

THE BEST PERFORMANCE I'VE EVER SEEN Gregory Burke, playwright

Afore Night Come

Young Vic, London, 2001



Ewan Hooper in *Afore Night Come* at the Young Vic. Tristram Kenton

I'd never heard of this before I went to see it. I was doing a placement at the National theatre studio where my first play, *Gagarin Way*, was on. I'm from a working-class background, so it was a fluke that it had ended up there. I didn't really go to the theatre much either, so while I was in London I went to see lots of different things. *Afore Night Come* was really strange – that's what I loved about it, it was different.

It started very naturalistically, a normal working situation where a group of fruit pickers has to get the harvest in. Thousands of light bulbs hung above the stage representing pears. Most of the characters are old hands who live in the countryside, but Ewan Hooper's character, Roche, an old Irish tramp, doesn't do much fruit picking, he's more a sort of emblem. He provokes the ire of the group and they slowly turn on him.

Hooper was dressed quite weirdly; he had a tea towel on his head and sunglasses and

carried one pear at a time across the stage rather than putting them in the buckets. It was just such a powerful performance. I suppose the thing about the character is that he's too educated for manual labour. But I also think the outsider in any play is the one who you feel most empathy with.

What I loved about David Rudkin's play was that he took a workplace setting and turned it into something that had mythic qualities. A lot of very powerful plays are about the myths and religious motifs that have always existed in society, like the connection between the harvest and religion. I also liked the situation because I often write about work. *Black Watch* is really just a play about work, but the job is soldiering, it's a kind of workplace drama.

Interview by Maya Dibley

National Theatre of Scotland's production of Black Watch by Gregory Burke returns to the Barbican, London, from 27 Nov to 22 Jan