

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Holy Terror

Simon Gray  
Duke of York's  
(2004)

This comedy revolves around Mark Melon, a womanising chauvinistic publisher who eventually gets his comeuppance. The play takes the form of his delivery of a speech to the Chichester Branch of the Women's Institute, with graphic flashbacks.

In true late twentieth century fashion, a new man is employed as a hatchet man by a traditional publishing house with a remit to sweep out the cobwebs and the books. He then considers introducing his (humourless) friends, all played by Tom Beard, to the company's list.

At the same time, with slobbering relish Melon claims *droit du seigneur* over all of the women - wives, writers and temporary secretary.

This portrait of a publishing man is almost certainly Simon Gray's revenge on some offending soul in the writing business and is done with odd funny lines and a degree of aggression.

After the interval, the revenge gets nasty as Simon Callow turns up his performance to high octane and Mark Melon descends into a mad jealousy reminiscent of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*.

Callow can be very impressive, particularly in the swift transitions that Laurence Boswell orchestrates from palpitating madness to calm speechifying. The plot of *The Holy Terror* is wafer thin and with an understudy would almost disappear. The only other redeemer is Robin Soans who is allowed to demonstrate his skill as a character actor twice over.

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)