

LEO BUTLER

PLAYS: 2

I'LL BE THE DEVIL

FACES IN THE CROWD • JUICY FRUITS

69 • AIRBAG • DO IT!



B L O O M S B U R Y

Leo Butler

Plays: 2

Airbag; I'll Be the Devil; Faces in the Crowd; Juicy Fruits; 69; Do It!

I'll Be the Devil: 'A gripping play and an extraordinary piece of writing which comes at you in a blizzard of diseased banter.'
Daily Mail

Faces in the Crowd: 'Butler's outstanding play is a raw and devastating account of a couple who got swept along on a tide of easy credit, only to end up dashed against a northern rock of debt. It is a timely, savage, brilliant theatrical epitaph for the New Labour decade of shattered hopes and dreams turned sour.'
Daily Telegraph

Juicy Fruits: 'Butler is interested in the way women cope with the trauma of childbirth and the shock of infant death, showing us two characters trying to carry on as if their lives were unchanged by events that have left them lonely, manic and bereaved.'
Guardian

69: 'Let's talk about sex: intelligently, humorously, candidly and brazenly . . . and we respond by devouring each intimate yet brief encounter'
Metro

Leo Butler was born in Sheffield. His work includes *Made of Stone*, *Redundant*, *Lucky Dog*, *Faces in the Crowd* (Royal Court Theatre); *Devotion* (Theatre Centre); *Heroes* (National Theatre Education Tour); *I'll Be the Devil* (RSC/Tricycle Theatre); *The Early Bird* (Queen's Theatre, Belfast/Finborough Theatre); *Juicy Fruits* (Paines Plough/Traverse Theatre/Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester); *69* (Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh Festival); *Could You Please Close the Door Please* (FIND Festival/Schaubühne, Berlin); *Alison! A Rock Opera* (co-composed with Daniel Persad, Royal Court Theatre/King's Head Theatre/Spread Eagle Theatre); and *Boy* (Almeida Theatre).

*By the same author**

The Early Bird
Faces in the Crowd
I'll Be the Devil
Lucky Dog
Redundant
Boy

Butler Plays: 1
(Made of Stone, Redundant,
Lucky Dog, The Early Bird)

* *Butler Plays 2* contains revisions from the single editions for *Faces in the Crowd* and *I'll Be the Devil*. These revisions should be regarded as the definitive versions of the plays.

Leo Butler
Plays: 2

Airbag
I'll Be the Devil
Faces in the Crowd
Juicy Fruits
69
Do It!

with an introduction by the author

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This collection first published 2016

I'll Be the Devil first published in 2008 by Methuen Drama
© Leo Butler 2008, 2016

Faces in the Crowd first published in 2008 by Methuen Drama
© Leo Butler 2008, 2016

Airbag, Juicy Fruits, 69 and *Do It!* first published in this collection 2016
© Leo Butler 2016

This collection copyright © Leo Butler 2016

Introduction copyright © Leo Butler 2016

Leo Butler has asserted his right under the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photocopying, recording, or any information storage
or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization
acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material
in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved and application
for performance etc. should be made before rehearsals begin
to Judy Daish Associates, 2 St Charles Place, London W10 6EG.
No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.

No rights in incidental music or songs contained in the work
are hereby granted and performance rights for any performance/presentation
whatsoever must be obtained from the respective copyright owners.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 971-8-3500-0629-4

PB: 978-1-3500-0628-7

EPDF: 978-1-3500-0630-0

EPUB: 978-1-3500-0631-7

Cover image © Roberto Schmidt/Getty Images

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Country Setting, Kingsdown, Kent

