

REVIEW PAPER

# Play review: *The Secondary Victim*

Maggie Palmer<sup>1</sup>



Ali (Susannah Doyle) and husband Victor (Gary Webster) in *The Secondary Victim* (photo © Matthew House)

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**T**he *Secondary Victim* is a play which shines a light on the Rogerian approach to the therapeutic process. However, as Matthew Campling, the playwright, points out the three therapists we encounter in the play are not intended as exemplars of a narrow definition of the client centred approach but are portrayed as active participants in the therapeutic process.

They are, he says, 'real' people as opposed to 'opaque' therapists: "It is about writing-in-

the-cracks as distinct from complying with an open Code of Ethics by my side."

But this is not a play with a limited appeal only to professionals or recipients of therapy. On the evening we attended there was a packed house and we found members of the audience enjoying the play without any prior knowledge or experience of the therapeutic process. This is in part due to the tightly constructed plot and the small but exceptional cast.

The play centres on Ali, played by Susannah Doyle (who has been nominated for Best Female in the Off-West End Awards) a respected and experienced therapist who works from home and becomes the 'victim' of a professional complaint of sexual misconduct by one of her former clients, a disturbed and disturbing young man called Hugo.

Michael Hanratty, as Hugo, bears a dangerous resemblance to Malcolm McDowell's character in *The Clockwork Orange* – a manipulative and menacing figure.

The first half of the play shows us how Ali's life is thrown into disarray by these accusations and we see the effect it has not only on her reputation and professionalism but also on her marriage (Gary Webster plays her bankrupt husband Victor).

In addition, we observe her relationship with another client, the hapless Teddy, played by Christopher Laishley, who manages to make Teddy a warm and likeable character despite his obvious sexually inappropriate behaviour.

The strategically placed interval provides a brief respite for the audience to wonder where this will all end before the play freefalls towards its challenging finale. We are left wondering if there was ever a 'whole truth'.

The performance space at The Park theatre is suitably tight and intimate and serves to intensify the therapeutic sessions. In addition, the minimalist set (basically a few chairs) focuses all the attention on the interactions between the characters and is accentuated by the pace of the dialogue. This along with a spare use of lighting provides an almost claustrophobic atmosphere. The characters are trapped by the situation they find themselves



Ali (Susannah Doyle) with her supervisor, Marilyn (Natasha Bain) in *The Secondary Victim* (photo © Matthew House)

in and the audience feel a part of this.

Also performing as members of the cast are Natasha Bain and Matt Holt who play the roles of Marilyn and Jonny, Ali's supervisor and a fellow therapist respectively.

In this play, Matthew Campling achieves his aim of creating 'real people' as opposed to 'opaque therapists'. ■

#### Further Information

The play continues at Park Theatre, Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park, London N4 3JP. It finishes on 9 December, 2017.

• [www.parktheatre.co.uk](http://www.parktheatre.co.uk)

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#### Biography

**Maggie Palmer** is a retired teacher/trainer who has spent the last three decades living on the perimeter of the counselling/therapeutic world – much like the character of Victor in the play. Despite being married to a psychologist, she has never been the recipient of counselling or had therapy.



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