

British Theatre Guide

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The Infant

Oliver Lansley
Les Enfants Terribles
Old Red Lion
(2006)

When your editor gives a show five stars in Edinburgh, it would be churlish to miss the London transfer.

The Infant and its deceptively simple set, a single revolving structure designed by Signe Beckmann that cleverly divides the scenes, have travelled from the Gilded Balloon to a very reasonable London equivalent, the 60 or so seat Old Red Lion above a pub at the Angel.

If it weren't so close to today's bizarre reality, one would dismiss the plot as neurotic silliness and absolutely unbelievable.

The lights come up to reveal Simon Lee Phillips bound and gagged on the floor playing Cooper, a very ordinary man. Like Josef K in *The Trial*, he has been arrested for and is being interrogated about a crime of which he appears to know nothing.

Slowly, his two rather mad interrogators, Alexander Gilmour as the Rowan Atkinson-like Samedi and Graham Brookes playing the more straightforward Castogan, reveal why they have arrested him.

A folded children's drawing, absolutely typical of a four-year-old with little talent apparently hides some state secret that could presumably lead to the end of the world as we know it.

The artist behind the picture is, indeed, Cooper's four-year-old son. Quite what is behind this is never explained but the seriousness is summarised when the toddler is within half a minute described as both "a serious threat to our national security" and "a danger to the very fabric of our society".

However, the proud father struggles to explain why his son is not a spy and also has to fight off accusations that he might be responsible and using the boy as a front.

The plot thickens as his blonde haired wife, Pippa Duffy as Lilly, is interrogated simultaneously. In a version of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, each is given the opportunity to denounce the other or their little boy.

Oliver Lansley cleverly develops his plot and plays with time so that some scenes are seen more than once and from different perspectives.

Rather than playing the action straight, the playwright and his director Jamie Harper, this year's winner of the James Menzies-Kitchin Award, take a different route.

The two interrogators play in an Absurd style, which enhances the ludicrous aspect of the situation but detracts from the seriousness of the issues. It may also eventually begin to wear down any viewer who is aware that the plot is not too far away from a true story widely reported in the press.

This makes *The Infant* something of a halfway house between a gripping drama and an absurd comedy and a jump either way might have been good news.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)