Contents

Select Chronology vii

Introduction ix

Airbag 1

I'll Be the Devil 37

Faces in the Crowd 171

Juicy Fruits 257

69 305

Do It! 333

This page intentionally left blank

Leo Butler

Select Chronology

- 2000 *Made of Stone* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, as part of the Young Writers Festival, directed by Deborah Bruce
- 2001 *Redundant* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, directed by Dominic Cooke, and won the George Devine Award for Most Promising Playwright
- 2002 *Devotion* premiered at the Theatre Centre, London, directed by Liam Steel
- 2004 *Lucky Dog* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, directed by James Macdonald
- 2006 *The Early Bird* produced by Ransom Productions and premiered at the Queen's Theatre, Belfast, directed by Rachel O'Riordan
- 2008 *I'll Be the Devil* produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and premiered at the Tricycle Theatre, London, directed by Ramin Gray
- 2008 *Faces in the Crowd* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, directed by Clare Lizzimore
- 2011 *Juicy Fruits* produced by Paines Plough and Óran Mór, directed by George Perrin
- 2012 *69* first performed at the Pleasance, Edinburgh, directed by Donnacadh O'Briain, Artistic Director of Natural Shocks
- 2012 *Alison! A Rock Opera* (co-composed with Dan Persad) first performed at the King's Head Theatre, London, directed by Nick Bagnall
- 2016 *Boy* premiered at the Almeida Theatre, London, directed by Sacha Ware
- 2016 *Decades* presented by the Bridge Theatre Company for The BRIT School, premiered at Ovalhouse, London, directed by Eva Sampson

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

1

We were watching Femi Kuti rehearsing with his band in the Africa Shrine. It was towards the end of 2007. Ramin Gray and I were in Lagos, running playwriting workshops for the Royal Court and an evening out was a rare treat, not least to see some live music.

We'd had a few beers and we were talking about some of the bands we'd been to see over the years. Arthur Lee and Love at the Sheffield Leadmill in 2005 was definitely up there for me, but Ramin had seen Bob Marley and the Wailers at the Rainbow Theatre in 1977, and there was no way I could compete with that.

The Africa Shrine is a sprawling, dimly lit social club somewhere on the outskirts of the city, and it was packed with guys who'd come to watch a Manchester United game on the giant screens above the bar. English football's big business in Nigeria. There are Chelsea flags pinned to the backs of all the buses, and when I told the locals that I supported Sheffield United I was met with howls of laughter.

So it was evening and the British Council had driven us out to the Shrine in a bullet-proof van. They weren't taking any chances – we had an armed guard too.

We drove past a woman selling pots and pans at the side of the road. She was illuminated by flames bursting out from the top of an abandoned oil drum.

One of us, I can't remember who, pointed to her and said 'Maryanne'.

As we sat in the Shrine talking about Bob Marley, a man with no legs served us drinks. Perched on a wooden trolley, he scooted through the crowds, whizzed under and around the tables. After he'd finished taking our orders he surprised us again by jumping off the trolley, lifting it high above his head. He stacked up the empties, turned and hurdled back to the bar on one hand.

One of us, I can't remember who, pointed to him and said 'Pot-Boy'.

2

‘Are you busy?’

‘Oh, you know . . .’

‘Well, remember how we did *The Early Bird* in the perspex box at the Finborough? We’re kind of expanding that concept with this one. It’s another box, but it’s sealed off, covered up this time, like a peep show? The plays happen inside, it’s sealed off and sound-proofed, and so the audience come in and they have their own little cubicle . . .’

‘Just like a peep show.’

‘Just like a peep show, yeah, but they have these headphones. We’ve got an amazing sound designer and they put on their headphones and watch the play through a screen, a little sort of glass window. And we’ll have two or three plays in rep, maybe a band some nights, a cabaret, burlesque or something – all very different, a really diverse set of writers I think, and each of the plays is going to be about sex, challenging . . . ideas about sex, sexuality, voyeurism. And, it’s fine, you can do whatever you want, be explicit as you want, or, you know, not at all if you don’t want.

‘What if someone decides to have a wank?’

‘In the cubicle, you mean? Well, I guess we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. The point is to subvert and surprise and . . . challenge or redefine the lines between the play and the audience. Why don’t you go away and think about it?’

3

On 19 Oct 2011, at 00:31, leo butler wrote:

Dear ****,

Thank you for your review of *Juicy Fruits* the other day. I’m pleased that you saw some potential in the main character, and I apologise that some of the humour was in bad taste. I would welcome your thoughts on how I might improve the piece.

However, I feel I should point out that the final scene was not a production gimmick, but a scripted scene with dialogue and stage directions.

All best,

Leo.

10/19/11 at 9:46 AM

To: leo butler

Hi. Leo,

Thanks for your email – heavy irony and all.

