

British Theatre Guide

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4:48 Psychosis

Sarah Kane

Royal Shakespeare Company with Royal Court Theatre

The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

10–27 July 2025

Three unnamed, psychotically-depressed patients recount their nightmares, their waking fears, their shame and self-blame and anticipate the time when each of them plans to take their own life.

I have no doubt that this is a true-to-life portrait of clinical depression: playwright Sarah Kane, who made her name with *Blasted* and other often controversial plays, struggled with it for many years and died after a second suicide attempt aged 28. According to a friend, 4:48AM was the time at which, in a depressed state, she often woke from sleep. The play, her last, was not performed until after her death.

In it, one of the patients complains that a doctor does not appreciate her gallows humour. Sadly, there is a lot of gallows and very little humour in her 70-minute meander within the workings of disordered minds.

It is like listening to Samuel Beckett, without the funny bits, as their syntax fragments alongside the disorder in their mental pathways. The trio chant seemingly random numbers and word associations, yet at other moments reload with multi-syllabic vocabulary as they talk of "literary kleptomaniacs" or a "maleficent spirit" like pretentious sixth-formers.

As he contemplates his end, the Daniel Evans character announces: "behold the eunuch of castrated thought." More sensitive souls may regard this as a clever and original suicide note. But then, and for much of this play, I felt like my head was in a black felt bag and someone was hitting me with a soft mallet.

Evans, Jo McInnes and Madeleine Potter reprise the roles they played in the original production 25 years ago, and, again directed by James MacDonald, they create tension through the constantly changing momentum, of uneasy silences to violent outbursts.

They do a fine job, but what I will remember with admiration is the brilliant set and lighting design by Jeremy Herbert and Nigel Edwards, with a screen set at 90 degrees to the stage that mirrors the actors in astonishing clarity. At one point, it looked as if Evans's shaven head might collide with its reflected image, and at other times, the actors seemed to be strung up on a wall like murder victims.

The final performance of the piece on Sunday 27 July is to be staged at 4:48AM followed by a breakfast. I'd recommend double rashers to cheer yourself up.

Reviewer: [Colin Davison](#)