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THE PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS THEATRE:
HOWARD BRENTON, DAVID HARE AND SNOO WILSON

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THE PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS THEATRE: HOWARD BRENTON, DAVID HARE AND SNOO WILSON

In the context of changes in British theatre theory and practice, in particular in the post-1968 Fringe, is it possible to consider playscripts as literary works, expressing the views of individual writers?

The emphasis within the early Fringe was on collectively organized workshops and group creativity, and on the exploration of non-verbal expression on stage, something which had been anticipated by the pre-1968 avant-garde and which amounted to a challenge to the playwright's traditionally dominant position in the theatre.

However, the playscript, as an example of written fictional narrative, dependent on the theatre for its realization but not its creation, still commands an independent status as a work, and the fiction enables the playwright to explore and evaluate reality in his own terms.

Snoo Wilson's works illustrate his clear awareness on the power of fiction to posit the equal reality of the rational and the irrational in dramatic terms, as a metaphor for our way of understanding reality outside the theatre, where reality and fiction seem difficult to distinguish.

David Hare focusses on the discrepancy between fiction and reality in the way we experience our lives and interpret history, and he seeks, as a conscious story-teller, to reveal, in imaginative terms, how that discrepancy leads to actual suffering.

Howard Brenton's declared preference for content and fact, rather than form and fiction, and for the theatre as a democratic medium, cannot conceal his consistent endeavour to use fictional narrative as fantastic as Wilson's to oppose bourgeois versions of reality.

In spite of their having learned to work with theatre companies and, hence, come to see themselves as parts of a larger, complex art, these playwrights, like their predecessors, continue to write fictions which express their personal vision in a form, print, that is accessible and analysable in isolation from actual performance.

Hans Christian Ib Andersen,
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DRAMA

Al kunst er udtryk og tydning. Men al anden kunst er menneskets forsøg paa at fastholde og bevare, at tyde og faestne det flygtende øjeblik, et led i menneskets evighedsdrøm. Skuespilkunsten derimod, som selv er saa flygtig, er potenseringen af øjeblikket, det fuldkomme øjeblik, det fuldkomme nu, nuet med alt, ikke blot hvad det rummer, men hvad det kan rumme.

Frederik Schyberg: Skuespilkunst, 1947.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that it was completed solely by myself.

INTRODUCTION

"You could certainly plan a fascinating symposium on the subject 'Death of the Contemporary Playwright: Who Cares?'".[1] So wrote the critic Michael Coveney in Plays and Players in 1985, in the context of the fashion, then, for adaptations of novels in the British theatre. Such adaptations had, he said, worked well on stage, but their relative dominance in the theatre could be seen as a sign that original dramatic work was becoming scarce, and he blamed this on the development of collaborative creation on the theatrical Fringe of the 1970s. Because of this, he concluded, the playwright "may not be all that crucial a presence or functionary" in the theatre.[2]

Even though Coveney's remarks were written tongue-in-cheek, they were not entirely without foundation, and they point to two significant facts about recent British theatre, which form the background to this work: the British theatre relies on its playwrights, whose welfare is a source of regular concern among theatre critics; and the playwright's position in the theatre and that of his art, the written play, have changed over the last thirty years, from being central and, apparently, indispensable to theatrical performance, to being optional, at least in theory.

As somebody used to approaching playscripts as examples of a major literary genre, I have wanted to investigate whether it remains possible to consider the playscript in those terms, not least in the light of developments in literary, dramatic and theatrical criticism, but also, and crucially, in the context of changes in the British theatre itself, changes away from the traditional view of the playwright as a literary artist working outside the theatre itself. One might put it, as Arthur Symons did in 1924:

> The question is this: whether the theatre is the invention of the dramatist, and of use only in so far as it interprets his creative work; or whether

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[1] M. Coveney, "From Page to Stage", Plays and Players, (henceforth: PP), No.380, (May 1985), pp. 16-19.

[2] Ibid., p. 18.

> the dramatist is the invention of the theatre, which has made him for its own ends, and will be able, once it has wholly achieved its mechanism, to dispense with him altogether, except perhaps as a kind of prompter.[3]

The question might be expressed differently: does the playwright belong to the theatre or the theatre to him, is he in command of the complex medium of the theatre or simply one of its constituent parts; can you speak of 'the playwright's theatre' or even keep him distinct from the theatre in which he works?

In a European context - and this also applies to the British theatre from the late nineteenth century - the playwright became increasingly isolated from the theatre. Joachim Fiebach, in his work on twentieth century theatre theory, Von Craig bis Brecht (1975), claims that this process of separation goes back to the seventeenth century and that it was started by the division of labour that resulted from the development of European capitalism.[4] According to Fiebach, this separation was complete by the nineteenth century, when the playwright had acquired the status of the 'true initiator' of the theatrical event, which was essentially seen as a presentation or embodiment of the playwright's script. The separation of playwright and theatre became evident when the theatre - the so-called artistic theatre - began to develop its own non-verbal language late in the last century. With this development, the playwright came to be seen as a verbal, literary artist, whose work might not forever dominate the theatre.

The British theatre has not developed exactly along the lines suggested by Fiebach. The playwright did come to be considered as a literary artist from the late nineteenth century, and several serious playwrights of our own century have been both novelists and playwrights, among them

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[3] A. Symons, "A New Art of the Stage" in Studies in Seven Arts (1924), quoted in G. Lloyd Evans, The Language of Modern Drama (1977), p. 7.

[4] J. Fiebach, chapter entitled "Theater und Drama" in Von Craig bis Brecht (1975), p. 303ff.

J.B. Priestley, Somerset Maugham and John Galsworthy.[5] But the artistic theatre was slow in developing in Great Britain and could not be said to provide a viable alternative to the playscript-dominated theatre until after the Second World War. So strong was the position of the scripted play that when George Devine set out to create a modern native British theatre in the 1950s, he began by approaching the nation's novelists.[6] In fact, only in the modern period in the British theatre, beginning with the presentation of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger at Devine's Royal Court Theatre in 1956, did modern European theatre theory begin to play a full part. The resulting conflict between the script-based theatre and the artistic theatre became particularly obvious in Britain after 1963, coming to a head in the formation of the so-called Fringe theatre from 1968. This is therefore an ideal period for an investigation of the relationship between playwright and company, playscript and performance.

The period to be dealt with in this work can be said to encompass the period after 1956, when the British theatre became truly international and began not only to absorb foreign ideas but also itself to influence foreign theatre. In this period, the theatre began to be seen as a major contemporary art form, capable of providing a focus for the British post-war welfare state, at a time when Britain, like other European nations, was undergoing radical cultural change. At the same time, an expanding system of state sponsorship for the arts, administered by the Arts Council of Great Britain, was instrumental in giving the theatre the material support which it needed in order to be able to develop into the very varied and lively sector of British cultural life which it now is.[7]

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[5] According to K.J. Worth, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (1972), p. 6, one in five of the playwrights listed in the New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (1900-1950) are primarily considered to be novelists.

[6] See e.g. I. Wardle, The Theatres of George Devine (1979), p. 167ff.

[7] For descriptions of the period see e.g. R. Hayman, The Set-Up (1973) and C.W. Thomsen, Das englische Theater der Gegenwart (1980).

Whereas the first, 1950s, 'breakthrough' in the theatre was created first and foremost by playwrights, the second wave in the 1960s affected the structure of the theatre company and the way in which performances were created and performed. This became particularly obvious in the Fringe theatre, which existed as a recognizable creative movement from 1968 to 1973, and whose organizational and artistic principles were carried on by the 'alternative' theatre, which can still be identified within the British theatre. In this work, I shall maintain the distinction between Fringe and alternative theatre, using the term 'Fringe/alternative theatre' to denote the British avant-garde theatre after 1968 in general.[8]

The principles on which the Fringe was based - in so far as one can speak of any generally accepted principles - were a rejection of the mainstream theatre, subsidized as well as commercial, and the adoption of the collective principle in the administration of theatre companies and the creation of plays. In the artistic theatre - for instance, in Performance Art - the collective principle could be seen as a symptom of general anti-authoritarianism and of a belief that the actor could create the play with his fellow performers but without the assistance of such non-performers as the playwright. In the political theatre, which did not necessarily abandon the scripted play, the collective structure exemplified the (socialist) democracy which this theatre was advocating, and challenged the individualism and hierarchical structure which allowed single members of the company - the playwright or the star actor - to assume a dominant position at the expense of the rest of the company. In either case, the use of improvisation, whether used during the rehearsal period as a means of creating the play or employed during the performance itself, gave the theatre company a means of creating work without playwrights.

The collectively organized theatre company - the theatre group - can be said to threaten the playwright's traditionally dominant position in the

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[8] See next chapter, "Text and Context".

theatre. Indeed, in the earliest time of the Fringe theatre, almost all of the new theatre groups that sprang up in and after 1968, in response to the abolition of theatre censorship, were concerned with using physical rather than verbal expression on stage, explored in workshop sessions. Only one company, Portable Theatre, concentrated on presenting scripted drama. Portable was formed in 1968 by two former Cambridge students, Tony Bicât and David Hare. Their original idea was to produce plays with a specifically literary bent, but with the arrival of Howard Brenton in the company in 1969 it changed into becoming an important producer of new writing from the Fringe, including that of Hare himself, Brenton, Snoo Wilson and John Grillo. Three of these writers, Hare, Brenton and Wilson, were so closely associated with Portable Theatre as to become known as the 'Portable playwrights",[9] and I have chosen to concentrate on the works of these three in order to be able to illustrate the tension between playwright and theatre in the post-1968 theatre.

Portable broke up in 1972, as a result of the conflict that had arisen between those interested in theatre aesthetics on the one hand and those seeing it as a part of the socialist revolutionary struggle on the other. It may be said that Wilson took the former road, Hare and Brenton the latter. In order to be able to illustrate the development of the three playwrights after the demise of Portable and of the Fringe as such I have chosen to deal with their major works in the period from 1968 to 1978, divided into two almost equal parts with the end of the Fringe in 1973. The beginning of the period under consideration - 1968 - is given by the sudden growth of the Fringe from that year, following the abolition of theatre censorship. Its end - 1978 - is indicated by changes in the careers of the three playwrights: with the election of a Conservative government in 1979 Brenton became more openly political in his approach to the theatre; Wilson moved away from the surrealist approach of his early plays to a more

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[9] See P. Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.1: Portable Playwrights", PP, No.5 (February 1972), p. 14ff.

rationalistic type of drama; and Hare did not write for the theatre at all for several years after 1978.

My approach will be first to indicate, in a background chapter, how the playwright's position in the theatre has changed in the 1950s and 1960s, inside and outside the Fringe. I shall then, in three chapters on the individual playwrights - Wilson first, then Hare and Brenton -look at how they have responded to those changes, through their plays. Finally, I shall attempt to reach a conclusion regarding the possibility of considering the playscript in isolation from the theatre, from actual productions. In order to do so, it will be necessary to indicate what it is about the playscript that is common both to the script and the performance. It will be my contention that the playwright's essential contribution to the theatre consists of the creation of fictional narratives, which both the reader and the spectator experience, albeit in different ways.

The fact that I am dealing exclusively with playscripts, even with those that have been published rather than the totality of the works of the three writers, suggests my own bias: I do believe that the playscript can be dealt with independently, as a literary work. But I do not believe that this can any longer be done as a matter of course. The critic must take into account the fact that the theatre, theatrical and dramatic criticism, and even playwrights themselves, have been considering alternatives to the playwright-dominated, playscript-centred theatre. He is also faced with a problem specific to the playscript: that it has a dual nature as both literature and theatre. As Michael Anderson points out in Anger and Detachment (1976),

> Whereas the literary critic has to deal with a finished product in print before him, the dramatic critic has to conjure up in his mind's eye . . . a three-dimensional picture of which the words on the page are only a flimsy part. If the critic's job is to evoke, analyse and finally to evaluate our response to a work of art, the dramatic critic has to remember that he can only refer obliquely to the work he is considering. A

> printed text is not a performance; a performance is only one of the many alternative interpretations of a written text.[10]

It would appear that any analysis of playscripts alone risks being inherently partial, at best contributory to the study of theatre, where performances are the proper subjects for analysis.

Dealing with the scripted play as a literary work does raise problems of definition and methodology, as has long been realized by critics in this country. For instance, in his 1948 A Short History of English Drama, B. Ifor Evans warned his readers that

> The history of the drama in England is more than an account of authors and plays, for it concerns the whole continuing tradition of the theatre. To the creation of the play the author is only one contributor.[11]

He pointed out that there had been a critical emphasis on the playscript as a literary work, leading to the misapprehension that "drama can be appreciated in independence of the theatre".[12] He himself appreciated that the written word in the theatre - the 'drama' - was intended for realization in performance, becoming 'theatre'. The 'misapprehension' had deep roots. It might be said that the definition of the playscript as literature goes back to 1616, when Benjamin Jonson published his plays, alongside others of his own works, as The Workes of Benjamin Jonson.[13] However, recently critical attention began to shift slowly in the direction of the theatre.

In 1954, Raymond Wilson suggested that literary and theatrical criticism might be united in dramatic criticism, dealing specifically with dramatic literature. In his Drama in Performance, he was concerned with

> . . . the written work in performance: that is to say, the dramatic structure of a work, which we may realize when we read it as literature, as this

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[10] M. Anderson, Anger and Detachment (1976), p. 3.

[11] B.I. Evans, A Short History of English Drama (1948), p. 9.

[12] Ibid., p. 9.

[13] G. Sjögren, Shakespeare: dramatiker, menneske, myte (1971), p. 184.

> actually appears when the play is performed. . . . In much contemporary thinking, a separation between literature and theatre is constantly assumed, yet the drama is, or can be, both literature and theatre, not the one at the expense of the other, but each because of the other.[14]

Williams, it is clear, is not giving the playwright second place as a creative artist in the theatre, although he suggests that some playwrights depend on their directors for their playscripts to become theatre, as happened in the case of Chekov and Stanislavsky. But where a playwright is involved, his work is still seen as preceding rather than co-inciding with rehearsal work or performance:

> When a dramatist writes a play, he is not writing a story which others can adapt for performance: he is writing a literary work in such a manner that it can be directly performed.[15]

A distinction between drama and theatre was still implied, but the new emphasis on the performance side of theatre was increasing. In 1960, in The Elements of Drama, J.L. Styan had Williams' words in mind when

> . . . proposing a completer criticism for drama, one which embraces both its verbal and its visual and aural elements. Thus the first article of its faith is that the act of reading a play is not likely to be enough.[16]

However, the act of reading remains the starting point for Styan, and the playscript the basis for theatrical performance, although the latter must now be deduced from what might be termed a 'theatre-specific reading':

> We must look first to the structure of idea and emotion in the dialogue itself, how the actor is to embody it in speech and action, and the sort of work the audience must do before the play is created in their minds. An understanding of the process of the theatrical experience is necessary for the full appreciation of the play.[17]

He was to repeat this in his later - 1965 - The Dramatic Experience: a Guide to the Reading of Plays, saying that in reading the playscript critically

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[14] R. Williams, Drama in Performance (1954), p. 4.

[15] Ibid., p. 170.

[16] J.L. Styan, The Elements of Drama (1960), p. 1.

[17] Ibid., p. 3.

we make a "test of stage-worthiness in our imagination",[18] but the playwright and his written work held first place in the theatre:

> . . . the good dramatist exactly controls the kind and intensity of our interest in the details of character and events on the stage.[19]

Implicit in this view is the idea that although the playwright communicates through other people, through the company staging the play, a successful act of communication can still happen between the playwright and his audience because the playwright 'controls' the stage event in the way that he writes the script.

Yet, respect for the practical aspect of theatre and its consequences for the way we read the playscript has reached a point where the latter can no longer be considered without reference to the theatre because it is incomplete as a literary text:

> A novel or a poem is neither more nor less than the words it consists of, but a script is obviously less than a play, while a production is obviously more.[20]

These words are from a more recent guide to play-reading, Ronald Hayman's How to Read a Play (1977), where he also points to differences in the ways in which we experience the written text and a play in performance. When we read a novel or a playscript, we "cannot take in more than one impression at a time" through the printed words, but performances can communicate in a variety of ways, simultaneously or in succession:

> Words, silences, sound effects, background music, facial expression, gestures, movements across the stage, lighting, groupings, shadows, shapes and colours in the costume and décor - all these may be telling us something.[21]

The playscript and the performance are different entities, but they are interdependent, and where they intersect a new critical entity comes into existence: the play, which is neither the script nor the actual production

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[18] J.L. Styan, The Dramatic Experience (1965), p. 14.

[19] Ibid., p. 2.

[20] R. Hayman, How to Read a Play (1977), p. 11.

[21] Ibid., p. 11.

but rather the relationship between the two.

Malcolm Kelsall, in Studying Drama (1985), accepted the new semioticist critical vocabulary, where the act of 'reading' a 'text' refers to the act of interpreting any form of communication of culturally determined meaning through any linguistic system, rather than the taking in through the eyes of the printed word. He said that the "eye reads the stage as if it were a book. It asks 'what is the meaning of the objects within that space?'"[22]

Obviously, the emphasis had been successfully moved from a view of the playscript as literature, over one which saw it as both literature and theatre, to one where only performance could determine the playscript's value as theatre, its literary aspect being seen almost as accidental and secondary. That the playwright must write with dramatic action in mind rather than with a wish to use words in an aesthetically pleasing way had long been accepted. Now the action had pride of place in critical thinking, if by 'action' one can refer to any type of communication received through man's senses: "Words, silences, sound effects . . . " and so on, organized in a complex 'language' whose understanding depended on the audience's knowledge of dramatic conventions and ability to correlate their experience of real off-stage life with what they saw on stage. In semiotic criticism, which in many ways seems a logical conclusion to the development that had been taking place in drama criticism, the emphasis had not only moved from the literary to the theatrical side of drama, but from the playwright and the script to the audience and its ability to decode what it was witnessing during the performance:

> Every spectator's interpretation of the text is in effect a new construction of it according to the cultural and ideological disposition of the subject . . . It is the spectator who must make sense of the performance for himself . . . (Keir Elam, 1980).[23]

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[22] M. Kelsall, Studying Drama (1985), p. 14.

[23] K. Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (1980), p. 95.

It was a development in line with that which had been taking place within theatre research. In an article in Theatre Quarterly in 1981, J.F. Arnott pointed out that a crucial factor in the establishment of theatrical scholarship as an independent academic discipline in the late nineteenth century had been its conscious dissociation from literary scholarship. From that point onwards, it had developed into two major branches: the Anglo-Saxon one, theoretical-practical in its approach; and the Continental 'Theaterwissenschaft' one, originating in German and Austrian Positivism, from whence it had acquired a theoretical-scientific approach. The cornerstone of theoretical scholarship within either branch was, as Arnott explained, "the reconstruction of performances",[24] what might be termed the 'archaeology' of performance. In his introduction to the discipline, Om teatervetenskap (On theatre scholarship, 1973), Gösta M. Bergman insisted that the performance must be the primary object of scholarly investigation, the work of art proper, and furthermore,

> . . . this complex work of art, which forms the intersection between word and picture, only lives in the 'now' and has therefore not been preserved from different ages as a living complete work. It must first be reconstructed as far as this is possible, before theatrical research can achieve parity with research into literature and fine art, where the works are, as a rule, preserved.[25]

He also points out that an approach which concentrates on script-based drama will inevitably exclude an important body of material, namely performances that are not based on scripts or even make use of dialogue. In 1978, speaking from a similar conviction, Clive Barker suggested that there was "a wider need for a new methodology through which to study performance".[26] Such a methodology would, it was hoped, bring theatrical scholarship into line with developments in the theatre itself, away from the reliance on the

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[24] J.F. Arnott, "An Introduction to Theatre Scholarship", Theatre Quarterly, (henceforth: TQ), 10, No.39 (Spring-Summer 1981), p. 42.

