



Shopping and Fucking is bound to be a Royal Court sensation. Pity about the play, says **Michael Billington**

Effing blind cynicism

THE title is brutally explicit: Shopping and Fucking. But then so is Mark Ravenhill's first play, jointly presented by Out of Joint and the Royal Court at the Ambassadors in London. It puts on stage a world of alienated youth for whom sex is simply a commercial transaction and for whom shopping and consumption are sexually arousing. But, for all its energy, it never persuades me that its characters are a social metaphor rather than a group of hapless special cases. All certainly lead lives of noisy desperation. Mark is an ex-addict who needs to separate sex and emotion and who brings home the terrifyingly abused 14-year-old Gary, who now craves a seductively rapacious father-figure. Sharing Mark's pad are Lulu and the bisexual Robbie who become involved with a middle-aged Ecstasy pusher to whom they are deeply in debt. Needing to raise 25,000 to save their lives, they turn to telephone sex and the satisfaction of Gary's fearful death-wish in exchange for the small fortune he has made from slot machines. Ravenhill's target is clear: the perverted values of a world that believes, in the words of the Ecstasy dealer, that "money is civilisation." But, while I don't doubt the moral sincerity of Ravenhill's Edward Bond-like argument, he also plays

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