

From resistance to witness: changing spectatorship in the theatre of Sarah Kane

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«From resistance to witness»

Changing spectatorship in the theatre of Sarah Kane

Graham Saunders

*Soldier: Tell them you saw me
Tell them... you saw me.*

In this article I hope to trace the changing demands made upon the spectator from Sarah Kane's 1995 debut *Blasted*, to the posthumous performances of *4.48 Psychosis* in 2000. Writing from the perspective of the work's reception in Britain, I will attempt to argue that reception moves from the *resisting spectatorship* that greeted the first three plays, to what I call the *witnessing spectatorship* of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*.

Based on her own pronouncements, Kane's attitude to the reception of her drama seems on the surface clear and unambiguous. Above all, her work set out to be *experiential* rather than *speculative* – to spontaneously stimulate the emotions rather than the intellect. Her account of two memorable performances seeks to make this clear:

Number one was Jeremy Weller's 1992 Edinburgh Grassmarket Project, *Mad*. (Second was a live sex show in Amsterdam about a witch sucking the Grim Reaper's cock). *Mad*, a devised play with professional and non-professional actors who all had first-hand experience of mental illness, remains the only piece of theatre to have changed my life.

[KANE 1998]¹

In each example given by Kane, the spectators are placed in the exhilarating / discomfiting position that what they are witnessing is actually (or at least potentially), real. The live sex act on stage is difficult to fake², while *Mad* confronts us with the knowledge that the actors might be enacting, or even directly experiencing at the moment of performance, genuine expressions of grief, anger or despair.

Aleks SIERZ, in his influential book *In-Yer Face Theatre: British Drama Today* locates Kane as central to the group of young dramatists he eponymously names, whose work relies on a succession of startling and provocative acts that the audience experiences emotionally rather than intellectually:

PLACE AU PUBLIC

It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure [...]. Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative.

[SIERZ 2000: 4]

Yet despite this assessment – and indeed Kane's own pronouncements on the subject – to classify her work as simply a «theatre of sensation» would be a mistake. Closer analysis reveals something far more complex going on, and it is possible to argue that a series of deliberate strategies are employed within the first three plays (especially so in *Blasted* and *Cleansed*), in which a complex relationship is maintained between stage action and image that deliberately sets out to engage the spectator both emotionally *and* rationally.

However, this was never something that could be easily identified in the early reception of Kane's work in Britain. Aleks SIERZ engages with the central problem in his initial reaction to *Blasted*:

On the train home, I wrote: «Kane's play makes you feel but it doesn't make you think.» This turned out to be wrong: it does make you think, but only after you've got over the shock of seeing it.

[SIERZ 2000: 99]

Clearly, Sierz needed to be outside the confines of the theatre and the actual influence of the play itself before he was able to analyze precisely what he had experienced. This seems to suggest that initially an emotional response predominated over a speculative one. However, the playwright Edward Bond in his own early reaction to *Blasted* seemed to suggest – as with the self-styled *Theatre Events* (T.E's) that shape his own work – that moments in Kane's debut could produce a state of equilibrium, whereby emotion and rational analysis can be experienced simultaneously. Hence it was possible for Bond to both appreciate that «the images of *Blasted* are ancient», and at the same time acknowledge that «the humanity of *Blasted* moved me» [BOND 1995].

Unlike Bond and Sierz, critics and audiences (with a few exceptions), until perhaps *Cleansed* in 1998, mainly reacted to the plays viscerally: these ranged from *Blasted* being likened to «having your face rammed into an overflowing ashtray [...] and then having your whole head held down in a bucket of offal» [TAYLOR 1995] to *Cleansed* being described as a drama of «almost unparalleled distilled intensity which is often unbearable to watch» [BENEDICT 1998].

If it had been Kane's intention – as she leads us to believe – that her drama was essentially experiential, then such responses would have

vindicated her dramatic methodology. However her reaction was just the opposite, where she expressed frustration that structure and imagery had been misunderstood:

The press was screaming about cannibalism [in *Blasted*] live on stage, but, of course, audiences weren't looking at actual atrocities, but at an imaginative response to them in an odd theatrical form, apparently broken-backed and schizophrenic, which presented material without comment and asked the audience to craft their own response.