[25] G.M. Bergman, Om teatervetenskap (1973), p. 76 (my translation from the Swedish).

[26] C. Barker, "New Paths for Performance Research", TQ, 8, No.30 (Summer 1978), p. 5.

playwright's script and dialogue, and it would enable the scholar to "look at all areas of performance, the 'illegitimate' ones as well as the 'legit'".[27]

There is no question on 'looking down upon' the playwright in this approach, rather of defining the object of research in terms of theatre instead of writing. Nevertheless, the effect is again that of denying the primacy of writer and script in the theatre. This, as is clear from the above, was happening both in dramatic and theatrical criticism and within the theatre itself, the latter being the subject of much of the first chapter of this work. The problem for the researcher wishing to deal with playscripts rather than performance becomes one of deciding how to take account of these developments without appearing regressive.

First of all, it must be accepted that the playscript is intended for performance rather than for reading and that its performability must be taken into account in the critical treatment. However, this does not necessarily oblige the critic to give performance higher critical status than the script. Given, as is the case in the British theatre, that the scripted play is omnipresent it is possible to treat the two as interdependent and to claim, with Jean Alter, that

> . . . a written text can qualify as theatre only when it is performed, and a performance only when it has a written version.[28]

Naturally, this will only apply where a playscript is actually involved and where it, rather than performance technique, is a central part of the material under investigation. It should be noted that it has not yet been possible to devise a method of analysis that can account adequately for both playscript and performance.[29]

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[27] Ibid., p. 6.

[28] J. Alter, "Coding Dramatic Efficiency in Plays" (1979) in Teater 2: Tecken, Språk, Struktur (1981), ed. I. Holm, p. 19 (my translation from the Swedish).

[29] K. Elam, The Semiotics . . ., p. 210.

This does not in itself justify the treatment of the playscript as literature, as a work to be experienced through reading, as it must be defined in this context. Again, I would refer to conditions actually prevailing in Great Britain and emphasize that, secondly, playscripts are as a matter of fact published, not just for the theatrical profession (as might be said to be the case with scripts published by Samuel French) but for a reading public,[30] who presumeably consider them to be literature. Where published editions of new plays are concerned, it may usually be assumed that their performability has been or is being proved in actual performance. Their publication takes place according to additional criteria of readability, and this fact justifies an approach to the scripted play as literature. It follows that such an approach cannot include every play that has been written but only a smaller section of them. In this connection, it is worth noticing that written drama has had an important role to play in recent imaginative writing in Britain generally, as an example of innovative literature, forming, as it has been said, a "natural bridge towards the new tendencies coming into English writing generally, from the later sixties on",[31] in particular in the

> . . . shift away from traditional modes of fiction purporting objectively and reliably to record, chronicle-fashion, an external reality; and a growing interest in language for its own sake, with its own inner hierarchy of sub-languages and its own system, self-generative and not determined by an external world, of conventions.[32]

In spite of changes in attitudes in the script in both theatre theory and practice, the written drama has played an active part in British literature, suggesting that it is still appropriate to consider it as a literary genre, taking its place alongside poetry and the novel.

It does seem necessary to stress that written drama, 'the drama', is a literary genre. Some critics have shown their awareness that such a view

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[30] C. Shearman, "When Publishers Come Out to Play", The Guardian, 20 May 1985.

[31] J. Holloway, "The Literary Scene" in The New Pelican Guide Vol.8: The Present, ed. B. Ford, p. 114.

[32] Ibid., p. 120.

of the drama was under attack. In Theatre Language (1972), John Russell Brown took the modern view that 'theatre language' is made up not just of words but "every means of expression that the theatre possesses and that can be controlled",[33] but although his aim was to demonstrate that if "the theatre is indeed an art form that draws forth potent images, a single artist's imagination provides sufficient field",[34] he was aware that the single verbal artist was being replaced in some quarters by the group. In 1974, in British Theatre 1950/70, Arnold P. Hinchliffe maintained that words were "a main tool of drama",[35] and yet he was not certain about whether the contemporary theatre needed "authors of any kind".[36] Ronald Hayman expressed very little faith in the quality of British playwriting in British Theatre since 1955 (1979),[37] believing that not enough attention was being paid to language as a sophisticated expressive medium. In his long defence of the playwright, The Language of Modern Drama (1977), Gareth Lloyd Evans insisted on the importance in the theatre of "discipline, preparation and form",[38] whilst showing his own dislike for the new physical theatre of the 1960s. One has a feeling that the very existence of such theatre prompted Evans to publish his study in order to defend a view that

> An acceptance of language as one of the few indications that mankind is not only a cut above the beast, but can express an awareness of this in a manner which ennobles and thrills, has given place to something else that regards language as a convenience for the expression of common denominators of human experience.[39]

His view may, perhaps, seem a little dated and his attack not entirely fair: great drama has always expressed 'common denominators' in one form or another, at best in challenging ways. However, it is not difficult to see

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[33] J.R. Brown, Theatre Language (1972), p. 14.
[34] Ibid., p. 250.
[35] A.P. Hinchliffe, British Theatre 1950/70 (1974), p. 18.
[36] Ibid., p. 170.
[37] R. Hayman, British Theatre since 1955 (1979).
[38] G.L. Evans, The Language of Modern Drama (1977), p. 231.
[39] Ibid., p. 236.

that Evans and other critics saw the literary side of theatre as being threatened. I shall argue in the first chapter that one can continue to consider the drama a literary genre because it continues to offer a fictional narrative through its structure, even where the playwright is not apparently writing aesthetically pleasing dialogue. However, at this point I would also like to suggest that the formal discipline of the drama - the fact that it seems to rely on fairly firm plot structure - gives it similarities with poetry. It can be considered as literature at a deeper level than that of literary style. In performance, the actors may add sufficient detail to bring the play close to the novel with its wide scope as a narrative. On the page, it presents the reader with a quite different task of reading a narrative which has been presented in what can only be considered a highly stylized literary form: a text which consists almost entirely of words that imitate speech to a greater or lesser extent, structured in a 'rhythmic' fashion that has more in common with poetry than with prose, yet is neither.

I have suggested above that the apparent demise of the word was linked with the playwright's seemingly diminishing status in the theatre. I would insist that playwrights have continued to provide the theatre with essential fictional narratives, which are intended for presentation in the theatre, with the additional 'creation' that is provided by director and actors, but whose meaning is also available to us through reading as well. This view of the playscript allows the critic to re-establish the link, however tenuous, between the playwright and his audience, at least where the reading audience is concerned. To do so is to go against a trend in the contemporary criticism which stresses the audience's efforts to 'create' the meaning of the work as they watch/read it rather than the author's attempt to communicate with an audience. One should, of course, not over-stress the significance of this attempt where playwriting is concerned: playwrights do not necessarily think of their efforts in such terms or have an audience in mind as they write. Nor should one ignore the warning of Wimsatt and

Beardsley against confusing what the writer may have intended with what the written work itself achieves:[40] it must be the work itself, whether the published script or the performance, the work is under investigation, not the individual who created it. This seems particularly obvious in the case of the written drama. In 1947, Jean Giraudoux spoke of the "sad and slightly ridiculous position of the playwright towards the characters he has created and given to the theatre".[41] As soon as one of these appears before the audience, he

> . . . becomes a stranger and indifferent [to the playwright]. The first actor who plays him represents the first in a series of reincarnations by which the character draws further and further away from his creator and escapes him forever. In fact, this is true of the play in its entirety. From the first performance on, it belongs to the actors. . . . After the hundredth performance, particularly if it is a good play, it belongs to the public.[42]

Nevertheless, even without wishing to advocate an 'intentionalist' or even a biographical approach to the written play, I would argue that there is a case for taking the playwright's plans into account in the treatment of his work. He is frequently involved in the first production of his plays and can be expected to have had some influence on them, at least insofar as the company is likely to have consulted him on the question of 'rewrites'. Peter Weiss, speaking as a writer with a negative impression of working with theatre groups, stressed the importance of this:

> It is, of course, important that the first version of a play, the first production, corresponds to the author's intentions. Later on, it may well be rewarding for the playwright to see in how many different ways his play can be performed.[43]

By working with the company, as has increasingly been the case in the British theatre since the 1950s, the playwright has been able to acquire a practical

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[40] W.K. Wimsatt Jnr. and M.C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) in 20th Century Literary Criticism (1972), ed. D. Lodge, p. 334ff.

[41] J. Giraudoux, "Two Laws (1947) in Playwrights on Playwriting (1961) ed. T. Cole, p. 62.

[42] Loc.cit.

[43] P. Weiss, Om författerrollen" in Teater 2, ed. I. Holm, p. 96

knowledge of the way in which the playscript develops from the page to the stage.

This gives him the ability to consider not only how the meaning of his playscript is expressed in words but also how it may eventually be presented three-dimensionally in the theatre, and contemporary playwrights in Britain willingly acknowledge their debt to the company when it comes to giving the playscript its final form during rehearsals. On the other hand, as David Lodge put it in the post-script to the 1984 edition of Language of Fiction:

> . . . literary texts do not, except very rarely, come into being by accident. They are intentional acts and their manifest intention is to communicate (even if what is communicated, as in many modern texts, is the difficulty or impossibility of communication).[44]

This does, of course, not mean that the author has "sovereign authority of his own texts, or any extra-textual control over all the meaning that may be discovered in it",[45] as Lodge says, and this is a particularly important point in the case of playscripts, where the company will be attempting to express its joint interpretation of the play's meaning in time and space. However, by the same token it is perhaps even more essential for a playwright than for a novelist that he is clear about the meaning of his work. This he can be through its narrative structure.

It should now be possible to indicate in what way I wish to treat the scripted drama as literature. Firstly, I accept that such a treatment can only be applied to a limited selection of plays, namely those which reach the audience in print, whether in book-form or otherwise and which, it is assumed, have also been intended for a reading audience. However, the challenges to the playwright and to the playscript in the theatre have been such during the post-1956 period, and even before then, that they must be considered in any treatment of drama written during that period. I shall

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[44] D. Lodge, Language of Fiction (1966/84), p. 280.

[45] Ibid., p. 279.

do so to the extent that they can be seen to have influenced the work of the three writers dealt with here. Secondly, I am conscious of dealing specifically with British plays and am not trying to establish universal principles concerning the drama. I shall be dealing with plays which are known to have been performed, where the playwright has been able to take part in the first production (in the contemporary British theatre, that usually means the only one), and where it can be assumed that he has been involved primarily as a writer so that the verbal rather than the theatrical aspect of the play can be emphasized. It may not be possible to show that the theatre 'belongs' to the playwright, but I do hope to suggest that he has not become subsumed into the theatre either, that he can still be identified distinctly as a literary artist.

CHAPTER ONE

TEXT AND CONTEXT

One of the main achievements of the British theatre since 1956 has been the re-integration of the playwright into the theatre. This created a new generation of playwrights aware of the nature of theatre and its dependence on live performance before an audience and its use of other means of expression than dialogue alone.

However, that re-integration was achieved at a 'cost' to the playwright, insofar as it cost him his nominal status as the theatre's prime mover and made him more of an equal of the other artists in the theatre. Inevitably, it also became more difficult to consider the playwright in isolation from the actual theatre, as a literary work.

In this chapter, I shall consider developments that have determined how the playwright and his work is viewed vis-à-vis the theatre company and its performances. I shall look, first, at how the Fringe/alternative theatre challenged the conventional view of the playwright and, then, how this was part of a wider rejection of mainstream culture. Having attempted, next, to show how the theatre's mainstream anticipated that challenge, I shall indicate why I believe that the playscript continues to deserve study in its own right.

(i) Brenton, Wilson and Hare all have roots in the so-called Fringe theatre, which took its name from the annual Edinburgh Fringe,[1] and which is usually taken to have existed from 1968 to 1973. 1968 was the year when the abolition of theatre censorship paved the way for the creation of a theatre based on a new, "uncontrollable" type of

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[1] For a discussion of the origins of the terms 'Fringe' and 'alternative' and of the developments of the 1960s and 1970 British avant-garde, see C. Itzin, "Alternative Theatre in the Mainstream", (p. 3ff) and S. Trussler, "Alternative Theatre - For What?" (p. 11ff), both in TQ, 5, No.19 (September-November 1975).

organization: the small-scale, touring theatre group, performing in non-theatre spaces, and touring shows with a form and content that had hitherto been considered unlawful according to the 1843 Theatres Act. In 1973, the disbanding of some of the most important original Fringe groups, the increasing professionalization of the Fringe, and a general feeling that the Fringe had 'spent itself' as a creative force led to a general agreement that it had ceased to exist as a distinct cultural and artistic phenomenon.[2]

However, the small-scale theatre groups continued to exist and to carry on many of the ideas of the Fringe: the concept of more or less collectively run theatre groups that offered themselves as artistic and organizational alternatives to both commercial and subsidized mainstream theatre. At the same time, some of the original aims and distinctive features of the original Fringe theatre were changing. In some quarters, the original, 'anarchistic' and individualistic attitude of much of the early Fringe theatre was being rejected in favour of more openly socialist aims, and some members of the Fringe, not least such playwrights as Brenton, were beginning to demand access to larger stages, dissatisfied with their work being presented only to small audiences in small, non-theatre or studio spaces.

Furthermore, whereas much of the early Fringe work had been physical theatre, developed in rehearsal by actors and directors but often without playwrights, the scripted play had a renaissance and was accommodated in the Fringe's own new venues such as the Ambiance Lunch Hour Theatre Club (1968, and part of Ed Berman's Inter-Action) and the Soho Poly (1969), both lunchtime theatres, followed by others which also - or only - played in the evening: the King's Head (1970), the Bush (1972) and the Half

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[2] See, for instance, P. Ansorge, Disrupting the Spectacle (1975) and C. Barker, "From Fringe to Alternative Theatre", Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 26, No.1 (1978). The 'unionization' of the alternative theatre is described in C. Itzin, Stages in the Revolution (1980), passim.

Moon (1972).[3]

By 1973, it was thus possible to see that the new, post-1968 theatre had established itself firmly, with its own organizations, but also that it had developed away from its unruly 1960s origins into something which its own artists/workers no longer accepted as the original Fringe.[4] It therefore makes sense to accept the use of the adjective 'alternative' to denote the developed Fringe theatre from 1973.

The notion of being a distinct alternative to the mainstream theatre and of consciously rejecting the mainstream theatre has been essential to many members of the Fringe/alternative theatre. Catherine Itzin, in her survey of British political theatre since 1968, clearly sees this rejection in political terms. Choosing the year 1968 as the starting point for the development of the new political theatre, a theatre desiring "to achieve a socialist society", she says that 1968

> . . . marked the coming to consciousness - the political consciousness - of the war-baby generation, to an awareness of environmental plundering and pollution, to cold-war imperialism, to conscious consumption in the first and second worlds and to the struggles of the third world. The response was disillusionment, despair, pessimism - and anger. The significant thing was that this response - the rebellion - did not remain random, but became a movement of the political left, appealing (however confusedly) to Marx as a symbol of the revolutionary transformation of society. All this came to be reflected in the theatre.[5]

At first glance, both Brenton and Hare would seem to confirm this: both declared themselves to be socialist/Marxist playwrights in the 1970s, and Brenton attacked the early Fringe's identification with the alternative counterculture, saying that

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[3] The new venues are described in R. Asquith, "Subversion at Lunchtime" in Dreams and Deconstructions, ed. S. Craig, p. 145ff, and M. Hay, "Showcasing the Fringe", ibid., p. 153ff. Plans of some of the new venues can be found in F. Bentham, New Theatres in Britain (1970).

[4] A reaction to the term 'Fringe' was developing within the new theatre groups and surfaced in the Radical Theatre Summer Schools at the Oval House from 1971. See Naseem Khan, "Radical Summer School", Time Out, No.187 (21-27 September 1973) and Jeff Nuttall "Why Do We Play to Kids?" Time Out, No.189 (5-11 October 1973).

[5] Catherine Itzin, Stages in the Revolution, p. 3.

> The truth is that there is only one society - that you cannot escape the world you live in.[6]

It should, however, also be noted that Itzin includes Hare almost as an afterthought, as a lone, dissenting voice, and that Snoo Wilson is only mentioned in passing.

Without wishing to question Itzin's right to select playwrights as she wishes, I take her different treatment of these three authors to indicate that there might be a different way of approaching them, one which takes into account the fact that in spite of their obvious differences, they could at one point in their careers operate within the same organization - Portable Theatre - and in Hare's and Brenton's case continue to work together occasionally. Such an approach would attempt to see them first and foremost as playwrights, but it would also refuse to accept Fringe/alternative theatre's total rejection of the mainstream, by arguing that much of what was apparently 'new' in the Fringe theatre had already been investigated, if not fully developed, in the mainstream and underground theatre before 1968. Although both Fringe and mainstream were equally 'suspicious' of each other in the 1960s, some mainstream organizations - the Royal Court Theatre, the RSC and the National Theatre - worked towards an integration of the new ideas and impulses from the Fringe/alternative theatre, and if Brenton can be used to demonstrate that the early Fringe anarchy turned into a more firm socialist commitment, he can certainly also be used to illustrate how Fringe and mainstream eventually came together. In 1976, his Weapons of Happiness became the first contemporary play to be commissioned for, and produced by, the new National Theatre on the South Bank. Thus, not only in the off-stage world but also within the subsidized theatre was it possible to argue that there was only one 'world'.

John Bull, in his recent New British Political Dramatists, does

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[6] Howard Brenton, "Petrol Bombs Through the Proscenium Arch", TQ, 5, No.17 (March-May 1975), p. 10.

include Hare, along with Brenton, David Edgar and Trevor Griffiths. He calls Itzin's emphasis on the political aspect of 1968 "reductionist".[7] The new theatre, as he points out, did not simply emerge from the political ferment:

> The tension between the 'avant-garde' stance of much of the drama and the realities of political life did much to produce the blend of optimistic fervour and cynical pessimism that is, in essence, the political sub-text of so many of the plays.[8]

The new theatre sprang from two sources: the avant-garde theatre (which dominated the 1960s Fringe) and the pressure of contemporary political events (which increasingly influenced the alternative theatre of the 1970s). Both were important influences on playwrights in the Fringe/alternative theatre, not only because of the tension they created in the plays, but also because they resulted in a theatre which claimed to be able to manage without playwrights, finding the actor's (and director's) creativity more important than that of the playwright, and seeking its inspiration in the main concerns of the audience or of the actors rather than in written playscripts.

Playwrights like Brenton, Hare and Wilson must therefore be considered in the light of several essential factors that were active in the theatre where they developed: the avant-garde theatre allowed them a great deal of individualism in the way they expressed themselves, and a great deal of freedom in their choice of subject-matter and style. The increasing pressure of political events during the period of political confrontation during the Heath administration in 1970-74[9] gave many artists in the theatre, including playwrights, a sense of political responsibility, reflected in their choice of subject matter and in their attitude to the function of their art (in fact, the very word, 'art', became suspicious

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[7] John Bull, New British Political Dramatists (1984), p. 9.

[8] Ibid., p. 4.

[9] See, for instance, Alan Sked and Chris Cook, Post-War Britain (1979), chapter 10, "The Politics of Confrontation: The Heath Government, 1970-74"; and Arthur Marwick, British Society Since 1945 (1982), "Part Three: The Time of Troubles 1973-80".

because of its allegedly 'bourgeois' connotations). Finally, they had to develop as individual creative artists in a theatre which cherished collectivity rather than individualism, and which was exploring ways of doing that collectively which the playwright had hitherto done individually: creating the play. Indeed, the tension between the individual and the collective was the thread that ran through most of the developments in the Fringe/alternative theatre.

