

DOMMAR®

BY MARK RAVENHILL

Study Guide

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Cast and Creative Team

Cast:

John	Jimmy Akingbola
Mina	Emma Beattie
Stephen	Tom Burke
Susan	Deborah Findlay
Paul	Ian McKellen
Gita	Bindu de Stoppani

Creative Team:

Director	Michael Grandage
Designer	Paul Wills
Lighting Designer	Paule Constable
Music & Soundscore	Adam Cork

The work of Mark Ravenhill

Key productions

1993	<i>Close to You</i>	London New Play Festival
1994	<i>Fist</i>	Part of a season of short plays, Finborough
1996	<i>Shopping and Fucking</i>	Out of Joint/Royal Court
1997	<i>Faust is Dead</i>	Actors' Touring Company/Lyric Hammersmith
1998	<i>Handbag</i>	Actors' Touring Company/Lyric Hammersmith
1999	<i>Some Explicit Polaroids</i>	Out of Joint/New Ambassadors
2002	<i>Mother Clapp's Molly House</i>	National Theatre (NT) and West End
2003	<i>Totally Over You</i>	Shell Connections Festival at the NT
2005	<i>Citizenship</i>	Shell Connections Festival at the NT

Background information

'I've always thought of myself as someone who makes plays – not a writer as such. I never wrote teenage poetry, novels, short stories. I don't even write letters. I don't consider myself to be particularly literary – beyond enjoying reading a good book.'

Mark Ravenhill¹

Ten years ago Mark Ravenhill's play *Shopping and Fucking* took the theatre by storm. Along with Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, the play has become synonymous with the genre of 'in-yer-face' theatre which emerged in the 1990s – a direct, raw and explicit style of theatre, characterised by an intensity and deliberate relentlessness, and a ruthless commitment to extremes.²

Ravenhill has developed the reputation among some critics and social commentators as a theatrical *enfant terrible* for his sexually explicit, sensationalist and shocking plays, but, as Dan Rebellato points out, Ravenhill is in fact 'profoundly moral in his portraiture of contemporary society.'³

In 2002 Ravenhill was commissioned by the National Theatre to write a play for young people. The result, *Totally Over You*, examines the cult of instant celebrity and was staged as part of the Shell Connections Festival in July 2003. A subsequent commission for the 2005 festival, *Citizenship*, explores teenage identity and is being revived at the National Theatre in Spring 2006.

In THE CUT, Ravenhill takes his work into a darker, more ambiguous direction. We hope you enjoy being part of the first audience to see this new play in production. The resource material contained in this Study Guide offers an introduction to the play and makes suggestions of what to look out for when seeing the play in performance.

Commentary and analysis of THE CUT

An introduction to THE CUT

Mark Ravenhill has said that he can have all sorts of general and often rather grand ideas about what he'd like to write, but there is normally one concrete thing, an image, a word, a moment, that actually gets him started.⁴ With THE CUT, it was the idea of liberal oppressors who, as liberals, feel guilty about their crimes, versus people who need and/or want to be oppressed. This idea manifests itself in the play in the characters of PAUL, a torturer with a conscience who administers the Cut for an unspecified regime, and JOHN, a member of the regime's 'underclass' who believes absolutely in the Cut and wants the procedure carried out on his body.

Hamish Pirie, assistant director on THE CUT, explains how Mark wants the production of the play to be 'an ambiguous monster': as a member of the audience, the production invites you to read as much as you want into it. However, in rehearsal, the creative team are taking great care 'not to taint the truth' of the playwright's voice by making limiting judgements about the play's meaning. For example, they have taken the creative decision not to define exactly what the Cut is. The only given is that it happens to the underclass: it marks them out; it gives them a freedom from the world and pain is part of that.

A similar ambiguity hangs over the play's setting. In his writing, Mark has added a 'sprinkling' of characteristics from various governments, regimes and dictatorships that we might recognise. One concrete decision taken by the creative team is that the party has come to power through a 'velvet' revolution, via a takeover or an election, as opposed to a coup. A clear creative decision has also been made about the society that has resulted from this regime's ideologies: it is chauvinist, racist and there is a definite class divide operating within it.