Best,

4

Faces in the Crowd

Dave's CD to Joanne – Tracklist

1. A Change Is Gonna Come – Sam Cooke
2. Waterfall – The Stone Roses
3. I've Just Seen a Face – The Beatles
4. High Tide or Low Tide – Bob Marley
5. Shipbuilding – Elvis Costello
6. A New England – Kirsty MacColl and Billy Bragg
7. Ten Storey Love Song – The Stone Roses
8. May You Never – John Martyn
9. Bankrobber – The Clash
10. Sunshine and Love – Happy Mondays
10. Angel – Jimi Hendrix
11. Cherish the Day – Sade
12. A Case of You – Joni Mitchell
13. I Want You – Bob Dylan
14. The Light Is Always Green – The Housemartins
15. Vice Versa Love – Barrington Levy
16. Silver Springs – Fleetwood Mac
17. It's Only Love – The Beatles
17. Sally Cinnamon (Live at the Hacienda '89)
The Stone Roses
18. Hallelujah/I Know It's Over (Live) – Jeff Buckley

I was flying out to Lagos with Ramin later on that day. I had just enough time to go to the Royal Court to deliver the first draft of *Faces in the Crowd*. I went up to the fifth floor and threw it on the literary manager's desk and made a speedy exit, I wanted to avoid anyone asking 'Are you pleased with it?'

In the end I flew out to Lagos on my own as Ramin had somehow missed the flight. It was an overnight trip so I should have had plenty of time to rest, but instead I was glued to the in-flight entertainment console with *The Departed* and *The Simpsons Movie* for company until the early hours of the morning. On arrival, after a stressful couple of hours waiting at baggage reclaim, I was met outside the heavily guarded airport by a British Council driver who hustled me into a bullet-proof van and took me to the hotel.

They told me I must never leave the hotel without an armed escort, and I told them I'd been here before and that I knew what I was doing. The group of twelve local playwrights would be arriving later. They'd finished their drafts and we were going to spend the next ten days developing them so there was plenty to be getting on with. The British Council had booked one of the hotel's conference rooms for us to work in and so – once I'd checked in – I decided to have a nose around. After peering into our conference room, I went to the reception telling them that we didn't need all the decorated tables or the podiums or the microphones. A dozen plastic chairs, some paper and pens, and a football would be fine.

Once that was sorted I went to the restaurant to have some breakfast. Unfortunately, it was empty, they weren't serving anything at the moment, but the waiter did say I could help myself to some cornflakes. I spooned the cornflakes into the kiddy-sized bowl and asked if the waiter could bring me some milk. I had a bottle of water with me so I took my first malaria tablet of the day and checked my mobile phone for a signal. I was dying to call home, as well as wondering if the literary manager might leave a message to say that she'd picked up my play yesterday. There was no signal so I decided to do some planning for the next day's workshop instead. I still wasn't sure if Ramin would get another flight in time to join me, so I decided to plan a couple of sessions that I knew I could run by

myself. Ball games, a bit of debriefing, discussion about our hopes and ambitions for the rest of the workshop, etc. It must have been twenty or thirty minutes later when the waiter returned with a saucer of powdered milk. I shouted at him and he went away to fetch some actual milk, and then I felt bad for shouting at him.

I was bored now. I went to my room, unwrapped a pack of duty-free Camel Lights and made myself a coffee with the jar of Nescafé I'd bought at the airport. I thought I'd go outside and read some of the writers' scripts. It was almost midday and the sun was coming out. There were two or three middle-aged white blokes on sunbeds and four or five young black girls swimming in the pool. One of the girls climbed out and took a seat next to me. After she complimented my eyes and hair for a few moments I suddenly realised that I was being approached by a prostitute. I thanked her for the compliments, gave it another ten minutes then went quietly back inside.

The white guys, it turned out, were there for a Shell business conference, and it was routine for the company to provide them with young women during their stay. I decided to watch TV. I found an American show which had Wallace Shawn in a funny little cameo part. My mind started to wander, thinking about *Designated Mourner*, how inconceivable that it's written by Rex from *Toy Story*, and I gradually fell asleep.

It must have been late afternoon when I woke up. The sun was blasting through the window. I climbed off the bed and decided to check around the skirting boards and behind the cupboards for any spiders or bugs.

Then I made another coffee to wake myself up and checked my phone to see if there was any news about Ramin. It was a relief to find that there was a tiny bit of a signal in the room if you stood in the right place, and, to my surprise, someone had left me a voicemail.

A moment later I was listening to the literary manager of the Royal Court telling me she'd read *Faces in the Crowd* and that it was good news.