The Fringe theatre rejected the mainstream, and this attitude it seems to have borrowed from the counterculture that was developing in the mid-1960s, not only in Great Britain but in Western Europe and the United States. The counterculture developed very rapidly in this country, culminating in what Jeff Nuttall has called the "psychedelic summer" of 1967.[10] The first underground venue, Better Books, opened in 1966 to become the first home of Britain's first avant-garde group, the People Show. During 1966, the London Traverse Theatre operated at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre as an 'officially approved' underground theatre. It had been opened by, among others, two Americans: Jim Haynes and Charles Marowitz.[11]

The former had already opened Britain's first underground theatre, the Edinburgh Traverse, in 1963. The latter had been involved in avant-garde experiments with Peter Brook at the RSC in 1963-64. In 1967, Haynes was involved in the opening of the underground's London club, UFO, which featured "rock music, underground movies, poetry, happenings, lights, theatre",[12] a mixture typical of this new kind of venue. 1967 was also the year when the university 'circuit' was first opened to touring theatre groups, initially by the Vietnam Solidarity Movement, and when an American and an Israeli, Ed Berman and Naftali Yavin, began to work with community theatre at the International Theatre Club at the Mercury Theatre.[13] Thus, when the new

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[10] Jeff Nuttall, Performance Art, Volume One: Memoirs (1979), p. 25.

[11] The others were Michael Geliot and Ralph Koltai. See Jim Haynes, Thanks for Coming! (1984), p. 123ff.

[12] Jonathan Hammond, "A Potted History of the Fringe", TQ, 3, No.12 (October-December 1973), p. 40.

[13] Ibid., p. 40.

foreign theatre groups appeared in Britain in 1967, the foundations for the Fringe had already been laid.

The Fringe's rejection of mainstream theatre - both as organization and as a type of performance space - was evident in the fact that Haynes, Berman and Yavin all moved out of conventional spaces in 1968, in Haynes' case to a disused warehouse that became the London Arts Lab and in Berman's and Yavin's to various unconventional environments, including the Ambiance Theatre, at one point at the Green Bananas Restaurant.

Characteristic of the counterculture was a wholesale rejection by the younger generation of the lives and standards of its parents' generation, manifested in a refusal to accept authority in any form, in sexual permissiveness, a growing interest in Oriental (and thus non-Christian) religion, in consciousness-expanding drugs, in growing student unrest and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, and so on. In the Fringe it was manifested in the rejection of the mainstream theatre's 'hierarchical' structure and conventional buildings, in favour of collectively run, egalitarian theatre groups taking their shows to new audiences in unconventional spaces. At the same time, the Fringe rejected the notion of the theatre as being the domain only of professional artists offering their art for sale to audiences who were seen as 'consumers'. The Fringe took the view that amateur commitment could make up for a lack of professional training.

Furthermore, the Fringe rejected conventional theatre forms, which were considered inadequate as ways of expressing the contemporary experience of actors and audiences. This is expressed in Sandy Craig's denunciation in Dreams and Deconstructions (1980) of

> . . . naturalism, the dominant form of bourgeois theatre [which] contained political argument: any such arguments were merely the expressions of individual characters usually, and ideally, held in check by the counterarguments of other characters.[14]

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[14] Sandy Craig, "Reflexes of the Future: the Beginnings of the Fringe" in Dreams and Deconstructions, ed. Craig.

On hindsight, the Fringe/alternative theatre's rejection of mainstream theatre may seem extreme, and its interpretation of conventional concepts of theatre exaggerated. However, both were clearly genuinely felt and legitimate as parts of the development of new theatre concepts.

In 1967 the first of the influential foreign theatre groups arrived on the British scene: Jérome Savary's Grand Théâtre Panique from France; off-off-Broadway groups like Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater and Ellen Stewart's and Tom O'Horgan's Cafe La Mama, followed in 1968 by Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater and, in 1969, by Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's Living Theater.[15] Together, these groups represented an approach to theatre that emphasized the creative powers of the total ensemble, often, as the list above implies, under the leadership of a strong director. The performances might or might not be performed by professionals, and the performers might or might not work from written scripts, but the foreign companies all suggested that the skills of the actor and the full range of the stage's own expression, lighting, sound, etc., could be used to create theatrical art without involving playwrights. The new reliance on the actor was evident in the use of improvisation in performance, which would only become legal in the British theatre with the abolition of theatre censorship.

The atmosphere of the kind of shows presented by these groups can be seen from James Roose-Evans' description of the Grand Théâtre Panique's 1968 performance of Labyrinth, based on Arrabal's script:

> The seating in the auditorium is arranged sectionally, some even on the stage, so that the actors can move more freely among the audience - sometimes even crawling under the chairs or, as at one point when the house lights come up and music plays, inviting the audience to dance with them. The 'labyrinth' consists of criss-crossing rows of blanket hung out on washing-lines across the stage and around the auditorium. In one corner of the stage is a water-closet which plays a prominent part in the action - characters drinking from

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[15] Details of some of these visits will be available in Appendix Two.

> the lavatory bowl, while its flushings coincide with simulated male and female orgasms. The actions seems to involve a mad judge, a demented girl, two prisoners and a cruel boss. The performance is improvised, as it proceeds, under the energetic direction of Jerome Savary who conducts the proceedings sometimes from the roof, on top of a ladder, or even suspended upside down over the audience.[16]

Apart from the fact that Labyrinth was an improvised show (based on a script and directed by Savary), it displayed two essential features of the new group theatre: it assaulted the sensibilities of its audience, as the French theatre theorist, Antonin Artaud, had suggested that the modern theatre should do; and it integrated the audience into the event, by staging the show amongst them and inviting them to take part in the theatrical event. By making actor and audience share the same space and thus bringing theatre and reality closer together, the Grand Théâtre Panique seemed to be using another of Artaud's ideas, namely that of making the theatre a shared ritual[17] rather than an aesthetic experience to be enjoyed by audiences at arm's length. Indeed, ritual became a central element in much Fringe theatre, not as actual religious ritual but as an element of stylization and repetition used aesthetically.

No group took the new ideas further than the Living Theater, who held that "theatre, politics and life are synonymous",[18] and sought to abolish the division between performers and audience by involving them, as directly as possible, in "ritual enactments of political and social conflicts, glimpses of the future (Visions), and discursive confrontations between actors and audience".[19] The Living Theater demonstrated this attempt to "make revolutionaries on the spot",[20] as Judith Malina called it, in their Paradise Now, presented to London audiences in 1969. This show seems mainly to have inspired the British theatre to a rejection of the Living Theater

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[16] James Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre from Stanislavski to Today, new nev. ed. (1973), p. 60.

[17] See Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, first publ. 1964 (1970).

[18] Margaret Croyden, Lunatics, Lovers and Poets (1975), p. 93.

[19] Ibid., p. 119.

[20] Judith Malina, interviewed by Croyden, 1968. Ibid., p. 116.

approach and an insistence that actor and audience should remain separated, allowing the audience to treat theatre as a game of make-believe, a way of exploring man's perception of his environment at a distance.

Nevertheless, some Living Theatre ideas lived on. Margaret Croyden says of Beck's and Malina's later plans for a "guerilla theatre" which was intended to fuse art and life that

> In this context . . . aspects of the 1968 Chicago convention, the Paris uprisings, the Chicago trials, the student sit-ins, the slogans, placards, costumes of the radicals, may be considered theater, and its participants, actors.[21]

This is in keeping with the ideas of the socalled French Situationists , whose influence on his own writing Brenton has acknowledged.[22]

The 1971 "Guide to Underground Theatre" makes it clear that the Fringe theatre was moving towards physical rather than verbal expression. Out of the 32 groups and companies listed, only one, Portable Theatre, was committed to the presentation of new, scripted drama. The rest were far from all experimental avant-garde groups, but a large number of them stressed the use of improvisation, masks, of working as an ensemble and of exploring the use of the actor's body for the communication of ideas in performance.

Portable Theatre was one of four groups that had their 'home' at Jim Haynes' Arts Lab in Drury Lane, and the descriptions in the guide of these groups is revealing. The Freehold, formed in 1968, sprang from the Wherehouse La Mama, a London descendant of Ellen Stewart's Cafe La Mama. The original group was formed by actors and drama students, and had

> . . . from the beginning been that rare thing: a genuine ensemble company. Daily workshops. Extended rehearsal period (up to six months). Resulting in actors who are physically extremely proficient. Their application of essentially physical images to texts has met with varying success . . .[23]

Pip Simmons Theatre's members "met when training as specialist teachers" and

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[21] Ibid., p. 130.

[22] Howard Brenton, "Petrol Bombs Through the Proscenium Arch", p. 20.

[23] Time Out, "Guide to Underground Theatre", TQ, 1, No.1 (January-March 1971), p. 62.

originally only worked part-time with theatre. The group formed in 1968 and, says the Guide,

> . . . started as a definite theatrical experiment in The Meaning behind the Word, using the word-game texts of Jean Tardieu. They still distrust words but have evolved their own style of music and movement to put across strong and simple stories with the maximum directness and impact . . .[24]

The People Show had been formed as early as in 1966 and had its roots in fine arts rather than in theatre. In the 1970 Guide, it was said of them that

> . . . they work with [the audience] (and without scripts of any kind). They are not 'actors' in the traditional sense - they are people who have explored improvizations in an audience environment so thoroughly that they have the confidence to throw out the 'acting' which shelters behind someone else's lines, someone else's character. They have the guts to be themselves in front of others. Their 'characterizations' are imaginative projections of their own obsessions: and what they present is not a 'play', it's a show, a display, an exhibition, an entertainment.[25]

Two things are immediately obvious: the playwright is not involved, words were "mistrusted", characters not needed, and physical rather than verbal imagery was stressed; and there is no mention of attempts to create revolutionaries or make theatre, life and politics synonymous.

The descriptions - in particular of the People Show's "imaginative projections of their own selves" and of the Pip Simmons Theatre's use of "their own style of music and movement to put across strong and simple stories" - echo Charles R. Lyons description of "The Movement of the Creative Process from Playwright to Actor in the 'Avant-Garde' of the Sixties and Early Seventies" (1974). Lyons points to the non-mimetic nature of the actor-centred avant-garde theatre as its most significant aspect, saying that its performances

> . . . work towards the authenticity of the theatrical event itself as a self-contained experience which does not relate to the presence of some reality outside

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[24] Ibid., p. 63.

[25] Ibid., p. 63.

the performance.[26]

The actors in these performances are not playing characters or taking part in enacting fictions: they are presenting themselves in an act of self-exploration. This means that even where the performance is based on an already existing story or myth, what matters is not so much the story or myth itself as the way the actor uses it. The narrative becomes "a matrix which the actor uses in a process of self-exploration".[27]

The avant-garde theatre, Lyons says, is based on "the confrontation of actor and audience, not playwright and narrative",[28] and the confrontation is not a finished, complete theatrical 'work of art' but a process of self-exploration, offered to an audience that might or might not appreciate what it is witnessing. The implication is that the avant-garde is not primarily interested in communicating a clear meaning or content such as a playwright might provide. He points out that although the actor presents himself on stage as himself, as an individual, he does so in the context of the theatre group which provides him with a standard of objectivity.

In the context of British theatre, the idea of non-mimesis would only appeal to a minority taste, but in insisting that the actor could create his own art, and that the real centre of the art of theatre was the performance, not the playwright's script, the avant-garde was pointing the way forward to central developments in the British Fringe/alternative theatre, and doing so in a way which forced the playwright to look for new ways of working in the theatre.

Theatre is a collaborative art, and consequently collaboration alone does not define the theatre group: an element of egalitarianism

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[26] Charles R. Lyons, "The Movement of the Creative Process From Playwright to Actor in the 'Avant-Garde' Drama of the Sixties and Early Seventies", Mosaic, 8 (Fall 1974), p. 144. See also Martin Esslin, "From the Avant-Garde of the Fifties . . . to the Avant-Garde of the Seventies", English Quarterly, 5, (Summer-Spring 1972), pp. 7-16.

[27] Lyons, p. 146.

[28] Ibid., p. 146.

is also essential,[29] as well as a conviction that the group can function together as a creative unit. In Brian Clark's words:

> The group takes the material, absorbs it, lets it interact with its own collective personality, then evolves a new shape to give coherence to the resultant exploration.[30]

This applies regardless of whether the material is a playscript or any other kind of material chosen for dramatization. Two groups, which operated in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s, can illustrate two different ways of using the theatre group: the 'avant-garde' approach, and the political/agitprop approach. The two groups are TOC - The Other Company - led by Naftali Yavin as part of Inter-Action; and Red Ladder Theatre, which evolved from a small agit-prop group, Agit Prop Street Players, founded in 1968.

TOC was formed in 1968 to experiment with environmental theatre, and to develop work with a permanent ensemble. In 1970-71, its leader, Naftali Yavin, and five actors of very dissimilar backgrounds, spent eight months in workshops, exploring their relationships with each other through improvisation. The workshop was intended to realize the 'true' ideal of ensemble work, by making individual artists collaborate fully in a way that ignored what Yavin saw as "nineteenth century myths: exaggerated respect for the writer, the actor, the director".[31] In TOC's ensemble work

> . . . there would be no myths about the roles of the different contributors. Actors can write, writers can direct, the director can have ideas from the script point of view. The whole thing is very flexible. Another thing is letting people follow their own creative cycle, instead of coming in at ten o'clock and working like mad until half past five.[32]

The outcome of the workshop was two group-created plays, The Pit and The

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[29] See Steve Trafford, in Platform, "Live and Kicking", Platform, no. vol., No. 4 (no date; 1982?), pp. 3-4.

[30] Brian Clark, Group Theatre (1971), p. 6.

[31] Naftali Yavin, "Through the Eyes of a Camel: Two Interviews", Gambit, 6, No.23 (1973), p. 8.

[32] Ibid., loc.cit.

Journey, plays which used the notion of 'environmental' theatre to involve the audience directly in such a way that they 'experienced' the plays' meaning.

In The Pit, the actors performed inside a 'box', the audience observing them through slits in the box. Yavin explained:

> The theme of the play involved four people who were strangers . . . getting to know each other, going through the complicated procedure of opening up to each other. They experience master-slave relationships, fuckups and alienations of all kinds. But they emerge with some possibility of greater understanding, love and communication. As they get closer to each other, the structure of the box breaks down. Finally nothing separates actors and audience.[33]

The process enacted in the play seems very much to be the one that the group itself would have had to go through in the workshop, and the relationships they go through in the play seem immediately to indicate that they are based on improvisation. The script of the show was developed from Yavin's notes of the group's workshop work, and the presentation of the two shows was a demonstration that it was possible for the company to produce a play itself, using the actors' own creativity and making the total theatrical event into a metaphor, whose meaning would only become clear as it evolved, live, before its audience.

Yavin was not, in fact, influenced directly by the American groups: he wanted actors to work both with their minds and their bodies, not only with their intellect (as he believed British actors normally did) or their bodies (like the American groups).[34] Equally important, although he was exploring the art of theatre, not written drama, in his workshop, he did not wish to deny the value of the word in the theatre or the value of communicating with his audience:

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[33] Peter Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.3: Games People Play", PP, 19, No.7 (April 1972), p. 16. See also Time Out, "Guide to Underground Theatre", p. 64.

[34] Ansorge, "Games . . .", p. 14.

> There are rules - rules in the theatre and, for an audience, rules in society. I'm trying to make people aware of their ability to question and change the rules.[35]

His theatre was not 'therapeutical', it had a specific purpose, but that purpose was expressed through the language of theatre.

Red Ladder Theatre grew out of an 1979 group, Agit Prop Street Players, and its work was related to specific 'causes' from the very beginning. Political or socialist commitment of one kind or another has been typical of much new British drama and theatre throughout the post-1956 period, but Red Ladder was political in a new way that was typical of the 1970s, in that it was "a revolutionary socialist theatre group",[36] performing not in theatres but in the kind of places where it expected its main audience to gather: in working men's clubs, at pickets etc. In 1973, Red Ladder described itself as

> . . . a collective of 8-10 people. Everybody in the group shares an equal responsibility for what the group is doing and where it is going, from the administrative tasks such as bookings, publicity, van servicing, records, which are passed around the group on a rota - to the making and performing of the plays themselves. There are no guiding minds, no writer or director.[37]

The company also employed improvisations when developing their plays, but their theatre was not based on the actor's self-exploration. They took the play's subject from suggestions by their audience and concentrated on communicating complex political and economic ideas to an audience not trained to absorb such ideas through academic study. They developed their own "method of presentation that was non-verbal and non-literary",[38] whose success depended on their conscious use of visual imagery of the kind its audience

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[35] Ibid., p. 16.

[36] Richard Seyd, "The Theatre of Red Ladder", New Edinburgh Review, No.30 (August 1975), p. 36.

[37] Red Ladder Theatre, "Red Ladder Now", New Theatre Magazine, 12, No.3 (1972), p. 24. Both this and the previous article give descriptions of Red Ladder performances. See also Judith Condon, "Outlines of Agitational Drama" and Action Books, "How to Use Street Theatre", both in Culture and Agitation (London: Action Books, 1972).

[38] Seyd, ibid., p. 3.

knew from television and advertising.

In fact, neither TOC nor Red Ladder banished the word, dialogue, from their theatre. Rather, they showed that they could create both script and performance without assistance from playwrights. Where the playwright would traditionally provide a script outlining his own line of exploration of reality, his own choice of subject matter, TOC and Red Ladder suggested that the exploration could be carried out by the group itself and that the subject matter could originate outside the theatre company and be provided by reality itself. In neither case can the theatre be said to have been 'impoverished'. Rather, new dimensions were added to it, but at the same time the playwright's traditional status as the theatre's 'prime mover' was denied by the Fringe/alternative theatre: he was no longer a sine qua non.

(ii) There was, of course, nothing new in the theatre trying to find ways of creating performances that did not concentrate on dialogue. Indeed, the two main foreign influences on the new, post-1956 British theatre, epic and absurd theatre, could be said to have done so. However, they both depended on playwrights. On the other hand, the new group theatre of the late 1960s and early 1970s presented a new approach that did not require writers, and this explains the severe misgivings of some of the British directors interviewed for Plays and Players in 1968-70. One of them, David Jones, believed that

> In the sixties we have seen the breakdown of accepted theatrical forms but this has become an end in itself. Art before life. (1970)[39]

Jones was undoubtedly referring to the new physical theatre, as was Robert Chetwyn:

> I'd say the development in technique will be drastic, and I fear a cutting down of the value of words. The

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[39] David Jones, "Directors in Interview", PP, 17, No.11 (August 1970), p. 21.

> visual element is increasing enormously; in the experimental off-Broadway theatre the lack of words is tremendous . . . (1969)[40]

Peter Hall took a more balanced view of the new developments in the theatre, but his assessment of the dangers inherent in them was also more precise:

> I start feeling my age and my period with a lot of new developments. I do get worried about the masturbatory qualities and self-indulgence of a lot of the modern troupes. I also think they are cutting off one of their limbs by paying so little attention to the written word - or rather words formed by a single selective imagination. One must support and cheer them as they're a reaction to the work we did. But I couldn't do it. I like irony - and ambiguity and detailed precision - that's why I led such a happy life in Shakespeare. Art is ambiguous - a great play can be all things to all men. Yet I admire and respect the way new techniques demand more and more from the actor. (1970)[41]

He stressed the word, "formed by a single selective imagination", and did so for apparently contradictory reasons: for its ambiguity and its precision.