The play is divided into three scenes. Scene One takes place in PAUL'S place of work and culminates in him administering the Cut on JOHN. Scene Two is set in PAUL'S home and depicts him and his wife, SUSAN at a moment of crisis in their 26 year long marriage. In the final scene there has been a change of regime and PAUL is incarcerated in prison for his role in administering the Cut. He is visited by his son, STEPHEN, who is meeting his father for the first time since discovering his secret of carrying out systematic torture under the old regime.

It was the duality of the play's nature as both a political and a domestic piece that attracted Michael Grandage to direct the THE CUT and stage it at the Donmar. The play begins as a political piece, opening with a vast metaphorical scene. It then moves to the domestic sphere and we witness how the burden of PAUL'S role in the regime impacts on his relationship with SUSAN, his wife. There is the fusion of these worlds in the final scene as STEPHEN, now working for the new regime, faces his father PAUL for the first time after the discovery of PAUL'S 'evil' role working for the old order.



Scene One

Below is printed the opening section from THE CUT. Read through the script and then complete the practical exercise which follows it.

A room. A desk. PAUL and JOHN.

- PAUL** Were the searches made
- JOHN** I was searched, yes.
- PAUL** Was there any unnecessary brutality?
- JOHN** No. Not I wouldn't say/it wasn't unnecessary brutality.
- PAUL** Because I need to record any cases of unnecessary...I'm compiling a dossier. Which many people are eager to read.
- JOHN** I see.
- PAUL.** The last lot were very slack on unnecessary brutality. Blind eyes were turned. You remember?
- JOHN** Yes
- PAUL** But we intend to be different. We're shining a light on... We're coming down, Very hard. You see? On unnecessary...
- JOHN** Yes

PAUL But we need the figures so if you were in any way...

JOHN No no

PAUL You have to tell me

JOHN No

PAUL Look to you I know I'm – what? –I'm authority. Power. Strength. The Father.

JOHN Well –

PAUL But honestly you must tell me if there was any unnecessary – for the dossier.

JOHN No.

PAUL You're quite sure?

JOHN Very sure.

PAUL Well that's good. Good. No fist?

JOHN No.

PAUL No boot?

JOHN No.

PAUL Good. Good. Good.

Beat

PAUL Were the searches made?



Practical Exercise

Note: In the Donmar's production, the creative choice has been made that the scene begins in the middle of the interrogation; PAUL is 6 or 7 questions in and is working from a form, which is part of the new directives. It is these directives that are causing him immediate stresses.

1. What type of room do you think the scene is set in?
2. As mentioned above, JOHN has been questioned by PAUL for some. How would you establish this fact in performance?
3. What clues does this section of text give you about the relationship between PAUL and JOHN? You may want to consider use, style and repetition of language in your response.
4. As a director, what atmosphere would you want to establish in this opening scene? How would you achieve this in terms of production elements, casting and staging?

As the scene proceeds, PAUL re-affirms his need to know if JOHN was searched, as someone did actually 'pull a gun' on him recently. This led to the party having to set 'a new target for performance' for security staff, 'utterly thorough without any unnecessary brutality'. Using this 'performance indicator', JOHN is asked how he would say 'the operatives' did. PAUL records JOHN'S response in a file.

JOHN has been preparing for this moment for a long time. He has read the 'books' and seen the 'clips.' He really wanted to be 'ready for the Cut.'

JOHN appears to be taking control of the scene now. He asks where the instruments are:

JOHN In the clips they have the instruments all laid out you know. On the desk. There. Before I...before he... walks into the room they're all laid out and then 'Are you ready for the Cut?' 'Yes'. And – instruments in and-'.

PAUL has not kept to the script, 'that was the last lot' he says, 'all very brutal. All very fast. We're ...different.' He asks JOHN to consider some 'other options'. JOHN categorically refuses to do this. He wants the Cut. That is what he is here for. But PAUL is here to look at JOHN'S choices. They offer 'a prison facility to the insane.' JOHN produces the paper work to prove his sanity. PAUL finds his sanity 'very impressive. In this day and age.' The other options are the army or university. JOHN is exasperated. 'You're the man who does the Cut right? Then do the Cut. Do the Cut on me.' PAUL rejects this definition of himself, as the man who does the Cut:

PAUL This is the office. This is the building. But that doesn't have to define...me. You. We have choices. You and me.'