I sat down on the bed and plugged in my laptop to play some music.

Prop List – Limerick 1760. Abject Poverty

| No. | Scene | Item | Character | Notes | Have Actual |
|----------|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| | Scene 1 | | | | |
| Scenic | Scene 1 | Standing Stocks/Pillory | Dermot | | |
| 1 | Scene 1 | Stool | Ellen | | |
| 2 | Scene 1 | Bucket with water | Ellen | For washing Dermot's feet | |
| 3 | Scene 1 | Cloth | Ellen | For washing Dermot's feet | |
| | Scene 2 | | | | |
| Scenic | Scene 2 | Plank Bed | Mud Cabin | Tree stump legs to kick out | |
| 4 | Scene 2 | Old Blankets | Maryanne – on bed | | |
| 5 | Scene 2 | Stool | Maryanne | | |
| 6 | Scene 2 | Tripod | Maryanne | Over fire with hook for pot | |
| 7 | Scene 2 | Pot with Potato Stew | Maryanne | On Tripod | |
| 8 | Scene 2 | Kitchen & eating utensils/ implements | Mud Cabin | | |
| 9 | Scene 2 | Hessian Sack | L. Ryan | | |
| 10 | Scene 2, Pg 9 | Severed Pig Head | L. Ryan | In Hessian sack (item 11) | |
| Armoury | Scene 2 | Sword | L. Coyle | | * |
| 11 | Scene 2, Pg 16 | Dead Chicken to pluck | Ellen | | * |
| 12 | Scene 2, Pg 17 | Dead Chicken to pluck | Maryanne | | * |
| 13 | Scene 2, Pg 21 | Slaughtered Pig | Ryan | In sack with head out | |
| 14 | Scene 2, Pg 25 | Drinking Flask | Ryan | | |
| Armoury | Scene 2, Pg 25 | Dagger | Coyle | | |
| Wardrobe | Scene 2, Pg 33 | Crucifix on Chain | Ellen | Gets ripped off Coyle Sc 3 | |
| 15 | Scene 2, Pg 35 | Missal | Ellen | Fits in her pocket | |
| 16 | Scene 2, Pg 35 | Ladle | Maryanne | | |
| 17 | Scene 2, Pg 35 | Small Bowl | Maryanne | For Stew | |
| 18 | Scene 2, Pg 42 | Purse | L. Coyle | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| 19 | Scene 2, Pg 42 | Twenty Guineas | L. Coyle | For Purse (item 21) | |
| | Scene 3 | | | | |
| 20 | Scene 3 | Table 1500 - 1200mm long | Tavern | To sit 6 comfortably | |
| 21 | Scene 3 | 1 x Bench | Tavern | For long table (item 23) | |
| 22 | Scene 3 | Small Table | Tavern | To sit 2 -4 people | |
| 23 | Scene 3 | 2 x Chairs | Tavern | | |
| 24 | Scene 3 | Wooden crates | Tavern | For carrying bottles or sat on | |
| 25 | Scene 3 | Candles in holders | Tavern | | |
| 26 | Scene 3 | Bar equipment and utensils | Tavern | Incl. Spit utensils | |
| 27 | Scene 3 | Spit equipment, tongs, skewer | Tavern | | |
| 28 | Scene 3 | Regimental flag and Union Jack | Tavern | Dressing | |
| 39 | Scene 3 | Portrait of King George III | Tavern | | |
| 30 | Scene 3 | Cups with drink | Tavern/Pot Boy | | |
| 31 | Scene 3 | Jug for serving drink | Pot Boy | | |
| 32 | Scene 3 | Dead Piglet | Dermot | | |
| 33/Armoury | Scene 3 | Blunt Knife | Dermot | Home made job that's penknife like | |
| 34 | Scene 3 | Ankle Shackles | Dermot | Unlocked but fastened | |
| 35 | Scene 3 | Bit of a tree | Dermot | Attached by shackles (item36) | |
| 36 | Scene 3 | Drink (?) Ale (?) | Tavern | | |
| Wigs | Scene 3, Pg 51 | Piss | C. Farrell | Pisses in Dermot's cup. Dermot drinks | |
| Armoury | Scene 3 | 5 x Swords | soldiers | | |
| Wigs | Scene 3, Pg 73 | Blood | Dermot | After beating by soldiers | |
| 37 | Scene3, Pg 86 | Pipe | C. O'Connor | Given to L. Ryan | |
| Wigs | Scene 3, Pg 89 | Blood | Pot Boy | Bleeding to death | |
| Wigs | Scene 3, Pg 94 | Piss | C. Farrell | Pisses on Missal | |
| | Scene 4 | | | | |
| 38 | Scene 4, Pg 98 | Soup | Ellen | Made with pigs blood | |
| 39/Armoury | Scene 4, Pg 109 | Blade (same as item 35) | Dermot | Stabs L.C. Finnegan | |
| 40 | Scene 4, | Padlock and key | Maryanne | For Dermot's | |

| | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|---|---------------|----------------------|--|
| | Pg 111 | | | chains | |
| Wigs | Scene 4, Pg 113 | 2 x eyeballs | Dermot | Gauged from own head | |
| | Scene 5 | | | | |
| 41 | Scene 5 | Candles and holders (?) | Fleming's ¼'s | | |
| 42 | Scene 5 | Parchment | Cl. Fleming | To be referred to | |
| 43 | Scene 5, Pg 121 | Scroll | Capt. Farrell | | |
| | Scene 6 | | | | |
| 44 | Scene 6, Pg 124 | Drinking flask (different from item 16) | Cl. Fleming | Removes from pocket | |
| 45 | Scene 6, Pg 130 | Shovel | L. Ryan | | |
| Set | Scene 6, Pg 131 | Soil | Cabin | To fill the hole | |
| 46 | Scene 6, Pg 133 | Purse (different from item | Cl. Fleming | | |
| 47 | Scene 6, Pg 133 | Coins | Cl. Fleming | For purse (item 49) | |
| | Scene 7 | | | | |
| 48 | Scene 7, Pg 139 | Hunk of bread | Ellen | To fit in pocket | |
| 49 | Scene 7, Pg 140 | Bloody cloth | Ellen | From Dermot's feet | |

7

'How's it going?'

'Great, yeah, just . . .'

'Well we're doing this thing where we want to put these mini-plays all over the building. It'll be ticketed but it's free, and anyone can just walk in and go on a sort of treasure hunt searching for plays that we've hidden, and we'll mix it up with new and established writers, so it doesn't feel too . . .'

'Yeah.'

'Yeah, and they'll each be about twenty minutes long and we'll record them with David and Ned here and . . . I don't know, try and make them available as a podcast at some point too.'

'Cool.'

'Yeah, so you don't have to think of it as a radio play, but we'll record them like a radio play, and the audience will look around and

they'll find a play in, I don't know, Vicky's office or on the stairs or in the toilets. We'll give out clues of course, it'll be fun, and there'll be a set of headphones in each of the locations and, basically, the plays will be running on a loop and the audience can stop and put on the headphones, listen to the whole thing or . . . not, depending on . . .'

'Could I do one for the balcony overlooking Sloane Square?'

'Sure, yeah, that'd be cool, and you might want to think about the kind of thing that'll work well in that space. It's about giving the audience a different kind of experience, challenging the way we think about "what makes a theatrical space" and the relationship between the play and the spectator. Do you want to go away and have a think about it?'

8

ROYAL COURT THEATRE SHOW REPORT**SHOW** Faces in the Crowd**Jerwood Theatre Downstairs****DATE:** 07.11.08**PERFORMANCE:** 22**HOUSE:** 73

| | Lights up | Lights down | Playing time | Running time |
|----------|-----------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Part One | 19:50 | 21:19 | 1hr 29 | 1hr 29 |

SM: Nicola Chisholm**LX Op:****SM: Ruth Murfit****Sound Op:****Duty LX: Emily****Duty Carpenter: Charles Ash****Duty House Manager: Claire Simpson****COMMENTS**

1. Mr O'Neill banged his shin on the side of the bed as he was climbing in, adding a 'Bollocks'. DSM checked with him after the show and he is not injured.

Two calls were taken.

This was my second trip to Nigeria in the space of twelve months, all part of the theatre's commitment to discovering international work which has been led by the indefatigable Elyse Dodgson for the last twenty-five years or so. Elyse usually teams a playwright up with a director, such as Ramin, and sends them off to work with a dozen promising new writers in, say, Chile or Zimbabwe. After a couple of weeks' intensive workshops and some very competitive ball-games, there may – and very often is – a play or playwright that the Royal Court goes on to produce. And, as there aren't many writers who can earn a living from playwriting alone, to get paid to travel to somewhere like Nigeria, during their summer and our winter, is not to be sniffed at.