Michael Blakemore believed that the playwright's script could provide even more than that:

> I do still think that the word has a more specific moral commitment, not necessarily benign, but at least clearer, less misleading. And this is one of the things that worries me about the current avant-garde, their abandonment of the word leads to abstractions where the moral stand is foggy. (1969).[42]

This can put Hall's insistence on the word's precision and ambiguity into perspective. He did not believe that the theatre should be the playwright's slave, as he pointed out in a later interview:

> A text does not have an absolute meaning - cannot have an absolute meaning. It can trigger off responses in an actor and in an audience which are contradictory and ambiguous. Does a playwright know all the meaning? In my experience not. (1972)[43]

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[40] Robert Chetwyn, "Director in Interview No.5", PP, 16, No.5 (February 1969), p. 72.

[41] Peter Hall, "Director in Interview", PP, 17, No.10 (July 1970), p. 21.

[42] Michael Blakemore, "Director in Interview", PP, 17, No.1 (October 1969), p. 43.

[43] Peter Hall, "Is the Beginning the Word?", TQ, 2, No.7 (July-September 1972), p. 8.

There was, thus, still a job of interpretation and creation for the actor (and, presumably, the director), but the playwright's script could have a clearer "moral" (not "moralizing") commitment, could give the production a clear point-of-view.

It is interesting that directors from the mainstream theatre should object so strongly to the new theatre: they were obviously ready to counter the new Fringe's rejection of themselves. The directors I have mentioned so far all objected to anti-verbal, physical theatre, but William Gaskill pointed out that even the playwrights of the Fringe presented the mainstream director with problems. There was, he said,

> . . . a tendency today amongst younger playwrights to what we used to call amorality. Writers like Orton, and more recently Howard Brenton, approach a type of existential attitude towards crime. . . . in approaching the problem of crime the new writers aren't really relating it to a moral, political or philosophical value. They don't relate to any known philosophy . . . [44]

He believed that this disintegration of values was connected with "a changing attitude towards the writer", and although he did not elaborate on this, he did indicate that it represented a change in the theatre away from "a theatre which relates to thought, to Bernard Shaw, to Brecht, where the underlying philosophical and political basis to drama has always been an essential part of the work",[45] a theatre where playwrights used language accurately to "define social situation".[46] It was not simply a question of whether the theatre was using playwrights' dialogue or not but of how such dialogue was used: to provide the theatre with "thought". In Orton and Brenton, William Gaskill saw two new writers who refused to provide that, and who were thus refusing to accept their traditional obligations as writers. Although Brenton, Hare and Wilson would not eventually emerge as radically

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[44] William Gaskill, "Director in Interview", PP, 17, No.8 (May 1970), p. 53.

[45] Ibid., p. 53.

[46] Loc.cit.

unconventional playwrights, they belonged to a generation of playwrights who were renouncing the responsibilities and roles of the older writers.

Not only theatre groups but playwrights too were rejecting the mainstream theatre, and that rejection comprised not just the form and style of presentation but the very values of the mainstream. This, I would suggest, is an indication that the Fringe/alternative theatre was part of a more comprehensive attack on accepted ideas and values, such as had already been seen in the counterculture's attack on the established culture. In the 1960s and 1970s, that general rejection became a more specific challenge to conventional ideas about what constituted 'art' and 'culture'. In Artists and People (1978), Su Braden argued that "the so-called cultural 'heritage' which made Europe great - the Bachs and Beethovens, the Shakespeares and Dantes, the Constables and Titians" had become a 'bourgeois' culture, unable to communicate with the majority of potential non-middle class audiences. The truth was, she claimed, that not professional artists, but people themselves, made culture:

> It is to do with self-expression and social needs. It is active, not passive. It is neither a sub-culture nor an alternative. It is active and to be lived rather than passive and to be appreciated.[47]

It was this conviction which had motivated the creation of the many new arts labs after 1968, starting with Jim Haynes' London Arts Lab, the first home of Portable Theatre. In Arts Centres (1978), John Lane says of the Arts Lab that

> . . . it cast a spell over thousands of young people who were searching for non-established forms of expression. It demonstrated the validity of self-determining democratic processes and the central, overriding significance of 'doing your own thing'. The idea of open access, the fluid use of interchangeable spaces, the relaxed mixture of cultures, the informal encouragement of every kind of personal creativity, were all forged and validated there.[48]

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[47] Su Braden, Artists and People (1978), p. 174.

[48] John Lane, Arts Centres (1978), p. 16.

The validity of "self-determining democratic processes" and of "doing your own thing" could also be seen as essential elements in the new theatre groups, giving them a reason for working collectively which went beyond simple wishes to create 'amateur theatre' or seek self-gratification: they were an open challenge to conventional theatre forms which they were trying to replace.

The challenge to the traditional scripted play could be explained in a more sophisticated way than simply as the result of the actors' wish to use their own creativity. In Reading Television (1978), John Hartley and John Fiske attempted to establish the theoretical foundations for the study of television by suggesting that television as such, not merely the television drama, communicated in ways that were more akin to speech than to literature. They believed that the dominant middle-class culture was based on a literate tradition that went back to the invention of printing. That literate tradition had, the authors argued, bypassed the oral working-class tradition. Their complex and interesting argument in favour of analysing television in terms of oral communication falls outside the scope of my work, but their reasons for rejecting traditional, literate communication as their model is illuminating. They claimed that

> . . . television is a characteristic product of modern society, while literature and the theatre come down to us from different societies whose structures and organization were different.[49]

Furthermore, they suggested that the literate tradition imposed specific ways of perceiving reality through its very structure:

> The written word (and particularly the printed word) works through and so promotes consistency, narrative development from cause to effect, universality and abstraction, clarity, and a single tone of voice. Television, on the other hand,is ephemeral, episodic, specific, concrete and dramatic in mode.[50]

It must be pointed out that Fiske and Hartley were not trying to deny the

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[49] John Fiske and John Hartley, Reading Television (1978), p. 14.

[50] Ibid., p. 15.

validity of literature and theatre. In fact, the features they claimed to be typical of the literate tradition were exactly those that might be considered its very strengths: its consistency and single point-of-view. Their arguments do, however, throw new light on the nature of at least part of the controversy over the status of the playwright's script in the theatre: what the directors interviewed for Plays and Players were defending was a theatre based on that very literate tradition, with all its distinct virtues: clarity, a 'moral' commitment, thought.

On the other hand, in rejecting that theatre, the new Fringe/alternative theatre groups were not simply being destructive. They were part of an attempt to create a different kind of culture which reflected different ways of perceiving reality and different attitudes to the nature of art and its creation. That new culture implied an emphasis on collectivity rather than on individualism, and this in itself would inevitably have consequences for the individual playwright working within the parameters of the new culture. Although individuality was not banished, individualism was, and the playwright would have to see himself and his work in the context of the 'collective', whether the collective of the theatre company with which he was working or the audience for which he was writing. He would be 'under pressure' from the theatre and from the off-stage world.

In a paper given in 1976 on the development "From Fringe to Alternative Theatre", Clive Barker said that

> . . . the later work of Hare, Brenton and Edgar, however much it might have more dramaturgical flexibility than their immediate predecessors, has seen them driven back to using words to articulate their content. The work of the earlier groups was less articulate but theatrically much more exciting.[51]

It is hardly surprising that playwrights should have been 'driven back' to what is, after all, their medium: words, and the fact that they should display greater dramaturgical flexibility than the previous generation

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[51] Clive Barker, "From Fringe to Alternative Theatre", p. 59.

can only confirm that the formal experiments of the early Fringe groups had borne fruit in the shape of a greater awareness among the new playwrights of the theatre's powers of expression, going beyond the spoken word.

The British theatre has continued to give prominence to the playwright, but the theatre's, and the playwright's, definition of the playwright's position in the theatre has changed. In an article from 1981, "The Language of Crisis in British Theatre", C.W.E. Bigsby pointed out that a large proportion of British playwrights and directors were educated at Oxford and Cambridge, and he suggested that this might explain why

> . . . the British theatre has remained so resolutely literate and articulate, so dedicated to the word, so distrustful, on the whole, of physicality, of a vision of the theatre as non-rational, as dedicated to the dismantling of boundaries, the celebration of shared values and experiences.[52]

Bigsby's explanation rings true. Brenton, Hare and Wilson are certainly university-educated, the two former at Cambridge and the latter at East Anglia, and their contribution to the theatre lies very much in the field of writing. They cannot be called 'visionaries' of the theatre, but Wilson has shown a distinct interest in the 'irrational', and both Brenton and Hare have shown a central interest in the specifically fictional aspects of their art, thus demonstrating that even if they are not 'irrational', they are aware of the special nature of writing in relation to off-stage reality.

These three playwrights were from the beginning recognized as writers. Time Out wrote in 1974, as Hare's Knuckle opened in London's West End, that they "broke completely with any of the options previously available - social realism, 'stylish theatre' or absurdism. They were the vanguard of the 'verbalists' in the theatre explosion since 1968".[53] The fact that they were so obviously writers, not radically different from playwrights as they were otherwise found in the mainstream theatre, commercial as well as

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[52] C.W.E. Bigsby, "The Language of Crisis in British Theatre", in Contemporary English Drama, ed. Bigsby (1981), p. 15.

[53] David Hare, "Hare in the West End", Time Out, No.209 (1-7 March 1974), p. 9.

subsidized, explains why it was possible for them eventually to find their place in the mainstream. However, integration did not imply any artistic capitulation on their part: they remained distinctly post-1968 playwrights, and if Hare had seemed more willing to expand into writing not only for commercial theatre but also for film and television, Brenton has continued also to work in alternative contexts and Wilson has remained on the fringe of the theatre.

(iii) Among the Fringe's achievements were the establishment of the small-scale theatre group as a creative unit, creating theatre without playwrights, or without primary emphasis on the playwright's script; performances that tried to bring the theatre closer to the audience, partly by working against the conventions of traditional, representational theatre in order to bring the form of theatre closer to the way the audience were supposed to experience reality, partly by changing the relationship between theatre and audience by performing in non-theatre spaces and/or by changing the physical relationship between audience and performance area.

However, these ideas were by no means new to the British theatre in 1968. For instance, although the Royal Court Theatre was dedicated to the playwright as a 'writers' theatre', its efforts to train writers to learn how to write specifically for an art form based on live performance anticipated later developments towards a theatre relying less, rather than more, on the spoken word. In itself this did, of course, not disqualify the playwright from working in the theatre, but it pointed to the fact that the actor's - and the theatre's - art consists of more than dialogue. Devine believed that "the basis of everything in the theatre is the dramatist",[54] and his successor as Artistic Director at the Court, William Gaskill, continued to teach the Court's actors taking part in the Actors' Studio's work

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[54] Irving Wardle, The Theatres of George Devine (1979), p. 118.

> to regard themselves as servants of the play. The text had to be spoken in such a way that the audience would be drawn to the narrative of the play - not the performance.[55]

However, making the actors servants of the play was not the same as making the theatre a slave to literature. Devine, and Gaskill, realized the importance of teaching playwrights how to meet the special demands made on them by the theatre. This was achieved by encouraging playwrights to attend rehearsals and performances of their own plays and those of others at the Royal Court[56] and, in the case of a limited number of writers, by offering them the opportunity to work together to explore the nature of theatre in the Royal Court Writers' Group.

The Writers' Group functioned between 1958 and 1960, first under Devine himself, then under Gaskill, and it included such writers as John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond and Ann Jellicoe. The latter later described the group's work:

> We met once a fortnight to improvise. We tried to explore the nature of theatre. Believing as we did in theatre depending on action and images rather than words, we hardly ever analysed what we were doing, or each other's plays, or theories of playwriting.[57]

They may not have discussed theories in abstract terms, but they were clearly developing a view of theatre that can be understood as a 'theory', a statement of principle about the nature of theatre.

While the playwrights in the Writers' Group were developing their view of what constituted theatre, others who were writing for another major 'New Wave' theatre were being confronted with the collaborative, even collective, nature of theatre in a more direct way. In 1958, Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop began to work with new plays in a way that anticipated the working methods which companies of the Fringe/alternative

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[55] Jack Shepherd, "Don't Talk About It - Do It" in At the Royal Court, ed. Richard Findlater (1981), p. 109.

[56] Wardle, ibid., p. 199.

[57] Ann Jellicoe, "Royal Court Theatre Writers' Group", Ambit, No.68 (1976), p. 63. Also in At the Royal Court, q.v., in a shortened form, as "The Writers' Group".

theatre would later adopt. Littlewood explained the principles behind her work in 1959:

> I believe very much in a theatre of actor-artists, and I think the trust that comes out of team work on what is often a new script, cleaning up points in production, or contact between actors, is essential to the craft of acting and playwriting. I feel that the playwrights have got to be in the theatre. If they are there, working with the fabric and problem of theatre every day, then perhaps out of our type of play, which has a great deal of improvisation in them, we shall get better plays.[58]

Littlewood was not just teaching playwrights and actors mutual respect but was making the playwright work with the company so that the final version of the play became the outcome of their joint efforts, of collaborative work in rehearsal. This work was not completely egalitarian. As was the case in many later Fringe companies, it was organized by a strong central figure, the director, who would come to be seen as a threat in his own right to the traditional British playwright's theatre: he seemed to become a creator in the theatre in his own right.[59]

As early as in the 1950s, these two important companies were thus pointing the way forward to the more physical, more group-oriented theatre of the late 1960s Fringe. The value of having a company working together to develop their art was realized at an early point, when the British theatre experienced the work of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble during its visit to London in 1956. The Berliner Ensemble did not create plays collectively, and its value lay more immediately in the fact that it was able to refine the whole company's craft and style by working together over a length of time, not being restrained by the limited rehearsal schedule usually found

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[58] Quoted from "a radio interview in 1959" in Howard Goorney, The Theatre Workshop Story (1981), p. 114. Littlewood's working methods are described in Tom Milne and Clive Goodwin, "Working With Joan", first publ. in Encore, No.8 (July-August 1960), pp. 9-20.

[59] This is one of the main arguments in Arnold P. Hinchliffe, British Theatre 1950-70 (1974), chapter 8: "Producer's Theatre". Objections to the director's assumed new dominance, from the actor's point of view, are found in Simon Callow, Being an Actor (1984), in the section called "Manifesto". On the director's role in the British theatre see also Ronald Hayman, The Set-Up (1973), chapter 16: "Directors".

in the British theatre. It thus allowed the actors to develop their own creativity.[60]

Both Devine and Littlewood had to give up the ensemble ideal because of the pressure to succeed commercially. Such success led to transfers to the West End, resulting in a temporary loss of part of the company, and critical success inevitably led to the creation of individual star performers, counteracting the central advantages of ensemble work: the egalitarianism and the opportunity to develop as an ensemble. Devine accepted the consequences and gave up the permanent company, whereas Littlewood felt forced to give up working in the British theatre altogether, at least temporarily.[61]

The pressures which Devine and Littlewood recognized have prevented the ensemble ideal from being realized fully in the British theatre in the majority of cases, but the ideal has lived on and the British theatre has developed its own approximations to the ideal. Thus, Britain's two new national companies from the 1960s, the Royal Shakespeare Company (1960) and the National Theatre (1963), both adapted the ideal. Both accepted that the British actor (and director) needed the freedom, for economic and career reasons, to move freely between theatre companies and between theatre, film and television, but they reached a compromise by offering their actors three-year contracts.

In 1962, William Gaskill experimented with ensemble work within the RSC in ways that also pointed forward to the later Fringe/alternative theatre. In that year he directed Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle at the Aldwych. During rehearsals, he suggested to the company that the already agreed casting should be scrapped and parts be redistributed on the basis of a joint assessment by the company of who played which part best. This proposal, which undermined the actors' normal view of a given part in a play as an element in his personal career, was seen by Gaskill as having

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60 See George Devine, "The Berliner Ensemble" in The Encore Reader, eds. Charles Marowitz et al., p. 14ff.

61 See Joan Littlewood, "Goodbye Note from Joan" in The Encore Reader, p. 132ff.

far-reaching potential consequences for the company:

> . . . the idea did hit very much at the basis on which the company was run, because as soon as you accept the true concept of a group, that is of equality in a group, you attack the whole system, salaries, billing, everything.[62]

Gaskill's experiment was an isolated phenomenon - indeed, he was democratically voted down by the company - but it was an important early example of the kind of process that would be found in the later theatre groups, such as Red Ladder, and it suggested that ensemble work could be seen as more than a way of perfecting the existing theatre: it could be a challenge to it in a fundamental way.

In 1965, Jeremy Brooks and Peter Hall of the RSC suggested in an interview for the London Magazine that the

> . . . long separation, in England, between the dramatist and the realities of his stage which started when Walpole kicked the writers out of the theatre, and was perpetuated by the bad habits of commercial managers when he started to creep back again, seems to be coming to an end.[63]

They made it clear that they, in the RSC, were seeking to create a theatre where actors were not afraid to use their intelligence, and where a new generation of directors and designers "put the play's meaning before its decorative or theatrical possibilities".[64] They also believed that the playwright's range of expression had already developed in ways which indicated that a more wide-ranging, not simply verbal, dramatic language had been created for him:

> Having at last escaped from a single-set naturalistic drama which bogged them down for so long, dramatists are reaching right back towards the complete freedom of movement which Shakespeare had. This freedom of movement necessarily means an abandonment of picture-frame naturalism, which in turn leads to the develop-

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[62] William Gaskill, "Brecht in Britain" in Theatre at Work, p. 128.

[63] Jeremy Brooke and Peter Hall, "The Royal Shakespeare Company", The London Magazine, 5, No.5 (August 1965), p. 66. This interview unfortunately does not indicate which answers are given by whom. Brooke and Hall were referring to Horace Walpole's Licensing Act of 1737.

[64] Ibid., p. 64.

> ment of the non-naturalistic style of production capable of embracing as much song, dance and mime as will help the play to achieve an expressive unity.[65]

Devine's ambition of bringing the playwright into the theatre had been realized, and the British theatre was developing a modern style of presentation that left the playwright free to experiment with his expression. The theatre which Brooks and Hall were talking about was clearly still a playwright's theatre, or at least a theatre concentrating on the written play, whose meaning was of primary importance. In the 1960s, inside and outside the RSC, experiments were, however, being carried out which questioned the primacy of the playwright's script. In the experiments carried out within the RSC the playwright remained central: their purpose was to open up new possibilities for the playwright. However, this was not so everywhere.

1963 is an important year in the history of recent British theatre. It not only saw the first season of the new National Theatre at the Old Vic Theatre in London, but also the introduction into the British theatre of the theories of Antonin Artaud through the RSC's experimental Theatre of Cruelty Workshop (and, in 1964, Season), starting a fashion in the British theatre for 'ritualistic' drama. It was also the year of the opening of Britain's first underground theatre, Jim Haynes' Edinburgh Traverse, and of the first presentation in Britain of a Happening; and it was the year when Theatre Workshop presented a group-created play, Oh What a Lovely War. Whereas the Artaudian workshop and the Happening could be said to point forward to the development of the avant-garde theatre, Oh What a Lovely War suggested a more openly politically committed group theatre. That play, a group-created musical documentary play, researched and created by the company itself, presented a critical view of actual events - the First World War - in a wholly theatrical way, using the pierrot show as its frame and employing not only acting but also mime, dance, songs and screen projections. It thus relied on the actors' complete range of technique as performers.

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[65] Ibid., p. 66.