JOHN rejects the choices on offer to him.



Discussion Point

During the course of the play, how many real choices do you think PAUL has? Which of these choices does he take and how do these impact on his journey through the play?

It transpires that PAUL is burdened by concealing the nature of his work from his family:

PAUL Do you think I tell my wife what I do here? (I have a wife). Do you think my children..? (One's in prison – expensive – one's in university – cheaper). Do you think I tell my children what I do here'

JOHN believes he should tell his children, because he thinks the Cut is 'a very old and beautiful' custom. PAUL vehemently disagrees: "Have you any idea of the

suffering? The pain? The great screams as the instruments go in?...They claw at me. They howl at the sky. It's barbaric.'

Off the record, he tells JOHN that they have a working party looking at it, 'considering ending the whole thing.' JOHN asks why. 'Progress. Humanity. Etcetera. Our core values.' replies PAUL. JOHN can't believe they could wipe out centuries of tradition; his grandmother and his uncles have all had the Cut. But as PAUL says: 'You can't stand in the way of core values. None of us can.' They are 'for now of course carrying it through...just... softening the blow. Talking. We get to know you. You get to know us.' JOHN doesn't want to talk; he'd like to see the instruments:

JOHN This isn't right. This isn't how it's supposed to be. I'm not supposed to get to know you. You're not supposed to talk to me. You are just supposed to show me the instruments.

PAUL explains that there are 'new procedures all the time. Every day practically'. Only that morning he received a directive. There are new guidelines for talking, to 'keep things inclusive'. There are 'box files full of the things. Aims. Objectives. Targets. Outcomes.' He offers to show them to JOHN: 'We're very open. It's a root and branch thing.' JOHN just wants to be cut. 'Just like that?' says PAUL, 'cruel, cold, hard, impersonal?' It would make PAUL 'very unhappy': JOHN would be in great pain, and so would PAUL: 'Enormous pain – physical for you, spiritual for me.'

PAUL believes JOHN'S attitude to the Cut is different. Normally he sees fear, anger, sometimes a sullen attitude, but JOHN is keen. JOHN explains he is keen for the Cut because he wants to be free of himself and of all this, 'I want to be Cut away. I want to be Cut away from this body. Yes – and this history and this wanting and this busyness and this schooling and these, these ties. I want to be released.'

PAUL categorises JOHN as 'very idealistic' for these views, and 'a bit of a dreamer', equating the Cut with freedom: 'We'd all like to be free. Believe me I want to be free of bodies of history wanting...' JOHN says PAUL should 'free himself'. Anyone can free themselves. But PAUL denies this: "I Cut. You are Cut. That's my burden. Nobody's ever changed that':

PAUL We can stop Cutting. But we'll still be the people who used to Cut. You'll still be the people who used to be Cut. Always the same. No fucking point. We soften the blow. Maybe we end the Cut. But still the old circles, the old divides. Young and I thought – change it all. I can make it better. Nothing's going to be the same. Out with the last lot. And now look at me. Repellent. Can't tell my beautiful wife, my beautiful children.'

It is passed on down through families, JOHN'S family have always been Cut; PAUL'S will always be Cutters. As PAUL says, of his 'beautiful children'. Whether they are sent to the prison or the university, 'They'll always be cutters, never Cut.'

Gita has the instruments. JOHN didn't see her on the way in, but, as PAUL says, she is 'easily missed.' She 'Can't speak. Can't hear. It's a condition. But we found her a place. Inclusion.'

JOHN always knew that the Cut would bring 'Liberty. Freedom. Nothingness.' He practised 'little moments of emptiness. Not forever like the Cut but moments.' JOHN believes 'each and everyone of us can free ourselves.' JOHN tries to get PAUL to shut his eyes to demonstrate this. But PAUL finds it impossible to trust after the gun incident. He cannot shut his eyes, which has made 'lovemaking to my wife impossible.'

JOHN persuades PAUL to shut his eyes. It is vital that PAUL doesn't speak. JOHN proceeds to deliver the following monologue:

JOHN

Total darkness. And you have no body. Your body has dissolved. Dissolved or melted away. Every piece of skin or bone or hair. Every last cell has gone away. The cage has vanished. And you are free.