[STEPHENSON and LANGRIDGE 1997: 131]

Nils Tabert, who translated *Crave* and *Blasted* into German, believes that while KANE expressly wanted the violence in her drama to produce an immediate emotional response, this should not be achieved at the expense of a brutal or prurient form of realism. Tabert cites the first German version of *Blasted* in Berlin that attempted to replicate violence and sexuality through an approach to realism that Kane found offensive: «They took the play very literally, there was a lot of nudity. It was true to the text, but it lacked the metaphorical quality, the poetry» [HATTENSTONE 2000].

I would also argue that the principal reason behind the early frustrations that Kane experienced with responses to her drama came from what could be termed a *resisting spectatorship*. When confronted by what in retrospect have come to be seen as landmark plays, either through their attempts to present for the first time radically new form or content, audiences often develop *en masse* certain strategies of resistance. These have ranged from the shocked outrage that greeted Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881); rioting in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), or bored incomprehension for Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959).

In the case of *Blasted* resistance took the form of genuine shock combined at times with ridicule; both reactions were symptomatic of an inability for audiences to initially distinguish between the cause and effect of the violence they were witnessing having a logical structure. Aleks Sierz's impressions of the resisting audience in those early Royal Court performances are similar to my own:

Two people walked out, others hid their eyes, some giggled. But the responses were mixed: some people were irritated by what they saw as puerile exhibitionism; others were moved by the starkness of the horror or by the psychological accuracy of the relationships.

[SIERZ 2000: 99]

These reactions were compounded by *Blasted* suddenly moving from a type of domestic social realism in the first half to a form of neo-expressionism in the second. By ignoring these connections between the two sections, the spectator experienced the play simply as a succession of

PLACE AU PUBLIC

shocking images which seemed to have no context in which to explain them.

This initial resistance by the spectator was encouraged by that other most discerning group that constitutes the theatre audience: namely the professional theatre critics. Although small in number, their influence is crucial in determining what Stanley FISH calls «interpretative communities» [1980]. These loosely ordered institutions, of which the theatre critic is just one element, exists according to Fish in order to shape wider consensual views of artistic culture. In the case of *Blasted*, almost all the reviews interpreted the play as a series of shocking images. Michael BILLINGTON's response was typical: «*Blasted* [...] contains scenes of masturbation, fellatio, frottage, micturation, defecation [...], homosexual rape, eye-gauging and cannibalism» [1995]. Individual responses such as these, which consisted of listing the plays contents, together with other reports that dwelt luridly on its disturbing content, undoubtedly went some way in shaping and promulgating a myopic and uninformed spectatorship amongst the theatre-going public. This in turn set up a wider expectation that viewing a Sarah Kane play meant nothing more than simply experiencing a succession of visceral shocks, divorced from any form of coherent aesthetic or moral structure. However, by the time of the 2001 revival of *Blasted*, originally hostile critics such as Charles SPENCER recognized that «the atrocities now seem more organic to the play, rather than mere theatrical shock-tactics» [2001]. This sea-change in criticism was significant, but in fact it had been the reception of *Crave* in 1998 that marked the real turning point amongst critics and audiences alike.

Crave prompted Dominic CAVENDISH to comment that «it conforms Kane as a uniquely experimental voice» [1998] but it was not only its aesthetics that seemed radical, but more the change in dynamic as to *how* the audience experienced this new play by Sarah Kane. Again, the critical community and the wider mass spectatorship seemed in agreement that the poetic language together with the absence of any stage action (violent or otherwise), succeeded in changing the resisting audience to one which was more willing to accept this new dramatic form. The *resisting spectator* had now become the *witnessing spectator*.

This is not to say that *Crave* or *4.48 Psychosis* were any less intense experiences than the previous plays, but by placing the spectator in the role of *bearing witness*, for the first time a relationship had been set up in Kane's drama based around the dynamic of an *empathic relationship* towards its protagonists. Whereas in the plays that went before the spectator was subject to the visual representation of the body in pain,

in the last two plays the spectator had become witness to the trauma of *recited pain*. Aleks SIERZ maintains that in the moment of performance *Crave* is meant to work as a form of onslaught upon the emotions, with its structure deliberately resisting the spectator undertaking a rational analysis of its content:

Watching it, you don't have time to work it out; your mind is simply dazzled by its images and the way its phrases collide, clash and mix. The more you try to analyze these impressions, the more the magic evaporates.