This successful production became the direct source of inspiration for Peter Cheeseman's musical documentaries at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, a theatre-in-the-round. The first of these was The Jolly Potters (1964). Although the documentaries at Stoke were not based on playwrights' scripts, Cheeseman was not trying to abolish the playwright in the theatre. Indeed, he usually had playwrights in his company, but in the absence of a playwright in 1964, he made use of the fact that he had a permanent company to create the first company-created Stoke documentary without a playwright. In later documentaries, which were ideally based entirely on primary source material, the playwright was only in charge of research, whereas the director and actors created the actual play in rehearsal.[66]

Cheeseman believed that playwright and theatre should learn from one another, and in particular that playwrights could learn from the narrative freedom offered by productions in the round, without sets, centred on the actor and capable of moving quickly from one scene and fictional location to another.[67] But the documentaries also taught playwright and the company another, important lesson. As Cheeseman said:

> A theatre should be an artist's workshop, and like any other factory should make things on the spot. If there is no writer in the company, the company must assume responsibility for authorship.[68]

Cheeseman was still not suggesting that the playwright did not have a place in the theatre, but he was saying that the theatre might manage without the playwright: the company was now the constant and the playwright one of the variables.

The Stoke documentaries inspired the creation of local documentaries

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[66] Peter Cheeseman, "Documentary Theatre at Stoke-on-Trent", introduction to The Knotty (1970), p. xvf.

[67] Cheeseman claims that the performance style at Stoke has influenced Peter Terson, Tony Perrin and Ken Campbell. See Peter Cheeseman, "A Community Theatre-in-the-Round", TQ, 1, No.1 (January-March 1971), p. 79.

[68] In Robin Thornber, "The Wriggling Monster", Guardian, 13 January 1970, quoted in Brian Clark, Group Theatre, p. 12.

at several other theatres, in particular some of the newly-built regional repertory theatres, which, like Cheeseman's, wanted to form a close relationship with the community in which it was built.[69] One example (not at a new rep) was Close the Coalhouse Door, premiered at the Newcastle Playhouse in 1968. For a playwright, Alan Plater, the author, was modest about his own contribution to the play, saying in the preface to the published version that it was

> . . . impossible and irrelevant to divide the creative credit. . . . The show has grown and developed since the first night and there is no definitive script - nor should there be, for this or any play.[70]

In the preface, he acknowledged the importance of Littlewood and Cheeseman for the development of the documentary, but explained that the company-approach had not been possible in this instance because of a limited rehearsal period.[71] He did not surrender his claim to being the actual author of the play, regardless of whether or not it did have a final version, and an article by Plater, written in 1971, made it clear that the introduction of the group-created documentary did not necessarily make playwrights surrender to the group-idea:

> You cannot simply dramatize any old newspaper found under the carpet . . . History only makes sense when it is filtered through an imaginative and highly subjective brain.[72]

The brain would, of course, be that of a playwright.

Thus, although the documentary had presented an alternative to theatre based on scripts by individual playwrights, pointing forward to the group-created theatre of the Fringe alternative theatre, it had not convinced playwrights that they had no place in the theatre, but it had made it clear

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[69] On the new documentary theatre see Annegret Maack, "Das zeitgenössische Dokumentarspiel" (The contemporary documentary play) in Drama und Theater im England des 20. Jahrhunderts, ed. Heinz Kosok (1980).

[70] Alan Plater, Close the Coalhouse Door (1969), p. 6.

[71] Ibid., p. 6.

[72] Alan Plater, "The Playwright and His People", TQ, 1, No.2 (April-June 1971), p. 68.

that there was an option to them, that a play could be made by the theatre company itself, by using only factual material from the off-stage world: the two factors that would influence playwrights in the early 1970s theatre. This kind of theatre, although far from revolutionary, was in its attitude to the creation of theatre and to what theatre might deal with, a predecessor to such theatre as Red Ladder's.

The other line of theatrical development, that of the avant-garde, could be said to begin with the presentation in 1963 of the first Happening in Great Britain: Ken Dewey's In Memory of Big Ed, performed on the last day of the International Drama Conference at Edinburgh, which was attended by Peter Brook, William Gaskill, Peter Hall, Joan Littlewood, Charles Marowitz, Kenneth Tynan, and many others.[73] There is, of course, no guarantee that all of these people witnessed the Happening, nor is it possible to argue that this particular Happening influenced the British theatre to move in any particular direction. It can, however, be seen as the first instance of a new kind of theatre which was developed further in Great Britain.

In Memory of Big Ed presented its audience with an example of theatre that was based on a script, but which left the performers a degree of freedom in the way they carried out their part of the performance. and whose meaning could only - if at all - be comprehended in performance. Although this Happening was scripted, as was usually the case, it was not concerned with fictional narrative or with character, but rather with creating a series of images, not in a theatre but in a non-theatrical 'environment'. In the case of Ken Dewey's Happening at Edinburgh, a conventional situation - the Conference - was turned into an environment where performers and audience shared the same space, the audience thus becoming part of the

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[73] Jim Haynes, Thanks for Coming! prints the official list of participants on pp. 91-92.

event itself.[74]

The style of the Happening would be found in the work of the People Show from 1966, one of the earliest Fringe groups, and in the work of many later Performance Art companies. More immediately, the Happening's scorn for character and narrative and, even more, for its disregard for the playwright's traditional script, was found in the RSC's Theatre of Cruelty Workshop and Season, in the autumn and winter of 1963-64. It was organized by Peter Brook, assisted by Charles Marowitz, to introduce a small group of twelve young actors to the ideas of the French theatre theorist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948). Artaud suggested that the theatre of dialogue and character, the theatre of literature and playwrights, should be abolished. In its place he wanted to see a theatre based on the actor's and the stage's own means of non-verbal expression such as "music, dance, plastic art, mimicry, gesture, voice inflexion, architecture, lighting and decor".[75] This theatre, which would appeal to its audience's senses rather than intellect, was to reject topicality and all attempts to solve social and psychological conflict,[76] and instead concentrate on alerting its audience to the fact that we, as human beings, "are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads".[77] It would ideally be performed in a new type of theatre where the action surrounded the audience. One might say that Artaud was distancing himself from the kind of theatre which Henrik Ibsen stood for, based on a script with a carefully structured plot and character, and based on the assumption that human existence was understandable in rational terms. To Artaud, the reality of

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[74] This Happening is described in "Ken Dewey" in Richard Kostelanetz, The Theatre of Mixed Means (1970); in Ken Dewey, "Act of San Francisco at Edinburgh" in Jean-Jaques Lebel et al., New Writers IV: Plays and Happenings (1967); and in Charles Marowitz, "Happenings at Edinburgh" in the same.

[75] Antonin Artaud, "Production and Metaphysics" in Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, p. 28.

[76] Artaud, "Oriental and Western Theatre", ibid., p. 51.

[77] Artaud, "No More Masterpieces", ibid., p. 60.

human existence was far less easily comprehensible, and he wanted his theatre to reflect that fact.

In their twelve-week workshop, Brook and Marowitz set out to suggest to their actors that, in Marowitz' words,

> . . . the voice could produce sound other than grammatical combinations of the alphabet, and that the body, set free, could begin to enunciate a language which went beyond text, beyond sub-text, beyond psychological implication and beyond monkey-see-monkey-do facsimilies of social behaviourism.[78]

In other words: non-representational theatre. Marowitz explained that the workshop rejected the conventional type of acting where the actor's "character is established; his relationships develop; his plot thickens and his conflicts resolve".[79] He was referring to the type of acting which was based on conventional plot-structures such as were often used by playwrights, plot-structures that did not adequately reflect "the broken and fragmentary way in which most people experience contemporary reality".[80] The workshop sought instead to establish a style of acting and performance which rejected such older play structures and made greater use of non-verbal expression. This was evident from the group's performed programme:

> The programme consisted of two short nonsense-sketches by Paul Ableman . . . a production of Artaud's three-minute play Spurt of Blood (played first in sounds; then as Artaud wrote it); a dramatization (in movement only) of a short story by Alain Robbe-Grillet; two collages by Brook . . . three scenes from Genet's The Screens; an anti-Marceauvian mime-sketch called The Analysis; a short play by John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, Ars Longa, Vita Brevis; and the collage-Hamlet.[81]

The emphasis on the actors' performance skills was obvious, and they were further employed through periods of improvisation during each performance.

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[78] Charles Marowitz, "Notes on the Theatre of Cruelty", in Theatre at Work, p. 167.

[79] Ibid., p. 168.

[80] loc.cit.

[81] Ibid., p. 177. Some of the British texts used in the Season have been published: Paul Ableman, "She's Dead", "Spine", "Emily and Heathcliffe" and "I Eat" in Ableman, Tests (1966). John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, Ars Longa, Vita Brevis, Encore, No.48 (March-April 1964). Charles Marowitz, Hamlet, PP, 11, No.8 (May 1964).

Efforts were made to involve the audience in each performance.

If the workshop created a fashion for theatre of cruelty throughout the 1960s, it failed to create the kind of ensemble work that had also been hoped for. It lead directly to productions by the RSC of Genet's The Screens and Peter Weiss' Marat/Sade, but not to continued ensemble work. By the time Marowitz published his description of the Theatre of Cruelty workshop (1966), new concepts of ensemble work had already appeared in Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's Living Theatre, and in the Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory. Grotowski had developed what he termed 'Poor Theatre', one stripped of all the accretions of centuries of Western theatre development and reduced to the bare essentials: actor and audience. Other "visual elements - e.g. plastic /sic/, etc. - are constructed by means of the actor's body, the acoustic and musical effects by his voice".[82] Grotowski also denied the centrality of the playwright's script - his was obviously an actors' (and a director's) theatre, not because he did not believe that 'literature' could not inspire the theatre, but because "we do not find in it the creative part of the theatre".[83] That creative part was in the actor, and like the Theatre of Cruelty Workshop, Grotowski did not so much realize written scripts as 'react' to them, transpose them into new, theatrical works of art. Grotowski's productions were supreme examples of so-called environmental theatre: the audience, strictly limited in numbers and constitution, was placed within the scenic environment, which was designed for each particular production, the set being indivisible from the rest of the production. Again, in this kind of performance, the meaning of the play could only be understood from the performance, not from the pre-existing script.

An unusual aspect of Artaud's and Grotowski's theatre, one not often stressed in the pragmatic British theatre, is its 'spiritual' aspect.

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[82] Jerzy Grotowski, "The Theatre's New Testament" in Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (1968), p. 33.

[83] Grotowski, ibid., p. 33.

Grotowski hoped that actors confronting their own selves honestly would force their audience into a similar self-confrontation, and the performance would, through that honesty, acquire a spiritual, moral dimension. To achieve this, Grotowski believed that it was

> . . . necessary to abolish the distance between actor and audience by eliminating the stage, removing all frontiers. Let the most drastic scenes happen face to face with the spectator so that he is within arm's reach of the actor, can feel his breathing and smell his perspiration.[84]

This was achieved through the aforementioned environmental staging. Although neither of the three writers to be dealt with here, Brenton, Hare or Wilson, have experimented with spiritual theatre, it is worth noting that many of their small-scale early plays would have been performed in small intimate spaces, and it is interesting to note that Howard Brenton was to speak of this kind of intimate performance in terms of its 'moral force', almost in Grotowskian terms.[85]

Both Artaud's and Grotowski's ideas must be considered 'extreme' in a British theatre whose very strengths lay in highly professional productions of scripted drama. In 1966, a play was created by a company, again within the RSC and directed by Peter Brook, which seemed to attempt to reach a workable compromise between British tradition, and the new, anti-verbal ideas from the Continent. The play was the group-created play about the war in Vietnam, US. Albert Hunt described it as

> a collective search by a group of people who wanted to say something true and honest and useful about a subject we all felt was very important . . . a statement that had grown out of a process of work, and not one that had been conceived in Brook's mind before the process began.[86]

The group, most of which had been involved in the Theatre of Cruelty Workshop or in the RSC's production of Marat/Sade, were given three and a half

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[84] Ibid., pp. 41-42.

[85] Howard Brenton, "Petrol Bombs Through the Proscenium Arch", p. 6. He speaks of the space between actor and audience as "almost a moral force".

[86] Albert Hunt, "Narrative One" in US (1968), p. 12.

months to develop the play in rehearsal, and, important for this British experiment with group-creation, a playwright was meant to be involved throughout the rehearsal period and write a play on the basis of the actors' improvisations in rehearsal. Typically of the situation in the British theatre, the playwright originally chosen, Charles Wood, had to withdraw because of film engagements, and Dennis Cannan was brought in as his replacement at a late point, so that he eventually came to write only the second half of the play, the first half being a company-created documentary.

The specific reason given by Brook for wanting to involve the playwright was similar to those of Devine, Littlewood and Cheeseman: that the playwright could, and should, learn from the theatre. In particular, where the Vietnam War was concerned, it was believed that "no individual playwright, working alone, seemed able, at the moment, to handle a direct statement of this size".[87] In this respect the US company came close to the kind of collaboration with playwrights that would become common in the Fringe/alternative theatre, where writers could draw on the experience of a company for their own work. Similar arguments would be put forward to explain why England's Ireland, a collaboratively written play about the Irish problem from 1972, was written by an entire group of playwrights (including Brenton, Hare and Wilson) rather than a single individual.

The working method employed by the US company, where the playwright based his play on the company's improvisation, was one that would recur often in the Fringe/alternative theatre and which both Brenton and Hare would experience in different ways in Brighton Combination and Joint Stock Theatre Company. Geoffrey Reeves was later to describe the US company as one modelled on the Berliner Ensemble, defining their approach as that of

> . . . a group of people in a particular society, we exist now: the function of our theatre is to take serious issues which concern us and deal with them in terms of our art . . .[88]

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[87] Ibid., p. 13.

[88] Geoffrey Reeves, "Director in Interview No.3", PP, 16, No.2 (November 1968), p. 70.

Unlike Artaud, they thus insisted on the value of topicality, but they were not simply creating a documentary. Their aim, although it was only partly achieved, was to work towards a written script - unlike both Artaud and Grotowski - but their rehearsals included the development of the actor's art through the participation of Joseph Chaikin, whose Open Theatre would be the first of the influential American companies to visit Great Britain the following year and present their 'new' kind of physical theatre; and of Jerzy Grotowski, who led a two-week workshop with the company. Thus, the development of the art of theatre was also taken into account in a project which could be said to attempt to combine two major influences in the theatre: that of the politically committed theatre and of the avant-garde.

Like Gaskill's ensemble work during the rehearsals for The Caucasian Chalk Circle in 1962, the US project was an isolated phenomenon, but both were important experiments. It appears that the immediate influence on the new post-1968 Fringe came, not from such mainstream experiments but from the theatre groups visiting Great Britain from abroad, presenting British audiences with the non-verbal theatre to which the directors reacted so negatively in Plays and Players. It is, however, noteworthy that such experiments took place within the subsidized theatre before 1968. Along with the documentary 'tradition' that grew out of Littlewood's and Cheeseman's work, and the efforts by such subsidized companies as the Royal Court Theatre and the RSC to integrate the playwright into the theatre, they paved the way for the integration of such playwrights as Brenton, Hare and Wilson into the theatrical mainstream.

Very few playwrights made the transition from the pre-1968 mainstream theatre to the post-1968 Fringe/alternative theatre: John Arden and John McGrath are rare examples. However, in certain sections of the mainstream theatre there was a determination to 'ignore' the Fringe's rejection of the mainstream and try [instead] to absorb it. This determination could be seen, it might be argued, in the Arts Council's swift decision to extend its subsidies to the Fringe as early as in 1969. It was also clear in William

Gaskill's invitation to the new Fringe companies to take part in the 1970 Come Together festival,[89] arranged in order to assess the Fringe's "importance and relevance to the new work of the more traditional 'literary' theatre".[90]

William Gaskill would later be involved in what can be seen as a 'mainstream' theatre group: Joint Stock Theatre Company, a group which could be said to bridge the gap between mainstream theatre and alternative theatre. In 1967, the director Max Stafford-Clark, who had worked at the Edinburgh Traverse since 1966, saw the American company La Mama perform at the Traverse. He went to work with La Mama in America in 1968, and in 1970 created the Traverse Workshop Company in an attempt to create specifically British work, inspired by La Mama, in collaboration with actors, musicians and playwrights.[91] One outcome of his work was Howard Brenton's Hitler Dances from 1972. It is worth bearing in mind that Ellen Stewart's La Mama Theatre in New York worked specifically with new plays and playwrights.[92] The La Mama work that influenced the new physical Fringe work directly, along with the influence from other foreign companies, seems to have been Tom O'Horgan's non-verbal La Mama work on tour,[93] but it does not appear to have been this branch of La Mama that inspired Stafford Clark.

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89 The festival is described in Vincent Guy, "Come Together", PP, 18, No.3 (December 1970), p. 30f; Helen Dawson, "Come Together: a Report", Gambit, 5, No.18-19 (1971), p. 178f. Brenton, Hare and Wilson were involved indirectly in the festival through Portable Theatre's performance of Howard Brenton's Christie in Love.

90 Terry W. Browne, Playwright's Theatre (1975), p. 93. In "Opinion", PP, the editors claimed that the experiment had failed and that "the dialogue between right and left, between young and old has been either non-existent or else mutually abusive". (p. 15).

91 See Peter Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.4: War Games", PP, 19, No.8 (May 1972), p. 14ff.

92 Robert Pasolli, "The New Playwright's Scene of the Sixties", Tulane Drama Review, 13, No.1 (Fall 1968), p. 150ff.

93 See Charles Marowitz' impression of O'Horgan's style of directing in his review of the London production of Hair (1968) in Marowitz, Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic (1973), p. 142ff. An interesting view of O'Horgan's non-verbal theatre is given by Elsa Gress in "Ohorganism - the Lost Years", Tulane Drama Review, 13, No.3 (Spring 1969), p. 115ff.

In 1973, Stafford-Clark, David Hare and David Aukin formed Joint Stock Theatre, a company which developed a way of working where the entire company of director, actors and playwright were given a share in the creation of the play. At the beginning of the process the whole company took part in a workshop. The playwright was then 'sent away' for a period to write the script on his own. The script would be subject to change during the rehearsal period that followed but remained the playwright's own work.[94] In 1974 William Gaskill joined Joint Stock as one of its directors, and, with his reputation as a director, gave the company a certain amount of respectability.[95] Joint Stock also developed a compromise solution to the ensemble ideal by forming a 'pool' of actors who were not contractually bound to the company but who might be called upon when needed for a particular production. Joint Stock's methods were not dissimilar from those used in the creation of US, but the way they were employed ensured that they survived well beyond their first production. Joint Stock remain as evidence that not only were some of the apparent innovations of the post-1968 Fringe explored in the mainstream theatre before 1968, but there was also a demonstrable, if only slowly developed, link between those early experiments and the work of the Fringe/alternative theatre.

(iv) It comes as no surprise that playwrights were themselves aware both of the changes taking place in the theatre and of the implications these changes had for their work and for their position in the theatre.

Thus, whilst playwrights in the 1950s and early 1960s could still describe themselves as traditional artists with, as Sean O'Casey put it in 1950, the power to "immortalise man's fight against intolerance, cold custom, ignorance and fear",[96] they were gradually beginning to appreciate, during

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[94] For a description of Joint Stock's working methods see Michelene Wandor, "Free Collective Bargaining", Time Out, No.467 (30 March-5 April 1979), p. 14ff.

[95] Simon Callow, Being an Actor, p. 66.