Feel the darkness. Feel the void.

Remember how they used to scare you with that?

Remember then how you used to scare yourself with that?

The darkness. Where the monsters live. Where the witches live. Where the paedophiles are. The darkness. Don't go into the darkness. Carry the candle. Leave a light in the window. Take a torch into the woods.

Lies. All of it lies.

The void. It'll eat you up. The chasm that swallows the sailors, swallows the ships, swallows the astronauts. The hole, the pit, the gap. Avoid. Avoid. Avoid. Take a map, make a rope bridge. Steer clear of the void.

Lies lies all of it lies.

They've told you lies and you've kept your eyes open. When all freedom asked of you was to close your eyes.

And now you've closed them. And you've made a start.

But still you're trying to work out where the light switch is. Still the torch is in your hand. Still you're fingering the switch. In case. In case. In case.

Don't. Please. I beg you. Spin around. Spin around until you're dizzy and there's no light switch. Let the torch fall from your hand. Let it roll away into the forest. Let the mud suck it up and rot it away.

And stand in the darkness. And become the darkness.

The truth.

And feel everything go.

There's no history. All that struggling to move forward, to expand, to progress. That's gone away.



And there's no society. All the prisons and the universities have fallen down or been exploded. Or maybe they never were. It doesn't matter.

The truth.

And your wife and your children. Eaten away by cancers or burnt to nothing or maybe never born. Generation after generation never born. Back and back until the first stroke of the first day of first time. None of it ever was.

The truth.

And so there's nothing.

Don't fight. Don't try and feel your body. Don't reach for the reports. Don't try and call for your wife.

Because it's all nothing.

There's only truth. There's only you.

Darkness is light. Void is everything. You are truth.

(Long silence)

And open your eyes.

And open your eyes.

And open your eyes.



Discussion Point

When you see the play in performance, consider JOHN'S objective in delivering this speech to PAUL. What effect does the speech have on PAUL? Is it the effect that JOHN set out to achieve?

PAUL does not open his eyes when requested to, so JOHN tricks him into opening them. PAUL is furious; JOHN'S words have offered him the release he needed. PAUL believes he heard 'the truth' from JOHN, 'Everything's finished. Everything's over. We're all done.' He admires and reveres JOHN for saying what's been in his head that he's never been able to articulate.

PAUL produces a gun and asks JOHN to shoot him. He will shoot himself if JOHN won't do it and asks JOHN to leave. But JOHN won't. He's here for the Cut and PAUL is supposed to administer it: 'That's your duty. That's your calling. That's why you were chosen. JOHN challenges PAUL to administer the Cut. PAUL notices a tear in JOHN'S eye. He calls JOHN 'a very selfish young man.' To 'ride roughshod' over his suffering. 'Have you any idea of the burden for a man – of my class?' PAUL rings a bell for GINA to bring in the instruments. While they wait he tells JOHN how he, PAUL, should shoot himself, but he won't. 'All day long under the desk I'll be handling the gun. But I won't fire. I won't fire tomorrow or the next day or the next day or the next day or the next day. Or never.'

 **Observation point**

'Today is the day that PAUL is broken; it is the day that he falls apart. This is why we are seeing him on this day - it is where the drama lies.'

Hamish Pirie, Assistant Director, THE CUT

How are Hamish's comments exemplified in the staging of this part of the scene?

GITA enters with the instruments. JOHN handles them, admiring the craftsmanship of them; to PAUL they are 'purely functional.'

GITA switches off the lights and the Cut is administered in the dark.

**Discussion Point**

What comment is this opening scene making about the world of the play? What role does the Cut have in this world?

To what extent can the character of GINA be seen as a dramatic tool, to give us a view of this world?

As PAUL'S assistant in administering the Cut, what implications does the fact that GITA can't hear or speak have on her role in the world of the play?

What do you think JOHN and PAUL'S overriding objectives are for this scene?

In performance, what strategies does each character employ to try to achieve their objectives? How successful are these strategies?