Although the British Council had forbidden us to leave the hotel complex, we did sneak out a couple of times. Once, in the daytime, when Ramin wanted to find somewhere to get a haircut, and again, at night, when I went out with one of our writers, Ozi, to get some meat. We'd sneaked through the hotel's security gates and Ozi flagged down a couple of young kids on rusty yellow mopeds. Clinging on to our drivers, we bounced dangerously along the busy potholed highways until we reached the vast, late-night market lit up with fires from the scores of charred oil drums. Five minutes later, we climbed back aboard the mopeds and headed back to the hotel with two plastic bags weighed down with hot sizzling meat. The ride was exhilarating, and the meat tasted okay, but our hosts were furious. In fact, when it came to my third and final trip, twelve months later, the British Council made us work in the back of their offices so that they could keep an eye on us. Clare Lizzimore was the director that time, and we'd just worked together on the production of *Faces in the Crowd*. It really didn't seem like a year since I was with Ramin at the Africa Shrine, preparing for the production of *I'll Be the Devil* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. And it was only two years ago that I'd had my very first visit to Lagos, with Elyse and Hettie Macdonald. During that trip we'd met local director/choreographer Odey Anthony, whose company had treated us to an incredible display of contemporary dance set to tribal drumming. Elyse and I were so impressed that, only a few months later, I was working with

Odey at the Royal Court, collaborating on *Airbag*. I remember Odey was delighted when I arrived to rehearsals with a jar of Nescafé I'd brought from home.

10

I'd like to credit a few people who supported, inspired
and helped bring these plays to life.

Ramin Gray, Clare Lizzimore, Donnacadh O'Briain,
George Perrin, Odey Anthony, Ned Bennett,
Elyse Dodgson, Dominic Cooke, Jeanie O'Hare,
Michael Boyd, Clare McQuillan, Carissa Hope Lynch,
Emily McLaughlin, Ruth Little, Howard Gooding,
Anna Brewer, the late great Gerard Murphy,
the sorely missed David McLennan,
and all the casts and crews of the shows.

I'd also like to thank all the brilliant playwrights I had
the pleasure to teach and to work with at the Royal Court,
and in Lagos, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Chile.

Finally, I'd like to thank my family and, in particular,
Nazzi and Bea, for being there through thick and thin.

This page intentionally left blank

Airbag

This page intentionally left blank

Airbag was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, as part of the Rough Cuts season, on 2 July 2007, with the following cast and creative team:

Mrs Gorman

Gillian Hanna

Lisa

Nicola Walker

Joe

Nick Moss

Dancers/Musicians

Vincent Etagweyo, Frank Asiyai
and Odey Anthony

Director Leo Butler

Choreographer Odey Anthony

Characters

Mrs Gorman, *elderly and frail*

Joe, *forties*

Lisa, *forties*

Setting

A bed.

The text is deliberately written with wide gaps between lines.
These can be filled with silence, or with movement/dance.

One

Mrs Gorman, *elderly and frail, is sitting at the end of the bed.*

Mrs Gorman Gorilla.

Gorilla, look.

Gorilla tapping at the window.

At this time of night?

I mean, we've had cats before.

They come in over the back wall don't they, Billy? There's that lovely strawberry blonde from number twelve, he's quite the charmer.

Often leave 'im a saucer of milk.

Saucer of milk, a small slice of something. Fill his belly at least, a scrap of chicken from the roast.

Nothing like this though, mind.

No gorillas, I mean.

6 Airbag

Dark black eyes peeping through the ivy, peeping through at me.

Do you think it's cold out there?

Do you think I should offer him a blanket of something?
Something to keep the rain off his back.

Billy.

Wake up, Billy.

Billy, please.

Come on now, child, listen to your grandmother.

Do you think it's cold out there?

You can hear me, can't you?

Fat leathery fingers beating at the glass, don't encourage 'im!

Don't encourage him, you'll only wind him up!

Shut the curtains.

Shut the curtains, he'll see you.

He'll see us both, get down.

How many?

How many exactly?

Oh.

Oh, well, I suppose they can't mean any harm by it.

It's probably just him and his friends, they can't possibly . . .

I suppose they just got lost.