[96] S. O'Casey, "The Plays of Ideas" in T. Stemmler (ed.), English Dramatic Theories: 20th Century (1972), p. 82.

the 1960s, that the demands for social realism (coming from the political left) and for greater use of the actor's creative abilities were threatening the playwright's independence as a creative artist. Arnold Wesker, in 1966, insisted that an "imaginative quality comes into my writing, as opposed to the recreation of facts and incidents",[97] whereas Robert Bolt and Harold Pinter (in the same year) both reacted against the new fashion for physical theatre and the Happening, claiming that they brought into the theatre "the destructive, the uncontrolled, the possibly uncontrollable" (Bolt)[98] with the new "anarchic theatre of the so-called 'creative' actors",[99] thereby losing the playwright's contribution to the theatre: "shape, structure and overall unity"[100] (Pinter). John Arden (also in 1966) seemed to be taking the full consequence of these new developments by giving himself, as a playwright, second place in the face of much more significant political realities. "Who's for a revolution?" he asked,[101] suggesting that the real problems of his own time required a political rather than an aesthetic response.

In a 1971 interview, David Mercer and Geoffrey Reeves made it evident that a change had taken place. Mercer saw himself as belonging to an older generation of playwrights, for whom the act of writing "entails one man or woman sitting in isolation and trying to get their particular vision onto paper".[102] He felt that the playwright had "a duty divided between personal vision and the relationship of that vision to the political-historical scene".[103] Even if he stressed the 'political-historical' aspect of his work, he could still believe that he, as an individual writer, needed to

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97 A. Wesker, "Arnold Wesker" in C. Marowitz and S. Trussler (eds.), Theatre at Work (1967), p. 80.

98 R. Bolt, "Robert Bolt", ibid., p. 72.

99 H. Pinter, "Harold Pinter", ibid., p. 101.

100 Pinter, ibid., p. 109.

101 J. Arden, "John Arden", ibid., p. 57.

102 D. Mercer and G. Reeves, "Political Theatre in Britain", Gambit, 5, No.20 (1971), p. 76.

103 Ibid., p. 80.

embody a 'vision', a special insight, in his work. Reeves, himself a director, expressed a more modern view, namely that "the writer's duty . . . is to find something which is both personally true and responsible to the group".[104] The 'group', whether in the shape of the theatre company, a particular target audience or society at large, was to become increasingly important, not least in the political theatre, and the individual correspondingly less significant.

A debate among playwrights of the post-1968 generation, printed in Theatre Quarterly in 1976, showed that they longer had to work in isolation but could collaborate with theatre companies.[105] However, although there was a general consensus that playwrights had to write 'revolutionary' drama in one shape or another, those present were also aware that they were making a considerable contribution to the theatre with their writing: the scripted play was still an essential feature of the British theatre and the playwright was still actively engaged in trying to get his own work presented in theatres rather than in promoting the theatre in any general sense, as a member of a company. As Olwen Wymark remarked, she did not

> . . . see the writer working by himself as a romantic nineteenth century idea. There has to be room for the individual creative act. I don't think community theatre and group theatre writing should be a substitute for that. There are two different experiences.[106]

Thus, in spite of the crisis caused by the theatrical avant-garde in British playwriting around 1970, the individual playwright had not disappeared.

One would, of course, be ill-advised to concentrate on the scripted play simply because playwrights themselves show a degree of confidence in the value of their own work: one would not expect them to do less. There is, however, a particular property of the scripted play which I would suggest justifies a consideration of it as a written work, in isolation from any

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104 Ibid.

105 Pam Gems in "Playwriting for the Seventies", TQ, 6, No.24 (Winter 1976-77), p. 46.

106 Olwen Wymark, ibid., p. 47.

actual production, and that is its properties as fiction. In The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, Keir Elam contrasts the experience of reading the playscript with that of witnessing a performance of the play, saying that

> The reader is able to imagine the dramatic context in a leisurely and pseudo-narrative fashion, while the spectator is bound to process simultaneous and successive acoustic and visual signals within strictly defined time-limits. . . . the basic action structure and logical cohesion of the drama is accessible through analysis of the written text, which is of unquestionable value as long as it is not confused with performance analysis.[107]

It may be argued that the playscript is not 'narrated', that it does not usually contain the narrative passages and the authorial comment that are frequently found in narrative fiction such as the novel or the short story. However, it is still a kind of fictional narrative, told, if not by an obvious or implicit narrator in the story itself,[108] then certainly by the playwright himself. The very idea of the theatre telling stories has been stressed in two recent British works of theatre theory, John McGrath's A Good Night Out (1981)[109] and Steve Gooch's All Together Now (1984).[110] Both are concerned with theatre as a story-telling medium, rather than with the playwright as such, but Gooch does mention the need for a proper understanding of how narrative structures are created in the theatre, something which the acting-companies of the early Fringe ignored.

Story-telling, the creation of fictional worlds, is traditionally part of the playwright's craft. The story, through its narrative structure, the plot, imposes a certain structure on the performance, and the story told through that plot forms a fictional world which is realized on stage in the performance. In 1941, Thornton Wilder put forward the view that the narrative structure was the playwright's way of ensuring that his ideas

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107 K. Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (1980), p. 99.

108 The complex of problems surrounding the definition of the narrator in fiction is dealt with in, for instance, S. Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction (1984), p. 86ff.

109 J. McGrath, A Good Night Out (1981), pp. 1-2.

110 S. Gooch, All Together Now (1984), p. 51.

'survived' the passage from page, through performance, to the audience. The playwright, he said,

> . . . learns, above all, to organize the play in such a way that its strength lies not in appearances beyond his control, but in the succession of events and in the unfolding of an idea, in narration.[111]

This was precisely what the British theatre in the 1960s had been moving away from, but I suspect that there is more than a grain of truth in Wilder's words, even when applied to the works of more recent writers.

Whether or not the playwright wishes to control the performance consciously - and I believe it must always be in his interest to do so to some degree - his script is likely to constrain or control any production to some extent, and I believe that he does so chiefly through the fiction which he has created, which the artists of the theatre must find in the script as they read it and seek to interpret it. In so doing, they are approaching the playscript as readers, albeit as professional readers, studying the text for a purpose rather than for the sake of experiencing the text as a literary work. In either case the reader is, however, seeking to understand the fictional world being created in the script.

The nature of fiction and its potential as a means of exploration of reality have been the subject of several recent studies. Thus, in A New Mimesis (1983), A.D. Nuttall claims, with reference to Shakespeare's works, that

> The fiction evokes from us, as we entertain the hypothesis, all the human energies and powers, the incipient commitments and defences which occur in experiential knowing, but are absent from cool, conceptual knowing.[112]

Through mimesis - and it is a cardinal point in his book that drama can successfully reflect an objective off-stage reality - drama can convey "the real object in a manner which deepens our experiential knowledge of that

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[111] T. Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwriting" in T. Cole (ed.), Playwrights on Playwriting (1961), p. 107.

[112] A.D. Nuttall, A New Mimesis (1983), p. 75.

object or of like objects",[113] 'experiential knowledge' being such as we acquire through our experience rather than our study of life.

In The Modern Stage and Other Worlds (1985), Austin E. Quigley makes a similar claim for fiction as a means of understanding reality, saying that

> . . . plays invite us not just to look for summarizing themes, but also to reconsider our ways of understanding and participating in plays as a first step towards reconsidering our ways of understanding and participating in the social worlds that surround us.[114]

The drama and the theatre can provide metaphors which bring drama and reality close together:

> . . . the real and the fictional are not radically separate in theatre. The world of the audience and the world of the play are not radically separable, and neither are the world of the play and the world of the theatre. Each of these opposing worlds in part constitutes and is in part constituted by the others.[115]

One finds in Nuttall and Quigley a suggestion that fiction is an essential means for human beings of getting to grips with reality, and that it works by being linked, through a degree of mimesis, to that reality. However, that is not the whole reason why fiction can be seen to have a practical function, one which I would say can be ascribed to the playwright. In Fantasy and Mimesis (1984), Kathryn Hume considers the nature and significance of the fantastic in literature, and she insists that mimesis is not, in fact, the essential impulse behind literature, which has two such impulses:

> . . . mimesis, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and fantasy, the desire to change givens and alter reality - out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defences.[116]

I would argue that the essential strength of fiction, seen from the

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[113] Ibid.

[114] A.E. Quigley, The Modern Stage and Other Worlds (1985), pp. 254-55.

[115] Ibid., p. 40.

[116] K. Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis (1984), p. 20.

playwright's point of view, springs not so much from its power to convince the audience that it is witnessing an imitation of reality, as from its power to suspend our understanding of reality temporarily and transport us to a fictional world, where we have no actual responsibility as individuals but can indulge in fantastic versions of reality, whether in the shape of surrealist dream-imagery or in terms of political and social Utopias. Naturally, the theatre group can achieve this without the playwright's assistance, but the playwright does provide the unified point-of-view which can give the playscript 'human dimensions' by making it more clearly an attempt by an individual - the playwright - to communicate with other individuals.

From the 1950s, the theatre developed in such a way that the playwright became, at best, integrated into the theatre, at worst (from his point of view), marginalized or even redundant. There was a clear sense of crisis in the British theatre in the late 1960s because of these developments, a fear that the Fringe's indulgence in physical expression might threaten the traditional, playscript-based theatre with its capacity for expressing thought and moral insight.

I now turn to the ideas and works of the three playwrights, in order to see whether the threat was real or not in their cases. The aim will be to investigate whether they see themselves as marginalized/redundant or whether they believe that they have something to say to their audience as writers. It will also be necessary to look at some of their works in order to ascertain to what extent they consider the fictional aspect of their plays to be important and whether those fictions are created with such awareness of the complex art of theatre that they can be said to command that art and not require the assistance of actors or directors to be intelligible. In this way, it should be possible, eventually, to suggest whether one may still consider the playwright as an independent artist and his playscript as a written work rather than as the outline of a performance.

CHAPTER TWO

SNOO WILSON:

THE PLAYWRIGHT AS CREATIVE MAKER

My choice of Snoo Wilson as the first playwright to be dealt with may seem surprising. Of the three playwrights included here, he has been the most isolated. One critic has commented positively on his career by saying that his "reputation has increasingly taken on the dimensions of a minor cult",[1] another sees him as the "'Enfant Terrible' of the English Stage",[2] whereas a third fears that he has been "consistently undervalued even by his contemporaries, who are suspicious of a writer so apparently lacking in 'commitment' or 'a view of the world'".[3]

Wilson's "commitment" and "world view" are indeed problematic. He does not appear to build on any pre-existing systems of values and he can certainly not be classified as a political playwright. However, it would be wrong to say that he is completely without commitment. On the contrary, he is so committed to being a playwright as to refer to it as a "calling", and as you look more closely at his thoughts about the theatre and his own work, it becomes clear that he is trying to develop a world-view of his own, one that is based on the quality of illusion, of make-believe, that is fundamental to the theatre. He has used his understanding of that fundamental illusion to create plays that are self-contained fictional worlds, whose connection with the world off-stage is clear but also essentially indirect.

In his work one senses the conflicting trends in the theatre to which I referred in the previous chapter. Wilson, while acknowledging the importance of dealing with the off-stage world, objects to the materialistic world view which a concentration on the surface reality of that off-stage world can imply. He shows an active interest in non-verbal theatre, in spite of being much more of a writer than an actor or director himself,[4]

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1 S. Grant, "Voicing the Protest: The New Writers" in Dreams and Reconstructions, (1980), ed. S. Craig, p. 128.

2 J. Bierman, "Snoo Wilson: 'Enfant Terrible' of the English Stage", Modern Drama, 24 (1981), p. 424.

3 M. Coveney, "The Alternative's Absurdist", Time Out, No.502 (30 Nov.-6 Dec. 1979), p. 32.

4 See W.S. Gilbert, "30 Years Onward", PP, No.380 (May 1985), p. 24; and J. Bierman, p. 425.

but his plays do become increasingly self-contained, more and more obviously the work of a single writer. He has involved himself in work with other writers and with theatre companies, yet, in the final event his commitment is much more clearly to himself as a writer than to any company. To look at his plays is therefore to see an example of how the individual playwright reacts to working in a theatre which views individualism with scepticism.

In the first half of this chapter, I shall first look at how he has responded to the new collaborative working methods in the theatre. I shall then investigate how he has developed a view of the drama as a means of exploring human experience both in its conscious and unconscious aspects, and, hence, of the playwright as a central figure in that exploration. Finally, a selection of his plays will be used to illustrate how his ideas are manifested in his writing.

(i) Snoo Wilson was born in 1948. He read English at the University of East Anglia from 1966 to 1969, and it was during his time at the UEA that he began to interest himself seriously in theatre. He acted in W.B. Yeats's The Only Jealousy of Emer,[5] a symbolist play which hinted where his own tastes lay. He has admitted to a clear preference for theatre which rejects representationalism and a purely rational and materialistic world view:

> The absurdists and the surrealists were the people I discovered who would posit solutions to emotional states about political problems which I couldn't have managed to cope with in any other way. And then a bit later on I developed an interest in psychology - Freud and Jung, and through them in the historical context, what they were doing.[6]

The passage is in itself typical of Wilson's style: not always clear, the words concealing as much as they reveal. Most of the influences he names are playwrights: Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot and Howard Brenton, but he also has an interest in the English literary avant-garde,

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[5] W.S. Gilbert, p. 24.

[6] S. Wilson, "A Theatre of Light, Space and Time", TQ, 10, No.37 (Spring 1980), pp. 4-5.

in the Bloomsbury Group, and one of his early plays, staged in 1970 at the UEA, was an adaptation of Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts. The four playwrights mentioned give a clue to his own interests: two absurdists are followed by a verse dramatist, who used formalized language to break through surface realism, and Brenton, his contemporary, makes extensive use of non-realistic devices in his plays.

He took an interest in the new, physical theatre early in his career. Thus, he is reported to have been involved in a company called Australian Dancers, formed in 1967 by well-known performance artists, Jeff Nuttall, Tim Sillence and Diz Willis.[7] In 1979, he paid homage to the oldest English Performance Art group, the People Show, started by Jeff Nuttall in 1966,[8] and one of his own earliest plays, Charles the Martyr (staged at the UEA in 1970), was originally intended for one of the major physical theatre companies in the Fringe, Nancy Meckler's Freehold.[9] He insists that both verbal and non-verbal expression play a part in his theatre, saying that he has

> . . . a strong sense of design and space, because the people I admire are working in all three of those things - light, space and time - which you're in the theatre for. If you're in the theatre just simply for the words, the 'logos', then you might just as well be writing novels, as far as I can see. There's no point in working in draughty rehearsal rooms for something which isn't amazing from all points of view.[10]

It is difficult to disagree with him about the necessity for understanding and working with all sides of the theatre, not just the words. Indeed, it is obvious that he is a member of the modern, post-Devine and post-Littlewood theatre, working from an understanding of the theatre's complex means of expression, not just its verbal side.

Like Brenton and Hare, Wilson learned to write for the theatre

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7 From a list of significant events in Fringe history, 1963-73, compiled by M. Brown, J. Hammond and R. Hudson, in J. Hammond, "A Potted History of the Fringe", TQ, 3, No.12 (Oct.-Dec. 1973), p. 40.

8 Snoo Wilson, "The Sense of the Sublime", PP, 27, No.2 (Nov. 1979), pp. 10 and 12.

9 Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . .," p. 5.

10 Wilson, ibid., p. 8.

through practical experience, in particular by writing for Portable Theatre. Touring the Fringe circuit of small-scale, non-theatre venues, the Portable playwrights learned how to capture and hold the attention of ever-changing audiences. In Wilson's own words, "a Portable production needs complete running down of a show till you just get what you absolutely need":[11]

> You got lots of different audiences, different assumptions, and different theatres, all of which knocked the edges off your plays. You learnt about structure - that your intentions have to be realized in a specific way or not at all if they're going to get across. And if you're working in a thing that has got words and visual stuff, very often people's responses are developed in one area but not the other.[12]

Portable - and the Portable-derived Paradise Foundry - staged all of Wilson's early professional plays, from Device of Angels (1970) to Vampire (1973), and he relied even more than his two fellow Portable playwrights upon this one company, both as a source of practical experience which helped him to learn his craft and as a means of reaching the public.

Indeed, a large proportion of his plays have been produced by two companies, first Portable and then, starting in 1976 with The Soul of the White Ant, the Bush Theatre under its artistic director Dusty Hughes. The playwright generally depends on the theatre to turn his script into an actual performance, but in his case that dependence is all-important. Like many other playwrights, he prefers to write to commission - "the idea of writing in a vacuum I find uninviting"[13] - but the theatre has also been his main 'publisher'. Brenton and Hare have moved from theatre to theatre in their careers, but have found 'homes' in the publishing world with Methuen and Faber respectively. Wilson has been in the opposite situation, finding supporters in a few theatre companies and no regular support among publishers, unless one counts Plays and Players.

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[11] P. Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.1: Portable Playwrights", PP, 19, No.5 (Feb. 1972), p. 22.

[12] Wilson, "A Theatre of Lights . . .", p. 5.

[13] Bierman, "Snoo Wilson, 'Enfant Terrible' . . .", p. 425.

For Wilson, the question of the playwright's position as an individual artist in the theatre is practical, not theoretical, and he has been involved in several collaborative theatre projects which can illustrate how he has reacted to working with others.

As the break-up of Portable Theatre neared, he took part in three collaborations: Lay By (1971), England's Ireland (1972) and Vampire (1973). The two former were written by groups of playwrights, the latter by Wilson alone for an actors' company with a distinctive style. All three projects experimented with the playwright's working methods, the former turning him into a many-headed, anonymous artist, the latter using him as a specialist working with performers. Neither appears to have convinced Wilson that it could offer a convincing alternative to the playwright's traditional methods.

Lay By originated at a conference of writers and directors held at the Royal Court. The idea of writing a play collectively came from David Hare, and its subject was taken from a newspaper item spotted by Trevor Griffiths, about a case of alleged rape at a lay by on the M1.[14] This real event gave the writers the opportunity to write a fantastic play about the immorality of their own times, in particular on the dehumanization inherent in pornography. The writers were Brenton, Hare, Wilson and Griffiths (the 'steering committee'), and Brian Clark, Stephen Poliakoff, Hugh Stoddard and Peter Ransley. The latter left the group in protest against the 'Artaudian' cruelty of the play.

Lay By was not written 'by committee'. It turned out to be impossible to plan the writing in advance, but the process of writing it did seem to prove that it was indeed possible to find a way of depriving a group of what Brenton called "very arrogant people"[15] of their individual artistic identity, at least for a time, in order to write a play about

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[14] H. Brenton, D. Hare and S. Wilson, "Getting the Carp Out of the Mud", PP, 19, No.2 (Nov. 1971), pp. 20 and 83. See also C. Itzin, Stages in the Revolution (1980), pp. 188-190; and J. Bull, New British Political Dramatists (1984), pp. 39-40.

[15] Brenton et al., "Getting the Carp . . .", pp. 20 and 83.

moral problems whilst denying the audience the kind of moral lead which the individual playwright was sometimes expected to give. In Hare's words,

> . . . we worked on a theatrical principle of forbidding any aesthetic at all. Snoo Wilson directed Lay By and copied it. It was impossible to apportion moral praise or blame.[16]

It seems to have been a feature of the Fringe theatre that it reflected a contemporary moral void and did so from a conviction that it was not possible for the playwright (or the theatre as such) to suggest ways of filling that void. Surveying the Fringe in 1973, the playwright John Grillo even accused Fringe writers of having indulged in despair while peopling their plays with criminals and perverts. Even though he could see reasons why Fringe playwrights should have written in the way that they did - and he included himself among them, along with Brenton, Wilson and Chris Wilkinson - he could not defend them. They had "tended to excite rather than seek understanding", and he argued that

> . . . if one is to achieve any understanding, width or depth, one must move towards a more socially realistic theatre with a study of complex and multi-faceted individuals who inhabit a real world rather than a world of poetic fantasy. Most important one must deprive oneself of the pleasure of violence and force oneself to look beauty in the eye for a change.[17]

As the political theatre developed in the 1970s, it could be said that a more socially realistic theatre began to dominate, but the treatment of individual character remained controversial. In political theatre, the notion of defining the individual character primarily as an individual rather than as a member of a particular group in a particular historical context was rejected. 'Individual psychology' came to be seen as the opposite of social realism and was associated with the tradition of representational theatre with roots in 19th century Naturalism, of which Henrik Ibsen was the most obvious representative. In 1972, Roger Howard gave his description of the new character type of socialist theatre, whom

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[16] Wilson, "Theatre of Light . . .", pp. 6-7.