Scene 2

PAUL'S flat. PAUL and SUSAN

SUSAN, PAUL'S wife, discusses MINA, their 'domestic help.' She describes MINA as being 'like a simple child'. SUSAN finds it a 'great pressure' on her, 'This watching. All the time watching, guiding. There's a burden.' She too seeks comfort in the dark, lying down in the dark for several hours after the burden of watching MINA. PAUL suggests they have her 'reassigned'. To do this would cause a 'fuss' according to SUSAN:

SUSAN You haven't seen the family. You're never here when the...
Oh there's a father. And a mother. And a brother. I suspect she has a child.

Observation point

During rehearsals for THE CUT, it was decided that MINA has just fallen pregnant; it is SUSAN'S instinct that leads her to believe MINA is a mother.

Why do you think that MINA hides her pregnancy from SUSAN? How much 'ownership' do you think the party has over the children of the Cut class?



SUSAN supposes that they must keep MINA and she, SUSAN, will just have to do the best she can. PAUL responds by telling SUSAN that she is a remarkable person and that he appreciates what she does for them. He tells her she is valued, but SUSAN doesn't appear to be taking this in – she is now preoccupied with the wait there will be for supper. She asks PAUL to try not to get angry until the food arrives; she knows him, if his blood sugar's not even that's when he starts to get tetchy. She believes she knows him 'absolutely and totally'.

SUSAN again diverts the conversation from PAUL'S efforts to discuss the physical aspects of their relationship, by changing the subject to their son, Stephen, who is at university. She received a letter from him today: he's looking forward to his fruitcake and there's a 'big push' in the universities 'against the Cut'. It is 'a real groundswell' a 'real mood for ending the whole thing.' SUSAN thinks the students are right and asks PAUL what he thinks.

SUSAN enquires what PAUL did at work to day, he says 'nothing', his usual response:

PAUL I've got a title. I've got an office. I've got a big office. But really, really I'm just a rubber stamp.

SUSAN tries to imagine what he does. She tries to picture it, lying on her bed in the dark in the afternoon. PAUL becomes tense and chastises her for lying on the bed in the afternoon. If she talks to STEPHEN and thinks the world is such a bad place then she should 'fucking do something about it.' She should do something for 'the losers'. She should 'bake a hundred fucking fruitcakes and go out to the villages and give them the fruitcake.' SUSAN calls for MINA to bring the supper, believing it is lack of food and low blood sugar levels that is causing PAUL'S behaviour, while he continues with his diatribe: 'Why is your life so petty? Why is your existence so utterly meaningless?' PAUL wants to know where she gets the idea about low blood sugar levels causing tetchiness: 'What is all this? Some clip you've seen?'

MINA enters with the food. PAUL addresses SUSAN more directly to get her attention as MINA leaves, asking if they will 'fuck' tonight. SUSAN responds by saying it is not something they can plan for, and that she would really rather it was spontaneous. It has been eight months since they have made love. PAUL asks SUSAN why she thinks nothing spontaneous is happening between them: 'Why do you sleep in Stephen's old room, wait 'til I'm asleep then pad along the corridor to Stephen's room?' SUSAN says it's because he always keeps his eyes shut when they make love, not just closed but 'squeezed tight' from start to finish and then weeps (the opposite to what he told JOHN), his chest holding in some grief. PAUL vehemently denies this:

PAUL Have you ever seen me cry? Do I look like a man who cries? Has there ever been a day...? Christ, we've known each other for fucking generations. Under the last lot. Under the new lot. We've been together for so fucking long. And have I ever been a crying man?

He continues to deny SUSAN'S reality, shouting abuse at her as MINA enters.

SUSAN again displaces her frustration onto MINA'S inability to carry out everyday routine tasks: SUSAN has started doing her own shopping because of MINA'S incompetence, the bread she got herself from the market.

Half a page of dialogue ensues with PAUL repeatedly telling SUSAN he loves her, while she continues to block him with her own trains of thought.

SUSAN gives PAUL the letter from STEPHEN to read.



Discussion Point

When you see this scene in performance, consider why STEPHEN writes to his mother rather than to PAUL or indeed both of his parents?

Compile the letter that STEPHEN writes to SUSAN. What impact do you think receiving and reading this letter would have on SUSAN prior to the scene?

In performance, SUSAN offers the letter to PAUL to read. What impact does it appear to have on PAUL'S subsequent behaviour in the scene?

