

Shakespeare & Company, Lenox, MA  
**Golda's Balcony** by William Gibson. Directed by Daniel Gidron.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“I have a Dybbuk in me.”*

What’s a Dybbuk, you ask. Well, I’ll tell you. In Jewish folklore it’s a malevolent wandering spirit that enters and possesses the body of a living person until exorcized. Golda Meir, in William Gibson’s play “Golda’s Balcony” makes the claim that she has such a creature inside of her. It’s a creature that makes her intensely obsessive about the world around her and what she can do to make it a better place. Her interest in the fledgling State of Israel basically destroys her marriage and her family life. Born in Kiev in 1898, raised in the United States, she becomes a citizen of Israel (formally a country in 1948) and its first and only female prime minister from 1969 to 1974. She had been a Socialist leader in trade unions when she was young and as a child she worked in her mother’s grocery store. She was accustomed to work and she thrived on it. In Gibson’s play she barely has time to expose us to these facts of her life; she is too busy fighting 1973's Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) War. The play centers around her dealings with America and Henry Kissinger.



Annette Miller; Photo: Kevin Sprague

Meir was a very special person and the role of Golda is being reprised by the actress who first played the role in 2002, Annette Miller. While the role was not written for her, it has been identified with her voice, her face and her own abilities ever since. So popular has she been in this role that the entire current run is reportedly pre-sold-out.

In truth she is a wonderful a Golda Meir now as she was back in the day. After that original portrayal at Shakespeare & Company, she played the role in Boston for an extended run. Though Broadway saw Tovah Feldshuh in the role, Gibson preferred Miller who played the part as written while Feldshuh did not. Now, twenty-one years later Miller’s portrayal seems even richer than it was all those years ago.

She has the same director with her again, Israeli-born Daniel Gidron, the same costume designer, Govane Lohbauer and the same set. She is even playing in the same theatrical space. The only thing different is Annette Miller herself. She has developed a warmth that wasn’t in her original interpretation. Meir was not a religious woman, believing, as she said, “in the Israeli

people and it was enough that they believed in God.” A practical woman as played by Miller, she is clearly devoted to her work, her country and its future. She welcomes the United States military help and accepts the first atomic bomb ever settled in another country. While many people considered that with a sense of horror, she, and Miller, make little of it. It was never used in her battles with Egypt and the Arab nations that surrounded Israel.

This is a beautiful performance by an accomplished actress that deserves to be seen in these days of danger in the State of Israel. History is very important and this play makes history even more relevant in these dangerous days. The play presents Meir’s early stage of Lymphoma which ultimately killed her years later but never makes much of it. Miller’s hardiness mirrors Meir’s own at the time and that’s enough information to have.



Annette Miller; Photo: Kevin Sprague

Meir has been portrayed by Ingrid Bergman, Anne Bancroft, Colleen Dewhurst, Valerie Harper, Helen Mirren and many other famous actresses, but for me it will always be Annette Miller’s role. Under Gidrom’s fine direction Miller is dynamic, spirited, human and so very right in the role. It will be hard to get tickets for this, but you should try; get on a waiting list if you can and hope someone cancels. It will be worth it.

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**Golda’s Balcony** plays in the Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre at Shakespeare & Co., 70 Kemble Street, Lenox, MA through August 20. For further information go to [Shakespeare.org](http://Shakespeare.org).