[17] J. Grillo, "An Excess of Nightmare", Gambit, 6, No.23 (1973), pp. 22 and 24.

he called "conscious man", one who

> . . . achieves individuality in his action - in his relationship, in society - not in his being. He is not a 'character' illuminating individual psychology, but an 'example' teaching the balance and interplay of social forces and their contradiction: he has no 'experience' but is instead educated by events, and what is depicted of his struggle is not an 'experience' for an audience either, but a process of ideation, a learning, a consummation not in the sensation but in the idea.[18]

It seems only too likely that this view of the individual dramatic character should be parallelled by a similar view of the individual playwright, no longer to be considered for his individual achievement but for the work he did with the theatre's artistic collective, which could itself be seen, metaphorically, as a model for ideal political collective in the world off-stage.

Nevertheless, one could still hear the complaint voiced in the 1980s that individual playwrights had failed to give the lead in the theatre. In 1980, John Ashford, director of the ICA's theatre, said that the playwright's refusal to give a moral lead was "the true failure of the fringe", and he continued:

> It may be more difficult now than at any time, but we must still look to our living writers to create a moral order from the apparent chaos that surrounds us. They must strive for the general through the particular. They must write the great play.[19]

This view was only beginning to become acceptable again at the end of the 1970s. At the time of Lay By, the trend was away from the view of the playwright as a person with a special insight or the right to assume a position of moral leadership, and the tension between individual and group, moral leadership or powerlessness in Lay By typical of the decade ahead.

This tension was inherent in Lay By, which was edited and directed

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[18] R. Howard, "Declaration of Intent to Write Propaganda" in Culture and Agitation: Theatre Documents (1972), ed. Action Books, p. 6.

[19] J. Ashford, "Slings and Arrows", originally a talk for the BBC World Service, printed in Ashford et al., "The Coveney Controversy: Point and Counterpoint", TQ, 10, No.39 (Spring-Summer 1981), p. 7.

by a single person: Wilson himself, who claimed to have favoured his own material in the final version.[20] Whether or not this is true, it is significant that a single playwright was chosen to give shape to the final play, as this was in itself an admission that the individual point of view served a practical purpose even in a collectively created play. The characterization in Lay By - and in Blowjob - rested neither on individualism, nor on social relationships, but in the next collaborative project in which Wilson took part, politics began to play a prominent part.

England's Ireland was created by core members of the Lay By group - Brenton, Hare, Wilson, Clark - joined by Tony Bicât (co-founder, with Hare, of Portable), David Edgar and Francis Fuchs.[21] This time the group drew on the experiences of the previous project, attempting to put collaboration into a firmer framework by isolating themselves for a week in a rented house in Wales. Again the group gave responsibility for the final script to individuals, this time a duo: Wilson and Hare. The latter found that the tightening of the playscript by individuals at the end of the process was essential:

> . . . when Snoo Wilson and I came to sit down and analyse it we found we didn't have a play: so the last third was written just by Snoo and me - not the last third chronologically, but the chewing-gum third.[22]

But again this was a practical measure and not an indication that the powers of the playwright as an individual creative artist were being acknowledged. On the contrary, like its predecessor, this project was founded on a desire to take the responsibility for the playscript away from the individual writer, this time not simply as an experiment in alternative ways of writing plays but in order to solve a particular problem. England's Ireland was about one of the most controversial subjects in the political

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[20] Wilson, "Theatre of Light . . .", pp. 6-7.

[21] On England's Ireland, see Itzin, Stages in the Revolution, pp. 189-91; and Bull, New British Political Dramatists, pp. 46-49.

[22] D. Hare, "From Portable Theatre to Joint Stock . . . via Shaftesbury Avenue", TQ, 5, Nos.19-20 (Sept.-Nov. 1975), p. 113.

theatre in the 1970s, the troubles in Northern Ireland. Writing a play in 1972 on that subject was a problem, not just from the point of view of the political controversy that it might arouse. As Brenton explained,

> It was obvious to all of us that none of us could write sufficiently on it by himself, being English. Therefore we had to try and write it collectively.[23]

This sounds very much like the reasons Peter Brook gave for choosing to develop US in workshop, with the writer as a member of the company, and it is an argument of the kind which challenged the positions of the individual playwright: the reality of the off-stage world, the subject-matter of the play, was given priority over aesthetic considerations or questions of individual authorship. Faced with such material as the Irish troubles, the playwrights in England's Ireland surrendered their traditional right to claim individual authorship. There were, of course, important differences between this venture and US: only playwrights were creating the playscript, not a whole company, and the content was given much higher priority than formal considerations.

England's Ireland was a failure, regional reps failing to book the play, probably because of its theme.[24] Initially Wilson supported the project,[25] but in the long run it seems to have convinced him that political theatre was not for him. In 1980, he compared Lay By and England's Ireland, saying of the latter:

> We knew what kind of show we were putting together - we wanted to do an overtly political version of the Layby manufacturing technique. Now I think that Layby worked because it doesn't appear to be overtly political, and England's Ireland in spite of a lot of good material codified my disenchantment or my own failure to accommodate head-on political theatre. I've never been able to

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[23] H. Brenton, "Messages First: An Interview with Howard Brenton", Gambit, 6, No.23 (1973), p. 29.

[24] D. Edgar, "Against the General Will" ("Green Room"), PP, 20, No.8 (May 1973), pp. 14-15. Only the Duke's Theatre, Lancaster, the Roundhouse, the Close Theatre, Glasgow, Nottingham Playhouse and the Royal Court booked the play, the two latter only for Sunday night performances. 54 theatres had, in fact, been approached, but the play was premiered abroad, in Amsterdam.

[25] See S. Wilson, "Snoo Wilson comments" in J. Vinson (ed.), Contemporary Dramatists (2nd ed.) (1977), pp. 877-78).

> handle that because it seems to lay a terrific lot of righteousness on the participants. Layby fires the imagination whereas England's Ireland does not fire the conscience or anything. I still believe in writers and poets being the unacknowledged legislators, but they can't do it by way of legislatures.[26]

England's Ireland represented a new application of a "manufacturing technique", without the appeal to the imagination which the creative artist, the playwright, might have made. By 1980 he had obviously come down on the side of the individual artist, to the point where he spoke of him in Shelleyan terms, implying that he - the artist - had a central position in human society.

If he felt that this project represented the drawbacks of political theatre, Wilson's next collaboration showed him working uncomfortably with an actors' company. Vampire (1973), a play about the cultural myths that 'vampirize' people, dominate their imaginations, was commissioned by Paradise Foundry, successor to Portable Theatre Workshop. Wilson had already written a short play, Boswell and Johnson on the Shores of the Eternal Sea (1972) for Portable Workshop, as part of a sequence of one-acters by different playwrights, presented together as Point 101.[27] With Vampire he was given the opportunity to write a full-length play for a company interested in expression and the use of stage imagery. Its director, Malcolm Griffiths, had described the kind of playwright he favoured, represented by Chris Wilkinson:

> He defines an area in which a play should take place - and then, as a writer, he abdicates. That's unlike the way Portable has been used to working. But the workshop I want would do things that way - a writer would start from the basis of the actors.[28]

At first sight, Wilson appeared to accept this, but he also saw it as his

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[26] Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . .", p. 8.

[27] The other writers were: Colin Bennett, David Edgar, Malcolm Griffiths, Roger Howard, Roy Kift and Micheline Wandor. See J. Hammond, "Fringe", PP, 20, No.3 (Dec. 1972), pp. 56-57.

[28] Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.1: Portable Playwrights", p. 22.

responsibility to give the company a new direction:

> I was very struck for a while to find something for a group like that which would bring them on from the stuff they'd been doing before, like /Chris Wilkinson's Plays for Rubber/ Go-Go-Girls, which was very limited stylistically. I wanted to get away from that discipline and try and open them out in a different way. If you're given an open commission to write a play for a group, it's really them and their life-styles that determines what the play's about.[29]

And, indeed, the last - third - act was written in the company's style whereas two other, smaller, scenes were re-written according to the wishes of the company.

If one looks at one of these scenes, one can, however, see that Wilson was not being subservient to the company. The scene is question is the nativity scene in Act Two, and in Wilson's own words,

> It was a problem with their dealing with the representations of Freud and Jung. To begin with it was very heavy and straightforward and required almost no movement at all. They couldn't really cope with that, so I re-wrote it to put Freud on stilts. Now he steals the show in a different way.[30]

One cannot help feeling that the playwright did not entirely accept the actors' judgement on the scene, and this is borne out by differences in the two published editions, from 1973 and 1979. The former says, in a stage direction concerning the entrance of the stage character, Freud:

> There is a roll of thunder and the stage darkens. FREUD arrives at the back of the stage. He is huge, on stilts. He is dressed in black. His face is a mask with two electric light bulbs dimly lit for eyes. His mouth is a megaphone.[31]

"Freud" is given a further entrance in this scene, with "unearthly pacings",[32] but this has gone in the 1979 edition, where the above stage direction has been reduced considerably:

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[29] S. Wilson, "Vampire", interview preceding Vampire, PP, 20, No.10 (July 1973), p. I (printed in a separate centre-section of that issue).

[30] Wilson, "Vampire", pp. I and III.

[31] S. Wilson, Vampire (1973), p. XII.

[32] Ibid., p. XII.

> There is a roll of thunder and the stage darkens.
> FREUD arrives at the back of the stage.[33]

I see in this a clear indication that, much as he claimed to have accepted that he was writing for a group and that this obliged him to write in a particular way, in accordance with the group's "life-styles", he was really writing the kind of play which he wanted to write, and when it came to re-publishing the script he removed at least this particular, company-suggested detail which had put more emphasis on spectacle than on the playwright's words.

In an interview in connection with the first production of the play, Wilson said that it seemed to him that "the most successful artefacts are ones where the frames are most closely defined".[34] Nevertheless, in this instance he ended up by writing what he himself admitted was a play intended to stretch the group, not merely give it words to speak and a story to enact, and with its demand for technical effects, it was "technically a bit over-ambitious for a touring company".[35] His inability to stay within the framework provided by others is, I believe, typical of him. In spite of his having entered the theatre at a time when the group rather than the individual, the performer rather than the writer dominated in the theatre, he ultimately revealed a conviction that the playwright plays a central part in the theatre. He is an individualist, not a 'group artist'.

But it is true that he needs the discipline which a theatre company can give him, for he is an impressionistic playwright when it comes to structuring his playscripts. He describes himself as a "loose-assembly person", but he is plainly not able to turn that into a successful creative principle in every play that he writes. Yet that may have given him the ability - like so many playwrights of his generation - to work with

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[33] S. Wilson, Vampire (1979), p. 60.

[34] Wilson, "Vampire" (interview, 1973), p. I.

[35] Op.cit., p. I.

theatre companies on developing his own scripts, with the result that such companies - or their directors - can be credited with contributions to his work. Thus, many of the ideas that went into The Soul of the White Ant (1976) came from the play's director, Dusty Hughes of the Bush Theatre.[36] Hughes, who has directed a number of his plays and with whom he turned his own Pignight (1971) into a screen-play, has also been credited with one detail in the stage adaptation of A Greenish Man (1978), one later said by critics to be typically "Wilsonian".[37] It seems that Wilson and Hughes have entered into an artistic relationship of the kind that has developed between several other playwrights and directors in the British theatre since the 1950s, for instance between Arnold Wesker and John Dexter, Harold Pinter and Peter Hall, Christopher Hampton and Robert Kidd.[38]

Such collaboration between playwright and director is not limited to such established relationships, it also occurs where the two - or the playwright and a whole company - have not worked together before. Thus in the Afterword to The Glad Hand (1978), originally the result of a workshop within the RSC but staged later at the Royal Court, Wilson thanked the director, Max Stafford-Clark, for having been "wonderfully exact and sedulous when I had lost my way in a wilderness of drafts".[39] This seems like an instance of the playwright relying on the director's ability to distance himself from the play and advise the playwright on how to shape it. In another case, Wilson was able to use a theatre company to help him rewrite The Beast (1974), called The Number of the Beast in the new (1979) version:

> I set about rewriting it with the help of the New York Theatre Studio, who provided actors' workshops and readings of the play to this end, and so they bear a considerable credit for the play in its present form.[40]

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[36] Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . .", p. 15.

[37] Op.cit.

[38] Ronald Hayman's "Double Acts", The Sunday Times Colour Supplement, 2 March 1980, p. 20ff.

[39] S. Wilson, "Introduction" to The Number of the Beast and Flaming Bodies, p. vi.

[40] Wilson, ibid., p. vi.

The revisions to his two re-published plays, Vampire and The Beast, show that the playwright's script is no longer the stable entity that it was before the abolition of censorship, but they also suggest that the playscript remains the playwright's property, even when routine collaboration between playwright and company has become established. In some cases, such collaboration can drastically alter a script - David Hare, who directed The Pleasure Principle (1973) spoke of the original script having been rendered "unrecognizable" by himself during rehearsals.[41] Certainly, Wilson has declared himself willing to follow contemporary rehearsal practice and allow his scripts to undergo any necessary alterations during rehearsal, but he still insists that he prefers companies "who are enthusiasts for the script",[42] thus showing that he values his own contribution to the theatre as highly as that of the performer or, as one suspects, even higher.

Since Vampire he has only shared the credit for the creation of the playscript in one instance: the musical England, England (1977), which he wrote and for which Kevin Coyne wrote the musical numbers. They did not so much write it together as simultaneously: each produced his contribution separately.[43] It is therefore reasonable to consider Vampire to be his so far last attempt to create a play in conscious collaboration with other theatre artists. Even that does not amount to full collaboration, and it must be concluded that in spite of his declared early - and continued - interest in non-verbal theatre, and his exposure to organized collaborative work in the theatre, he remains very much an individualist whose name appears alone as that of the author even in the case of Vampire.

Wilson's individualism explains not only his position vis-a-vis the actual theatre but also the isolated position he has had in his own generation of playwrights. His opposition to television's representational style

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41 D. Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 113.

42 Bierman, "Snoo Wilson . . . ", p. 425.

43 G. Dadomo and S. Grant, "Approach with Caution", Time Out, No.386 (19-25 Aug. 1977), p. 12f.

and his refusal to use it, has cut him off from much of the television work, on which most of his contemporaries have relied for part of their income. Only three of his ten television scripts have been produced. Two parts of a television trilogy, Magic Rose, originally commissioned by the BBC, were given a reading during the Warehouse Theatre's seasons in 1978-79 of "Plays That Television Would Not Do",[44] and another, Elijah Disappearing, was turned into a stage play in 1977.[45] It is as a writer for the theatre he has become known, and even then primarily as a writer working within the subsidized theatre. Unlike Hare, he has not attracted commercial producers, nor has he had the critical success of Brenton which might have got him commissions - and actual productions - at the larger subsidized theatres. The RSC did premiere his The Beast (1974) and employed him as their dramaturg during 1975-76, but no RSC production resulted from the RSC workshop that led to his writing The Glad Hand. His only play written for the National Theatre, Salvation Now, was not staged and has only been given a workshop performance in the USA in 1981.

Looking back on his early career in 1980, he spoke of his sense of isolation then:

> . . . the sense of not being wanted on the voyage was very strong - it persists from those days on, the sense of not being taken seriously as a creative maker.[46]

It took several years before the Arts Council would support him - only after three years of lobbying on his behalf by Portable Theatre,[47] and four applications, did he get a writer's bursary on the strength of an unproduced play for television, The Good Life (1971).[48] He emphasized his own dependence on the Arts Council by referring to himself as "an Arts Council flower",[49]

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[44] See S. Wilson, "Magic Rose" (introductory note) in The Warehouse: A Writer's Theatre (1979-80), ed. W. Donohue, p. 33.

[45] Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . . ", p. 16.

[46] Wilson, ibid., p. 12.

[47] D. Hare and T. Griffiths, "Current Concerns", PP, 21, No.12 (July 1974), p. 19.

[48] S. Wilson, "Vampire", (1973 interview), p. I.

[49] S. Wilson, "Theater on the Wrong Side of the Law", Theater (Yale), 12, No.2 (1981), p. 60.

and only on a few occasions has he been able to seek those alternative sources of income that playwrights can have access to. Apart from being dramaturg for the RSC he obtained the Henfield Creative Writing Fellowship at the University of East Anglia in 1978. In that year he also shared the John Whiting Award with David Halliwell, for his The Glad Hand.[50] Brenton had won the same award in 1970 and Hare the Evening Standard Award in 1971, underlining how slow Wilson was to be recognized. In 1980 he won the U.S. Bicentennial Fellowship, and James Bierman remarked that it "confirmed Snoo Wilson's election to the ranks of England's most 'promising' playwrights".[51] Considering that he had ten years of playwriting and nineteen professionally performed plays behind him in 1980, Bierman's remark seems ironic but also makes it clear how slow his career was to develop to the point where he could be called a "minor cult" figure.

(ii) As his career developed, he accepted neither the pressure presented by the events of the contemporary off-stage world, nor the challenge which lay in the idea of collective creation. Neither political nor physical theatre attracted him as absolute principles. Would it be possible to explain his isolation by pointing to this refusal to follow the main trends of his own time? To some extent it would, but it would not be fair to suggest that he has simply been 'behind the times'. Like Brenton, Wilson has been unable - or unwilling - to put the Fringe theatre and its style of presentation behind him. In Brenton, this leads to what occasionally seems like an unexpected narrowing of perspective, unexpected for a playwright who otherwise shows his degree of insight. In Wilson's case, it is more a question of his having maintained his early interest in madness and the grotesque, such as they were seen in early Fringe plays, and having tried to develop an appropriate style of theatrical expression.

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[50] Editors, "Cues", PP, 26, No.4 (Jan. 1979), p. 6. The winners shared £1,500.

[51] Bierman, "Snoo Wilson . . . ", p. 424.

At the same time, he has attempted to formulate general ideas about the theatre, his own 'theory of the theatre', based on his own experience as a playwright. His is not a theorist's mind, and he finds it difficult to explain his ideas clearly, but this is indicative of the way in which he thinks about theatre and his own works. He admitted that the ending of The Glad Hand (1978) "was one of a zillion endings",[52] but he defends this - as I see it - structural defect by arguing that "the structure of the play is what matters". Obviously, what he is saying is that not a single element of the structure but the entire structure expresses the play's meaning.

He has said of his own view of plot that it is

> . . . just something that feels right. It's like putting together a 'concept' album - when the tunes must feel right, in a certain order.[53]

Presumably, this is no more than what any playwright with a "feel" for writing plays would say: structuring a plot is a question of knowing instinctively - or from experience - when the story has the right structure. But he was not only talking about the structure "feeling right". He was also interested in the particular effects that could be achieved by using particular kinds of structure. He himself learned about structure from Brenton's Christie in Love (1970), which taught him how to "warp time":

> You're throwing images up on the screen, as it were, one by one, and you're not necessarily committed to following one up with another. You can be obscure about particular things. You can return and look at them from different angles, which is something which has always interested me. It's as if the past were a series of stills - like holograms, which you can examine from any angle.[54]

He was interested in non-linear structures in drama, and this interest is bound up with his fascination for the unconscious mind. In one instance he suggested that such non-linear or non-sequential structuring was a natural part of our way of understanding reality, not just in the theatre but in

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[52] Bierman, ibid., p. 433.