SUSAN asks PAUL if he actually wants this 'frankly barbaric' practice of the Cut to go on. According to STEPHEN, 'you've actually got to be for it or against it.' PAUL argues that STEPHEN is a child, a student, but SUSAN is a mature, older person and, for her, it is a bit late to see the world in 'Black and white. Goodies and baddies. Us and Them. We Cut. They are Cut.'

SUSAN tells him that today, when she tried to picture what PAUL was doing at work, she got a very clear picture of him cutting a young man. She asks him what might have put this picture into her head?

MINA comes in with the supper. As she arranges it on the table, SUSAN questions her, teasing her – as she does all day along – about having a little boy or girl at home. But MINA 'won't tell'. 'You keep your secrets don't you Mina?' SUSAN has 'an instinct', 'There are no secrets from me are there?' She goes on to ask if MINA would like her child to have the Cut, like his ancestors. She tells MINA 'not to worry', because that's all going to end:

SUSAN

That's all going to change. My son's working on that. I'm working on that. We're going to get rid of the Cut. We're going to hunt them down and chuck them out. They'll be none of them left. They'll be none of them doing the Cut by the time your boy's a man.'

PAUL breaks down after MINA leaves. He cries and howls, trying to get his words out, apologising to SUSAN. She reprimands him. 'Look at you. Look at you. Get up. You disgust me. You disgust me when you're like this.' He asks her why he can't shoot himself. Her reply is 'That's self indulgence. There are children'. PAUL asks SUSAN if she ever cries. 'Not that I remember...Not even this afternoon'. As they begin their meal, Paul again tells SUSAN he loves her:

PAUL I love you. And I want...I wish I could show you all of myself. I wish I could let you into...I wish there were no...

SUSAN Secrets?

PAUL Barriers. I wish there were no barriers.

SUSAN Yes. Maybe that would be better.

As the scene draws to a close, PAUL tells SUSAN that there is a working party looking into reform of the Cut within government. 'That's where it will happen.' Not with the ...students.' He says of himself: 'I'm a good man. At the end of the day I'm a good man.'



Discussion Point

SUSAN believes she knows PAUL 'absolutely and totally'. To what extent does Deborah Findley's interpretation of the role of SUSAN demonstrate this in performance?

How is the relationship between SUSAN and PAUL depicted by Ian McKellen and Deborah Findlay in performance? What performance techniques do they employ to show this?



Scene Three

Observation point

When you see the Donmar's production of THE CUT, consider the following:

1. How much time has elapsed between Scene Two and Scene Three?
2. When does it become evident that PAUL is incarcerated in the room in which this scene is set?

A room. PAUL and STEPHEN.

PAUL tells STEPHEN that he still looks the same to him:

PAUL Six months. Sicking up milk on my shoulder. Three years running through the grass. Eighteen. Off to university. You always looked exactly the same to me.'

To PAUL, nothing has changed. He asks STEPHEN if it feels that he's changed. STEPHEN feels as though the world has changed and he has changed too. He feels it very strongly. PAUL puts this down to STEPHEN'S youth, that he is 'still young enough to see...It all comes round again. You do the same old stuff again and again and again.' STEPHEN disagrees with his father about this:

STEPHEN There has been a change. Everything has been turned on it's head...We're starting all over again. All of us together are starting together all over again.'

PAUL sarcastically compliments STEPHEN on his use of language:

PAUL Fantastic. Terrific. I'm proud of you. Good with words. You're good with words. You can out gibber the best. That's good. You were always like that. I can never quite...I always...suspected words. But you – straight into bed with the little fuckers and start banging away. That's good. Good. Good.

It becomes evident that PAUL is incarcerated in the room in which the scene is set: when STEPHEN tells his father that 'this really is a better world', PAUL'S response is to ask him if he knows that 'they turn the lights on at five thirty every morning?' STEPHEN says that he will 'talk to them'. He is 'listened to.' PAUL doesn't want him 'pulling any favours' for him: he is his own person, as is STEPHEN.

STEPHEN is obviously part of what PAUL calls a 'new lot', STEPHEN says that 'they're, we're not cruel'.