[SIERZ 2000: 119]

In the first British production of *Crave*, this sense that the audience was bearing witness to something approaching a form of confessional was made apparent through the staging. The protagonists were all seated in an arrangement that was reminiscent of sensationalist TV confessional shows featuring the general public. However, in place of their reactive and belligerent audiences, the choice of setting in *Crave* was at odds with its content. Paul TAYLOR observed that the clash resulted in «Jerry Springer meets T.S Eliot» [1999: 1], with the audience placed in the position of trying to interpret these two very different discourses.

While agreeing that through such staging a recognizable genre had been subverted, Elaine ASTON observes that a new one has been set up that privileges the confessional, «so the audience is positioned as a psychiatrist, as one who listens» [2003: 94]³. This is in contrast to the mode of television and the «staged» performance of trauma.

However, this interpretation can be found wanting when one considers that in according the spectators the role of listening psychiatrists, the assumption is set up that their function will be one of careful analysis in regard to what they are hearing. Yet as Sierz observes, the speed of delivery and the emotional impact means that *Crave* very actively refuses to privilege any form of speculative response by its audience. Director Vicky Featherstone confirms that this was a deliberate policy, in that it not only forced the audience to experience the piece moment by moment through the senses, but it also served to concentrate attention on the intrinsic rhythms of its exchanges:

One of the conversations I've had with some people about the production was that they felt it was too fast and that they needed more space to ponder the language. But in a way it was deliberately so, and the whole point of the play as Sarah wrote it [...]. And it was absolutely about creating the rhythm through the communication of the lines to the next person. It wasn't about a member of the audience being able to ponder the meaning of each individual line.

[SAUNDERS 2002: 130-131]

While *Crave* demonstrated this need for the spectator to fulfil the role of a silent witness, the idea was not a new one in Kane's work. For

PLACE AU PUBLIC

instance, it is a major theme that haunts *Blasted*. While all performance before an audience constitutes a form of witnessing, Kane makes the idea central in two key dramatic incidents that take place in the second part of the play. The first of these witnessings takes place in the encounter between Ian and the Soldier. Here, both Ian and the audience are made unwilling second-hand witnesses to stories of the atrocities that the Soldier has participated in, as well as the account of the brutal rape and murder of his girlfriend by other soldiers. Once he has discovered Ian's occupation as a journalist the Soldier insists that he witnesses, acknowledges and records his story: «Tell them you saw me / Tell them... you saw me» [KANE 2001: 48]. The repetition of this line is significant for the Soldier, who moments away from taking his own life makes both Ian and the audience attest, witness and affirm his existence.

The other significant act of witnessing comes near the end of the play when Cate returns to Ian with a baby who was been given over to her care. The baby dies and Cate, even amidst the chaos of the situation gives the infant a burial and prays for it. Both are affirmations of witnessing by Cate (and again, the audience), that function as acknowledgement to their presence. This is made explicit when Ian mocks the trouble Cate is going to in burying the baby. When she realizes that she doesn't know the child's name, Ian mockingly replies, «Don't matter. No one's going to visit» [57]. Yet this act of burial and prayer is also one of remembrance into which the spectators are implicated as witnesses. Both scenes are essentially open declarations for the audience to acknowledge that a life had been lived, however briefly. This same declaration is forcefully reiterated in KANE'S last play *4.48 Psychosis*, where near the end one of the speakers asks us to witness their actual diminishment taking place in front of us: «Validate me / Witness me / See me / Love me» [243], along with the penultimate lines, «watch me vanish / watch me / vanish / watch me / watch me / watch» [244].

Yet like so much in Kane's drama the role of witnessing in *Blasted* is also made problematic. While Ken URBAN believes that in the second half of *Blasted* its «audiences become witnesses to the atrocities of war» [2002: 45], this is certainly not through a literal representation. Here we must bear in mind one of Kane's most frequently quoted comments about the function of theatre and the role of the spectator:

I've chosen to represent it [violence] because sometimes we have to descend to hell imaginatively [...]. It's crucial to chronicle and commit to memory events never experienced – in order to avoid them happening.