They got lost on their way to the hospital, look.

8 Airbag

Look again, open the curtains.

Look again, Billy, he's looking through my nightgown.

He's looking in at me through my nightgown, the devil.

He's lucky I don't call the police.

He's lucky I don't call the RSPCA, the devil. Looking me up and down, my best nightgown.

My best nightgown, in this heat.

At my age.

At my age, Billy, aren't you going to say something?

You're not a baby any more, come on.

Come on, Billy, tell them they've got the wrong house, tell them . . .

Tell them they can take their party elsewhere. 'You're not welcome, I said! It's gone midnight, you animals, there's people trying to sleep!'

There's people trying to sleep, Billy, well?

I mean . . .

I mean I've had about a hundred bloody cats before now. All the years I've lived here, all the years.

All the years, Billy, tell them. Tell them we're not looking for any trouble, tell them to go next door, they'll know what to do. Tell them to call the police, the Samaritans – give them directions, Billy, please!

If it's food they want.

If it's food, if it's something I've done to upset them.

If you've upset them.

Billy?

If this is one of your pranks, if these are friends of yours.

If your fucking mother were here, all the years.

All the years, smashing the glass.

Smashing the glass.

Smashing the glass, breaking the locks.

They're climbing in through the walls, child.

Billy, please – there’s how many? There’s how many now? Please, tell them to stop!

They’re coming for us, Billy, they’re coming through, wake up!

Through the window.

Through the window . . .

Two

Lisa and Joe sitting at opposite sides of the bed. **Lisa** speaks, **Joe** does not.

Lisa Thought you’d prefer it by the window.

You’ve got a good view of the park, look.

All the old trees. The playground.

You’ll be able to wave to us when we take the dogs out.

Joe's going to take them out every morning he says. Every morning before work.

That's good of him, isn't it?

It's good they let him work from home, I mean.

That's good though isn't it, Mum? All of us together.

Back where you belong. You and me.

Just me and you, alright?

Alright, Mum?

Back at home together. All of us this time, you hear me?

You can hear me can't you?

Course you're tired.

I mean, you're bound to be tired. All that pushing and shoving. Getting you up the stairs, all that effort, all those flights.

You're just bound to be fucking . . .

12 Airbag

I put your pictures on the cabinet, look.

I lined them all up just as you like them.

I mean, you're going to want to see them all aren't you? There's no point keeping them at that . . .

At that place still, not until you can . . .

I did it for you, look.

I did it for you, Mum, look.

It was me, you hear? I did it all.

That's right though, isn't it, Joe?

There's some photos of the kids I could frame for you.

There's one of Billy from his swimming gala. He's the sweetest little pigeon in his speedos, you have to see it.

I could frame it and put it with the others couldn't I?

Give you something to smile about.

Makes me smile at least.

Makes me laugh my fucking head off it does. Doesn't it you, Mum?

Mum.

Doesn't it make you laugh though? Be honest.

Be honest, come on.

Be honest for once in your fucking life.

We could ask him to come and read his comics for you.

Billy, I mean.

I'm sure he wouldn't mind.

Any excuse to not . . .

Any excuse to spend some time away from . . .

From his father, I mean. Any bloody excuse.

You'd like that wouldn't you, Mum?

He's done nothing but ask about you, poor thing.

Poor little bean, he's been up every night with worry.

You'd like that wouldn't you?

Keeping you company, well?

Well.

You can tell me later on then, can't you?

Tell me what you'd like, if there's anything you need.

If there's anything else I can bring up for you, anything at all, Mum.

If there's anything I . . .

I can do, if I . . .

I

If there's anything I . . .

Eaten away.

Eating away inside you, old bag.

Cancerous old bag, you're doing this on purpose. You're doing this to me – Well, aren't you?

Can't you hear me?

You know we're all praying for you.

That's right though isn't it, Joe?

We're all praying for you, Mum.

Mum, please . . .

Three

Mrs Gorman *sitting at the end of the bed.*

Please, don't . . .

Don't let them see you, I said, stay down.

Stay down, Billy, keep your head under the pillow, go on.

Go on will you? – The dirty thieving apes, look.

The dirty drooling jackals, as they're breaking through the walls.

Breaking through the walls, the plaster, as they're biting through the brick, the bastards.

'Haven't you had enough?!'

At this time of night, in this weather.

At this time of . . .