In the next unit of action, PAUL asks STEPHEN how his mother is. She is fine. She helped with the funeral of MINA'S baby. She dug it's grave. PAUL finds the

image of his wife holding a spade and digging hilarious. STEPHEN cannot see the humour in it. PAUL suggests STEPHEN stops being 'so fucking pompous' and find his sense of humour, which STEPHEN deems not to be appropriate. To which PAUL responds: 'Christ' sake, fuck sake...is there no humanity left? Do you none of you have a little fucking speck of humanity?' STEPHEN asks PAUL how he can tell him about humanity when he administered the Cut. PAUL attempts to shift the focus of their conversation to that of the father/son relationship: Did STEPHEN ever think that he was a good dad? He replies 'yes'. Continuing to talk about the dynamics of their family, PAUL says that he thinks STEPHEN'S mother 'always knew' that he administered the Cut, 'Everyday a little dance around each other because I suspected that she suspected.' STEPHEN says that she told the tribunal that 'there was never the faintest inkling.' STEPHEN thinks she was telling the truth: he could see it in her eyes. PAUL thinks not. He spent years with her:

PAUL So – this is the bright new future. This is the new world. Kids who can't tell the difference between a lie and the truth. O son. O son I would weep but there's no more fucking tears.

We learn that the tribunal cleared SUSAN but the house, which was in PAUL'S name, is now being used as a prison. PAUL: 'More prisons?' responds PAUL, 'a better world with more prisons?'



Practical Exercise

The following extract from Scene three fuses the political world of the play with the private. In pairs, experiment with staging the scene. You may want to consider the following points as you rehearse:

To what extent do PAUL and STEPHEN explore their relationship as Father/Son and Prisoner/Jailer in the scene?

How difficult, or easy, is it for STEPHEN to allow his father to hold him?

How sincere is PAUL in his belief that STEPHEN 'is the future'? What might that future be?

PAUL Would you say I'm evil?

STEPHEN I...

PAUL No. Just look at me now. Any would you say I'm evil?

STEPHEN I...

PAUL No. The heart. The gut. The soul. Listen. Listen. Listen to them now. And would you say...?

STEPHEN Yes.

PAUL ...that I'm evil?

STEPHEN Yes.

PAUL Ah.

STEPHEN Yes. There are systems of evil. There are acts of evil. There are people of evil. I say that there are all of these things. Yes. There is evil. And you are evil. You are it. You are my father and you are evil. That's what I say. Yes. Yes. Yes.

PAUL I see.

STEPHEN That's not personal...please don't take that the wrong...

PAUL It's alright.

STEPHEN Please. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

PAUL No. Don't be. I bless you. Come here. Let me hold you.

STEPHEN No.

PAUL Please. Let me hold you so I can bless you for that.

STEPHEN moves to PAUL. PAUL holds him.

PAUL Bless you for that. Bless you for that. Bless you for that.

STEPHEN moves away.

PAUL You're honest. I'll give you that. We were never honest. Me. Your mother. The whole lot of us. We were never honest but you're...

STEPHEN I try.

PAUL So maybe that's better yes? Maybe that's better than before?

STEPHEN We like to think so.

PAUL Cold but honest. You are the future my son.

It transpires that PAUL doesn't want forgiveness. He wants punishment:

PAUL I want to be paraded and scourged and feel the blood in my eyes and see the blade before me. I want to know that everyone sees my rottenness and is ready to cut it out.'

PAUL is 'the dirt that needs to be destroyed' so STEPHEN can be 'purified.' This reference to the Cut horrifies STEPHEN. It is 'so...old fashioned'. It doesn't happen any more.' PAUL knows this, so he'll 'sit it out. Lights on at five thirty six days a week...Sit it out 'til there's a new lot or this lot fall back on some of the old ways.'

Observation point

In the script, the play ends with the stage directions, 'STEPHEN goes. PAUL waits. The lights go out.' In the Donmar's production of THE CUT, how are the closing moments of the play staged? What impression does this leave you with at the end of the play?



Discussion Point

In Scene One, PAUL addresses JOHN by saying: "I Cut. You are Cut. That's my burden. Nobody's ever changed that". To what extent do you believe the new regime to which Stephen belongs have changed this? Will this change last?