[STEPHENSON and LANGRIDGE 1997: 133]

In *Blasted*, apart from Ian's rape and blinding, the audience's experience of war atrocities is mediated entirely through the Soldier's stories. While Ruby COHN believes «the anonymous soldier talks too much about his violence» [2001: 43], this seems a deliberate strategy on Kane's part, in that the audience is made to experience the horrors of war in a large part through their own imaginations. When the Soldier tells Ian to imagine what it must be like to kill a woman, Ian replies «Can't imagine it». The Soldier's reply, issued more like an order or a plea is significant: «Imagine it». If there was any doubt left to the significance of the exchange, KANE then follows this up with the stage direction, «Imagines it» [45]. This explicit instruction is there for the benefit of the actor playing Ian and the audience watching *Blasted*, who are led to mediate upon the war atrocities through their own imaginations.

Ian and the Soldier are also unreliable witnesses, whose veracity is openly held up to question by the audience. For instance, the accounts of war atrocities are rendered more morally ambiguous by being mediated through means of *reportage* by the Soldier. The same technique is also used earlier when Ian reports for his newspaper the story about a young backpacker who has been murdered in Australia. Again, as he recounts details of the story, the audience is made to fall back on representing the scenario for themselves. However, both Ian's and the Soldier's stories as a form of re-enactment are problematic for the spectator in the respect that both characters completely mediate and control their content. For instance, Ian's story focuses entirely on the murder of «bubbly nineteen year old» [12] Samantha Scrace, while the other six victims are ignored entirely. This callous attitude is reiterated later on in the play when the Soldier wants to know why Ian refuses to witness his story through reporting it. Ian's reply refers back to the Samantha Scrace story and its privileging of the personal over the collective: «It has to be... personal. Your girlfriend, she's a story. Soft and clean. Not you... No joy in a story about blacks who gives a shit? Why bring you to light» [48]. However, Kane makes the spectator aware that they are being manipulated by these stories, and just as much as Ian is forced to «imagine» by the Soldier, the audience is also brought to an awareness of the excluded subjects in these stories.

By the time of her last play *4.48 Psychosis* it is possible to argue that the role of the spectator as witness has changed beyond all measure from its role in *Blasted* and *Crave*. Caridad SVICH, speaking in relation to the 2004 Royal Court American touring revival commented:

Mental illness is not held up for view as a case study here; the audience is rather asked to enter the state of illness: to experience with artful distance the pain of thoughts fractured,

PLACE AU PUBLIC

seemingly divorced from the self.

[SVICH 2004]

While these damaging and obsessive human attachments are central to all the plays⁴, the relationship of the spectator to the performed event has radically changed. In work until *Crave*, violence is expressed physically. In theory this allows the audience to appreciate and make connections between love, obsession and violence; however, there is always the risk that these earlier plays also work towards producing a distancing effect, whereby it is the act of violence itself that becomes the dominant event rather than the spectators' own response to the individual at a moment of crisis. In contrast, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* represent the ecstasies and horrors that love can inflict through the medium of speech. As such, an identification and empathy with the characters becomes a different emotional experience than witnessing acts of physical pain being represented on-stage.

The playwright David GREIG in his introduction to Sarah Kane's *Complete Plays* also identifies a further important effect that *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* can produce for the spectator: one that can go beyond empathy and bring about actual identification and transference of experiences and memory with the characters on-stage. Concentrating specifically on the long «love» speech that A seems to deliver to character C in *Crave* [KANE 2001: 169-170], the spectator is regaled by a litany of the tiny details from the relationship: «I want [to] type up your letters and carry your boxes and laugh at your paranoia» [169], which are meticulously and obsessively recounted in order to present an empirical demonstration of A's «overwhelming undying overpowering unconditional... never-ending love I have for you» [170].

GREIG argues that the spectators, when bombarded with this long and demanding speech, go beyond empathy to a state where «Kane has opened her writing out to the audience leaving a space in which they can place themselves and their own experience» [GREIG 2001: xiv]. There is something to be said for this analysis, where by sheer virtue of its detailed inclusivity the individual spectators are able to superimpose their own experiences onto A's monologue. In this way they relive A's experiences vicariously to the point of actively assuming the personae, or at least identifying with A temporarily through virtue of the speech approximating their own feelings towards a past / present beloved. This identification becomes exacerbated further when the speech taps into another commonly held area of experience – namely the discovery that such demonstrations of love have been rejected.

