

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

Contractions

Mike Bartlett
Royal Court Performance Space
(2008)

This Orwellian black comedy was staged somewhere in a garret at the top of the Royal Court's Sloane Square home. The space was converted into the rather cold office of Julia Davis playing The Manager of a super-efficient modern company.

Across fourteen scenes averaging a little over three minutes each, we observe her changing relationship with a new employee, Anna Madeley's Emma.

An apparently innocent initial appraisal meeting quickly becomes something a little more sinister, as The Manager asks Emma to confirm that she has not breached the company's contractual requirement to declare any sexual or romantic relationship, activity or act.

Gradually, a quick snog with unseen Darren is analysed. This interrogation advances the relationship and soon enough it has become a sexual or romantic relationship with repeated activities and acts.

That breaches corporate etiquette and Darren is banished to consider life and boost sales 25 miles away. The ensuing pregnancy and birth of little Steven is more serious and the lad's father ends up spearheading activities in the company's Kiev office.

Even that is not good enough for the hard-hearted Manager or her masters, leading to a poignant ending to a play that is almost as original in its take on contemporary relationships as Neil LaBute's [Fat Pig](#), which had enjoyed its London opening a week before.

Following [My Child](#), Mike Bartlett is fast establishing himself as one of our freshest young playwrights. He is well served on this occasion by rookie director Lyndsey Turner and two fine actresses, Julia Davis the epitome of corporate cool (cruel?) and Anna Madeley, who splendidly moves from sweet and placid to murderously angry as the evening progresses.

The whole run is sold out, which is partly due to a compact space with a mere 30 seats surrounding the playing area but possibly also word of mouth for a play that originated on Radio 4 and has since been seen at Theatre 503.

If you have a ticket, this will prove an intriguing, unsettling but ultimately enjoyable experience. If not, keep an eye out for an extension to the run.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)