Dan Rebellato has commented that 'Ravenhill's work has a complex and difficult relationship with fathers.'⁵ How true would you say this to be of THE CUT? Pay particular reference to Scene Three in your response.



section 4

Ideas for further practical work and study

1. The three scenes in THE CUT have interior settings: PAUL'S office, his home and his prison cell. What impression do you get of the outside world when you see these scenes in performance?
2. In Scene One, PAUL tells JOHN that he has two children, one in prison and one at university.
 - a) What role do you think these two institutions, the prisons and the universities, play in the society depicted in THE CUT?
 - b) Why do you think that the child in prison is not seen in the play, or discussed by PAUL and SUSAN?
3. How is the status of women belonging to the Cut Class portrayed through the roles of GITA and MINA?
4. In Scene Three, PAUL says that he thinks SUSAN always knew that he administered the Cut, 'Everyday a little dance around each other because I suspected that she suspected.' To what extent do you think that SUSAN suspected that PAUL administered the Cut? Base your response on evidence from the play in performance.
5. At the close of Scene One, PAUL says of himself: 'I'm a good man. At the end of the day I'm a good man.' How true do you believe this to be? Base your response on Ian McKellen's interpretation of the role of PAUL.
6. JOHN points out in Scene One that his family have always been Cut; it is a tradition. In your experience, when has tradition been used as a reason to continue with practices that effect people's physical and/or spiritual wellbeing?
7. The Donmar's production of THE CUT is the play's premiere, i.e. it is the first time that that this new work has been staged. In rehearsal the creative team approached the piece very much as a 'drama'. As with any creative team rehearsing a new play, they could not gauge the extent to which the audience would respond to the comedic elements in the writing. At the performance of THE CUT that you saw, how did the audience respond to the production? How would you describe the genre of the play accordingly?
8. In Mark Ravenhill's play, *Faust is Dead*, the character PETE'S search for real experiences leads him to cut himself. In THE CUT, what do you think motivates JOHN to want to be administered the horrific act of the Cut?

'I still come over with a liberal flush when I hear that word (evil)...for me it's that particular four-letter word that leaves me a little short of air. A carefully laid out set of liberal platitudes start to topple once the 'E-word' enters the conversation. Because I still can't really robustly deny that it never, ever exists but I'd like to think that – what? – seventy-five, ninety, ninety-nine per cent of what we could call evil isn't evil: that it's society and all that jazz.'

Mark Ravenhill⁶

As we can see from the above quotation, Ravenhill's world view is essentially a social one in which 'we make and are made by society.'⁷ To what extent do you believe the Donmar's production of THE CUT illustrates this view?

Further Reading

Plays by Mark Ravenhill:

The Cut and The Product, Methuen 2006

*Shopping and F***ing*, Methuen Student Edition, 2005

*Plays One: Shopping and F***ing; Faust; Handbag; Some Explicit Polaroids*, Methuen 2001

Mother Clapp's Molly House, Methuen 2001

Totally Over You, Samuel French 2004

Books:

Aleks Sierz, *In Yer-Face Theatre*, Faber & Faber 2001.

David Edgar, *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting*, Faber & Faber 1999

Footnotes

- 1 Mark Ravenhill, 'A tear in the Fabric: the James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the 'Nineties', *New Theatre Quarterly*, November 2004, Cambridge University Press, p. 305.
- 2 For a more detailed analysis of the genre, see Aleks Sierz, *In Yer-Face Theatre*, Faber & Faber 2001.
- 3 Dan Rebellato, introduction to *Mark Ravenhill: Plays One*, Methuen 2000, p. x
- 4 Mark Ravenhill, 'A tear in the Fabric: the James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the 'Nineties', *New Theatre Quarterly*, November 2004, Cambridge University Press, p. 306.
- 5 Dan Rebellato, introduction to *Mark Ravenhill: Plays One*, Methuen 2000, p. xiii.
- 6 Mark Ravenhill, 'A tear in the Fabric: the James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the 'Nineties', *New Theatre Quarterly*, November 2004, Cambridge University Press, p. 306.
- 7 Mark Ravenhill, 'A tear in the Fabric: the James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the 'Nineties', *New Theatre Quarterly*, November 2004, Cambridge University Press, p. 306.

About the Donmar Warehouse –

a special insight into the theatre

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate (not for profit) 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 25 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

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