While encouraging such identification to take place, Kane simultaneously tricks and admonishes the spectators for allowing themselves to

establish such a close point of contact between themselves and a character who has told them earlier in the play, «I'm a paedophile» [156]. In some respects it is a testament to the power of this particular speech, where despite such prior knowledge the projection and identification of emotions between actor and audience can still take place⁵. This dramatic device is also repeated at several instances in *4.48 Psychosis* through several other memorable speeches. One of these, beginning with the lines «Sometimes I turn around and catch the smell of you» [214-215], moves from a lament concerning unrequited love to an angry outburst: «Fuck you for rejecting me by never being there» [215]. Another later speech is a near psychotic outburst of anger and self disgust: «I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs... everyone left the party because of me» [227]. However, in *4.48 Psychosis* while again allowing the spectator to privilege their own subjective responses onto these characters, Kane resists the problematic empathy that came about in *Crave*.

One can argue that Kane is simply manipulating an element of human nature whereby external stimuli can often become a vehicle for exorcising concealed, but deeply felt emotional memories. For example, the demonstration of mass grief at the death of the Princess of Wales in 1997, came about not so much through a sense of mourning for Diana herself, but more like a manifestation of deep seated personal grief, during a period when such expressions were unofficially sanctioned though the death of such a public figure.

Like «the private iconography» that the character M «cannot decipher» [183] in *Crave*, the complexities and obscure references that suffuse Kane's last two plays might also encourage the spectators to absorb these fragments into their own experiences. Norman D. HOLLAND, while arguing more for a literary audience than a performing one, observes that such identification strategies enable a work to be claimed and understood by «making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work» [HOLLAND 1980: 124]. In regards to theatre we can see this process at work in the early reception of such plays as *Waiting for Godot* (1953), *The Birthday Party* (1958), or even television series such as *The Prisoner* (1967-1968) and *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). Here, part of the pleasure that the spectator encounters with these works comes from an approach in which gradual mastery in comprehension comes from incorporating them within the spectator's own sense of identity.

In both the 2000 and 2001 Royal Court revivals of *4.48 Psychosis*, as well as its 2004 touring production to America, this act of implicating the audience into the role of active witnesses was also brought about

PLACE AU PUBLIC

through staging design. Suspended above the actors at a 45 degree angle was a large mirror, that in length and breadth was nearly the equivalent to the ground floor playing space. The presence of the mirror allowed the audience to observe the actors from two dimensions: one from the normal perspective of directly observing the action; the other from the perspective of observing the actors as if from above. In addition, the mirror also allowed the spectators at the back of the theatre to observe others sitting in front of them. In this way sections of the audience could also watch fellow members observing / witnessing the action in front of them. Although the effect was voyeuristic, the audience also in some sense became actively involved in the play through default of being reflected in the mirror, whilst others were still anonymous spectators observing in the dark.

The other strategy that the spectator will be tempted to use in coming to an understanding of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* (as well as the preceding plays to a lesser extent) is to search for biography within text and performance. This becomes one of the frequent questions that exercises the discussion site on the main Sarah Kane website⁶, where enthusiasts frequently attempt to make connections between the artist's life and what is enacted.

In some respects the temptation to make these connections is easier to carry out with Sarah Kane than other dramatists. This comes about not only through the circumstances of her death, but knowledge that the playwright herself made occasional appearances as an actor within her own work playing the roles of two suffering protagonists. First of these was the part of Grace in the last three performances of *Cleansed* in 1998, after the actress Susan Sylvester was injured; later that same year, she also played the role of C for 5 performances during December 1998 when the British production of *Crave* toured to Maastricht and Copenhagen. Such appearances merely accentuate and contribute to the mythology that spectatorship in the plays of Sarah Kane always carries with it at least a partial recognition that what is being depicted on stage has strong autobiographical connections. Yet when we see Harold Pinter acting in a 1987 BBC television version of his own play *The Birthday Party* or David Hare performing in his monologue *Via Dolorosa* (1998), the same connection between life and work is not so readily forthcoming.

With such associations, together with her suicide in February 1999, the early biographical reception of *4.48 Psychosis*, performed posthumously 14 months afterwards was perhaps inevitable. Indeed, it would have been an extraordinarily self-disciplined individual at that time who could draw out other concerns from the dominant discourse that

occupied the majority of critics and audiences. This time both interpretative communities of audiences and critics drew similar conclusions that what they were viewing constituted a dramatised suicide note⁷. Caridad Svich points out that such an interpretation of *4.48 Psychosis* «mars the engagement necessary for an audience to fully experience it» [SVICH 2004]. Yet attending several of the performances at the time, it felt to me less a body of theatregoers gathered together in order to watch a play, but rather a group of mourners come to attend a performance more akin to a funeral wake. This blurring of the audiences' role as witnesses to an actual death rather than a performance seemed to have been recognized by its director James Macdonald. While *4.48 Psychosis* ends with the gradual erasure of the speaker, the association that automatically presents itself to the spectator with the last lines of the play, «please open the curtains» [245], are also those uttered by Kane herself. In the first Royal Court production the actors opened the shutters in the small Theatre Upstairs letting in the evening sunlight, sounds of traffic and people on the street below⁸. Speaking from personal experience as a member of the audience, the effect was similar to the closing of a funeral ritual, whereby the action seemed to produce a laying to rest of the dead person's spirit. The effect was somehow both moving and uplifting, and in a sense allowed the audience to both reevaluate and affirm their own existence.

Reasons as to why Kane's drama makes such a dramatic shift in its relationship to the spectator from *Cleansed* onwards is difficult to ascertain. Nils Tabert recalls a conversation around the time of *Crave*'s first performance in Edinburgh in which Kane stated, «I'm past violence – I'm really sick of it. It's become like *Trainspotting* with film – so marketable and boring and I don't want to deal with it anymore» [SAUNDERS 2002: 135]. Vicky Featherstone also points to the immense influence that Martin Crimp's play *Attempts on her Life* (1997) [SAUNDERS 2002: 132] had on the writing of *Crave*, whereby explicit stage directions and named character identities are removed.

Whatever the reasons, despite one of the speaker's command in *4.48 Psychosis* to «Look away from me» [KANE 2001: 230], Sarah Kane's theatre demands the opposite from the spectator: whatever the particular strategies involved, her drama demands that an audience above all *reacts* to the trauma, whether it be physical or emotional that is acted out before them.

⁷Kane also talks about the importance of the audience experiencing performance viscerally rather than intellectually in other interviews. These include STEPHENSON and LANGRIDGE [1997: 132-133] and

PLACE AU PUBLIC

SIERZ [2000: 92-93].

²Although this was carried out with some measure of success by the Spanish theatre group *La Fura dels Baus* in their performances of *XXX* (2003/04).

³Aleks SIERZ in his review of the play (*Tribune*, 29 September 1998) also observes that «*Crave* is a poetic version of *In the Psychiatrist's Chair*».

⁴Examples include: the Soldier in *Blasted* performing on Ian the atrocities that were in turn inflicted upon his girlfriend as a way of somehow connecting with her; here he enacts the ultimate gesture of connection through sacrifice and kills himself; the eponymous heroine in *Phaedra's Love* hangs herself out of her doomed love for Hippolytus; Grace in *Cleansed* pursues a delusional obsession to erotically and physically possess her dead brother, while the two men Carl and Rod are tortured as a way of testing the boundaries and loyalties to which their love extends.

⁵Several commentators have picked up on the moral ambiguity of the speech. See REBELLATO [1999: 281] and URBAN [2002: 44].

⁶*Sarah Kane*, <http://www.iainfisher.com/kane.html>.

⁷HALIBURTON [2000]. The phrase «suicide note» was mentioned directly in almost every review. A representative selection includes the following: BILLINGTON [2000], TAYLOR [2000], CLAPP [2000].

⁸The same effect was used in the Royal Court 2001 revival of the play, although its removal to the larger Theatre Downstairs meant that the emotional effect of being contained in a smaller space was diminished. In the revival an approximation of the same effect was attempted by opening up all the exit doors (there are no windows in the space), so that the sound from the Royal Court bar downstairs filtered up to the audience.

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