[53] Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . . ", p. 6.

[54] Wilson, ibid., p. 6.

our daily lives as well:

> I suspect that our ancestors who laid down the foundations of our present brains and nervous systems may, in the protozoic ooze, have collected and passed down to us a much more careless idea of sequence and understanding than our cognitive, minute-stricken conscious minds know about, and that we are not only playing to ourselves in present time, but to the gallery where sit our ancestors . . .. And I suspect that theatre can be an engagement with these monsters within ourselves, though we can never entirely tame them.[55]

This may not amount to a revolutionary discovery, either in the theory of perception or that of the theatre, but his words (from 1983) showed him trying to link plot structure with more general ideas about how we structure reality in our minds, and that would allow him to argue that the playwright's work was, in fact, of central importance as a way of seeing the world, not as it 'really is' but as we 'really believe it to be'.

He shared with many playwrights, not just from the post-war period nor just British playwrights, a dislike for so-called naturalistic or representational theatre, and he raised the same objections to it as many others, namely that it only seemed capable of catching s surface appearance of reality and not the forces at work under the surface of human life/society. Wilson equated that visible surface with the world of observable phenomena, the material world which was the subject of so much successful and encouraging scientific investigation in this and the previous centuries, giving rise to hopes that man might eventually be able to explain and understand, and hence conquer, his world completely.

Wilson insisted that there was more to the world than could be explained rationally and by science alone. His own work, he explained,

> . . . tries to describe the world as complex, different and awesome, but also the same world which prosaic people . . . drag their mind-and-environment-forged manacles around in. . . . although we cannot accept any more the nineteenth-century fictions about matter we continue to abide by them, as if the alternative is dreadful to contemplate.[56]

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55 S. Wilson, "The Wickedest Man in the World", PP, 22, No.3 (Dec. 1974) p. 38.

56 S. Wilson, "Afterword" to The Glad Hand, p. 58.

The representational theatre, concentrating on historical fact and real behaviour, could not capture this dual image of human experience: its awesome and its prosaic sides, its magic which exists side by side with its ordinariness, the rational/conscious/material world and the other, irrational/unconscious/spiritual, one:

> . . . one calls out the other. I'm just saying we'd better have the whole lot on stage - we can't just have the one. We're meant to be making the world in here, we can't make half a world. I'm committed to making the theatre as much like the world as possible.[57]

Like so many other playwrights before him, Wilson was obviously trying to construct his own norms for what constituted 'realism', a mode of presenting reality as it 'really' was, on stage. His own emphasis was on the "other life", and his declared interest in "the occult, night, sex, dreams and death. Also . . . being in the world but not necessarily of it".[58]

He was not trying to establish a totally abstract or metaphysical theatre, nor was he suggesting that the observable, material world did not exist or was not significant. But he was adamant that a world-view which concentrated only on the material side of human existence was partial, and a theatre based on such a partial world-view - such as the nineteenth-century Naturalistic theatre did - could "never again correspond to the truth, to the world and to the imagination".[59] Mankind had acquired new insight since the previous, Positivist, century. It had discovered the unconscious and it had increasingly accepted that although the material world does obviously have objective existence outside the human mind, human beings perceived it subjectively, constructing their universe through their imaginations. That was why Naturalism, with its foundation in scientific objectivity, could no longer show us the truth about both the world as it was and the world as we saw it, for we no longer saw it objectively.

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[57] Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . . ", pp. 8 and 10.

[58] Wilson, "Theater on the Wrong Side . . . ", p. 60.

[59] S. Wilson, "Man Almost Bites Dog", ("Green Room"), PP, 23, No.6 (March 1979), p. 10.

By stressing the importance of the imagination he was placing himself closer to the centre of contemporary ideas about perception than his interest in, for instance, the occult might suggest. He had something in common with the Structuralists, who held that completely detached, objective information was impossible: the observer's prejudices, of whatever kind, would always influence the way in which he observed, and for that reason he could never hope to perceive something as it 'really was'. Wilson could also be said to share with Semiologists the idea that human beings 'read' their environment as a cultural 'language', made up of anything capable of carrying meaning and forming cultural 'myths' or 'fictions', which were part of our experience of reality. Wilson has said that Semiology is his "trace", referring in particular to the fact that he, like the Semiologists, believed that words were not all that could be made to express meaning.[60] That is not to say that he is a Semiological playwright, if such a thing exists. It is an accepted fact that the theatre is an art which expresses itself in a variety of ways, not just with words. Nor can Wilson be said to share the 'scientific', linguistics-derived theories of Structuralism or Semiology: he works far more instinctively, following his personal ideas.

These ideas are very idiosyncratic. His suggestion that the playwright must "make the world" in the theatre both says something about his faith in the playwright's ability to create a complete fiction on stage and in the possibility that such a fiction can be considered an image of the world off-stage. More than this, he thinks of his audience in a most unusual manner for a modern playwright. Nowadays, playwrights often claim not to think about audiences at all as they write or, perhaps, to think of them in terms of interest groups for whom a given political play might be intended. Wilson went much further, saying of the audience that

> . . . you have to swallow them up because you have to invent your audiences at the same time when you write. Because a play is a contract between the writer and the

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[60] Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . . ", p. 18.

> audience. The play is an imaginative conspiracy for a certain time. So you invent your putative audience who, of course, have character.[61]

For a writer who started out in a group-dominated Fringe theatre, he had reached a highly individualistic view of the playwright as the creator not only of fictions which, by force of being imaginative works, were close to the way in which we perceive the world, but also, because of that close connection, of the audience itself.

The "poet", the creative writer as "unacknowledged legislator" at work in the theatre, created his world on stage, but it was a fictional world which existed at the level of the imagination, and which was to be assessed in terms of its artistic, imaginative truthfulness rather than its content of verifiable facts from the off-stage world. This playwright clearly believed that the kind of imaginative exploration which takes place in, for instance, a stage play, was an appropriate way of exploring an area of human experience that was itself part of man's imaginative life: his unconscious.

What he was implying was that there was a direct similarity between art and life, at the level of the unconscious, and when talking about how the unconscious had been explored since the 19th century, he took care to point out that the exploration had had its artistic aspects. He said of two of the great psychologists of the modern age:

> The first prize Freud won was for literature. The position he reached was one of great language and final sterility of a most terrifying kind. Jung was a rambling old pantheist. But both of them were great creative artists.[62]

Wilson was going back to that time in the previous century when the unconscious was beginning to be explored, arguing that there had been a time in the 19th century when it was not yet the domain of the scientist, the professional psychologist, but could be claimed by the creative artist or the believer in occultism and magic, such as happened in the case of W.B. Yeats and Aleister Crowley, both of whom appear in his play about the latter,

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[61] S. Wilson, "Snoo Wilson: The Eclectic Dramatist", Gambit, 9, No.36 (1980), p. 14.

[62] Wilson, "Vampire", p. III.

The Beast (1974). Crowley, Wilson explained,

> . . . was a contemporary of Yeats and Lawrence as much as he is a contemporary of Freud. They were all discovering that funny area which we refer to as the unconscious. It's part of that great voyage out of the nineteenth century. They're discovering a new sort of universality which has nothing to do with 18th century rationalism - it's something weirder and stranger than that.[63]

Psychologists and writers alike were trying to explain and describe a new area of human experience, 'new' insofar as its significance was only just being realized. How highly he rated the artist became even clearer when he compared the attitudes of those two explorers of the unconscious, Freud and Jung. Science, he implied, was a hindrance on the journey through that mysterious world:

> His /Freud's/ 'scientific' enquiries into the mind are 'scientific' in order to erect a temple of orthodoxy, with the penis at its centre. Only Jung was brave enough to flout this, and waded into the boggy swamps of magic, astrology, synchronicity . . .[64]

The unconscious, so his reasoning seemed to go, was no place for the rational thinker or the scientific mind, since in the unconscious we were beyond the realm of what would be explained, analysed, understood, beyond what could be put clearly in words, and into something far more mysterious: the world of "the occult, night, sex, dreams and death", all phenomena that could be associated with magic, with powers that man could not hope to control, with "emotion, religion, idea"[65] etc. But if this underworld of the mind was no place for the scientist, it could be reached by the creative writer, whose fictions did not respect any distinction between what was invented or real, unconscious or conscious.

Insofar as the unconscious can be seen as an essential part of man's experience of life, a person with access to the unconscious can be considered to have a special insight, and perhaps even to have such a special

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[63] Wilson, "The Wickedest Man . . . ", p. 37.

[64] Wilson, "Introduction" to The Number of the Beast . . . ", p. vii.

[65] Wilson, "Theater on the Wrong Side . . . ", pp. 58-59.

status as to be considered one of society's unacknowledged legislators. It is difficult to accept this description of the playwright in this day and age, but in the context of what had been happening to the playwright in the Fringe it provided a reason for why Wilson stood apart from his contemporaries: not only because of his idiosyncratic views but because he maintained the playwright's central position as creative artist in the theatre. Although he denied that the word was everything in the theatre, he did not do so in order to surrender to the theatre's physical side or even to share creative responsibility with the actors. He did so because he found that there were elements of human experience that evaded verbalization, but he still maintained that he, as playwright, was in charge of suggesting the relationship between verbal and non-verbal expression in his own plays. His interest in that side of human experience made him shun political theatre because he was less interested in attempts to communicate precise arguments through the theatre than in making the theatre express a view of human experience which comprised both its everyday material reality and its more mysterious side, a view which he, as a playwright, was able to formulate in a more appropriate way than the 'scientist'.

(iii) The development in Wilson's plays[66] - to which I now turn - is towards ever greater 'self-containment' in the stories of the plays. Having begun his career at a time when physical theatre was in fashion and collective artistic creation was apparently preferred to individual creativity, this playwright wrote plays which were more and more obviously about his own personal obsessions and whose meaning can be derived from the script itself without obviously depending on a company to complete it in performance.

The playwright is, of course, always dependent on the company's ability to turn his playscript into actual theatre, and the script cannot be considered completely out of the context of that theatre. This is certainly true about Wilson, whose works require actors to use a variety of skills beyond those of straight acting, and which make conscious use of stage space.

[66] For details of the editions referred to in this and later chapters, see the bibliography.

But s his c re r developed, o di his ability to integrate all sides of the theatre into his own work, making them part of his narrative rather than elements of practical theatre craft added by other theatre artists to the written script.

One feature that is found in all of his plays is the fantastic quality of their narratives. He roams freely in a universe of his own, where normal ideas of time and space do not always apply; where the action may move, in an instant, from the physical, recognizable world to one of magic and fantasy; and where there is not always any obvious difference between the objective world and the way it is perceived by the characters.

These are all connected with his dual perspective on human existence, his attempt to include both the rational and the irrational, the conscious and the unconscious. In spite of his references to off-stage reality, to actual historical people and real psychologists, his approach remains very personal. His plays are his response, as a playwright, to the world in which he finds himself, not presented as the shared vision of a theatre group, nor as a three-dimensional enactment of a complex theory of human perception, but offered to the audience as his personal, fantastic vision of what the world 'really' looks like, seen through the imagination. It is my contention that this very vision, this preference of his for the fantastic narrative, is what finally makes him a playwright who uses the theatre for his own ends, rather than, for instance, a master craftsman providing theatre companies with dialogue and narrative structure or even a literary artist giving voice to a company. Consequently, although he has been very dependent on particular theatre companies to stage his plays, it is as an individual artist, as a writer for the theatre, that he must be considered, and it is his vision and the way that he embodies it in the narrative of his play that provides the basis on which his work can be evaluated.

The first two plays by him to be published were Pignight and Blowjob, both premiered in 1971 but not printed until 1975. Their appearance in the same volume is justified by thematic similarities: both present the

audience with a stage image of an amoral Britain in which fiction and reality clash. The fiction in question is not the playwright's fiction but the 'fiction' which is produced in the minds of central, mad characters.

Pignight is the closest that he has come to writing a political play. It is concerned, partly, with the way in which human beings exploit other living beings, pigs, by raising and processing them industrially and turning them into a saleable product. The play, whose action spans a single night in the present, is set at a pig farm near Sleaford, and it thus has an anchor in the real world which both playwright, company and audience inhabit.

On the night in question, two dubious characters, the ex-convict Ray and a prostitute, Jasmine, are looking after 2,000 pigs at the farm for its new owner, Bravington, whose only interest is in selling processed pork. The previous owners, Roland and Mrs. Mullen have emigrated to Australia, leaving behind one Smitty. This educationally subnormal German has come to England during the war as a POW and the Mullens have kept him on, Roland Mullen as cheap labour and his wife as a substitute son. The Mullens are unable to provide either each other or Smitty with affection. When Smitty sees Roland Mullen going to his pigs for the sexual satisfaction which his wife cannot or will not provide, he goes mad and is committed to a hospital.

During his time with the Mullens they have tried to educate him, Roland providing him with comics whilst Mrs. Mullen has tried to introduce him to the great European cultural tradition. Wilson is clearly commenting ironically on the latter in Pignight, for it is the comics that win: part of Smitty's madness is a belief, which he must have absorbed from his primitive education, that he has been chosen by "Galactic Knight Kaarg" to protect the new masters of the world from human beings until they can take over from them. The new masters - and this is the point where Smitty mixes the comics with reality - are the pigs with whom he somehow identifies, for like himself they are subject to exploitation and deprived of human affection.

Smitty returns to the farm on the night when the play's main action

takes place, and in his madness he shoots Ray and Jasmine. In the last scene, as Bravington speaks in the darkness of the many ways of exploiting pigs industrially, Smitty fries Ray's and Jasmine's kidneys on stage, thus turning the tables on the humans, showing the brutality which lies behind turning one's fellow creatures into a commodity and the effect that such brutalization can have on human beings themselves.

This is a play with a message, albeit one that is expressed metaphorically, and it is the only one of Wilson's to offer one as explicitly as this. What makes it a more typical play for him is the way that Pignight becomes a mixture of reality - the exploitation of the animals by the Mullens and Bravington - and the fiction which Smitty makes of that reality in his madness. The main action takes place in the contemporary Britain, but the play's plot becomes a function of Smitty's imagination (and of that of the playwright), with flash-backs, flashes-forward and scenes taking place in Smitty's imagination, as well as monologues, which allow the audience an insight into the minds of different characters. The real and the irreal, the conscious and the unconscious are seen in interaction.

Pignight is a typical Fringe play, stylized, clearly trying to shock its audience, both with its subject matter and with loud and gory effects. In its simplicity it is easily identifiable as a play for small-scale touring theatre. Three actors play all parts and the whole cast is male, most likely in order to 'dehumanize' the female characters. The play clearly proclaims itself as a play, making no attempt at representationalism. It relies on straightforward and very obvious effects - an actor miming walking by walking on the spot in a gravel box (pp. 12-13), gun shots (p. 16 and p. 43), actors playing pigs by donning pig masks, etc. The staging is simple and, as the first stage directions make clear, designed to bring the play as close as possible to the audience:

> A hat and coat rack, the sort that can lie flat against the wall, is set behind a box wide enough for three at the back of the stage. The audience should be on three sides. There is a simple wooden table up front. The clothes for the various characters are hung on the coat

> rack. The various props are behind or inside the box, which should be accessible from the back. (p. 9)

This simple staging puts the emphasis almost entirely on the performers, who have the responsibility for creating the play's fictional world themselves by changing character swiftly and by holding the audience's attention through their performances on the almost empty performance space. The mixture of reality and fiction would continue and become increasingly emphasized in his later plays, but the characters would come to inhabit more complete and enclosed stage worlds later on.

Blowjob is a more 'conventional' play than Pignight. It takes place in a few hours during one night in the present, and its setting is given with apparent precision: the home of a lonely old gentleman with his life's savings locked up in a safe, at 63 Arch Street, Birkenhead, and in the builder's yard next door. The settings, though not necessarily elaborate, appear to be more representational, or at least more solid, than in Pignight.

The play describes how two skinhead burglars, Dave and Mo, break into Cottrell's home to break into his safe. They knock him out and later kill him. Meanwhile, in the builder's yard next door, a gay security guard, McVittie, is on his rounds and finds Moira, a schizophrenic ex-student. She later joins Dave and Mo, whose attempts to break into the safe have failed. They try with gelignite but accidentally blow up McVittie. The two skinheads take flight, but Moira stays behind, puts make-up on the dying security guard and as he refuses her offer of oral sex - the title has a double meaning - she cuts his throat.

The story is certainly bizarre. It presents an image of a morally corrupt Britain where no values of right and wrong seem to exist and no explanations can be given for the central event in the play: McVittie's death. This senselessness, this irrationality, is fundamental to the play. Moira speaks in a mock-Laingian idiom, with ironical effect. She presents the audience with a paradox in that she denies the rationality that is inherent in attempts - such as those made by psychologists - to make sense

of madness. This, the play suggests, is self-contradictory. But Wilson is not trying to defend a senseless murder. He is simply attempting to present Moira's irrationality without excuses, without explaining it is an illness, for that very irrationality is an essential feature of the way in which he understands and presents human experience. It is, however, a weakness of this play that it presents a case of personal abnormality - Moira's schizophrenia - in the context of a more general abnormality, the moral decay and anarchy that surrounds her. This makes abnormality and irrationality the norm in the play whilst also seemingly proposing that both are common in the world off-stage. In later plays he was to ensure that a play's story was anchored in rationality at least sufficiently to show that he only considered it to be one side of life.

Blowjob is set so explicitly in the present as to seem to suggest that its irrationality is a social phenomenon, but in Vampire (1973), Wilson moves away from the actual world to write a play about ideas. Vampire is no discussion play. Rather, it suggests through its structure that men's way of thinking about reality has been governed by their adherence to ideas that have dominated in the place and during the historical periods where they have lived. So strong have these ideas, or complexes of ideas, been that they have 'vampirized' people, rendered them unable to see reality for themselves.

In the Victorian Act One, the play's characters exist in a world dominated by repressive ideas about sexuality and morality. In Act Two, set in the period around the First World War, some women (suffragettes) have begun to fight the old stereotypes, apparently helped by new psychological ideas, but some of these - those of Freud - turn out to be as stultifying as the Christian/Victorian ideas whose place they are intended to take. Act Three moves into the present, showing a world where style and fashion have taken over from content and values, leaving human beings as open as ever to cultural 'vampirism', exemplified by Enoch Powell's speech at the end of the play.

There is no suggestion in the play that this state of affairs - this

cultural vampirism - will end, but clearly expresses how unnatural it is, through its structure. The play is held together structurally not just by the central idea of vampirism but also through the survival of the female line of main characters: Joy, central character of Act One, escapes from her father's vicarage to a London brothel and is the only survivor of her family after a melodramatic bloodbath, having first been raped by her father while lying in a coffin (the father mistakes her for his wife's ghost). Her granddaughter - possibly the result of this incestuous relationship - is the suffragette Sarah, central character of Act Two, who conceives a child by the ghost of a dead British soldier, then, helped by Freud and Jung, giving birth to a vampire baby. Sarah's granddaughter, Dwight (after General Eisenhower) has given up natural relationships altogether in Act Three, runs a rock funeral parlour, and hopes to start a sperm bank. There is a logic to this sequence of examples of "unnatural procreation", where the women survive without much assistance from the men. Although birth is an obvious sign of life and survival, in Vampire it is constantly accompanied by death or symbols of death. Abolishing fathers is only the logical consequence, in the play's own terms, of what has happened, the only solution to the problem of ensuring survival and escaping from cultural prejudices

I say that it is the logical consequence in the play's own terms, for here Wilson has created a play that is clearly an artefact, whose meaning lies within itself and not in its reflection of the world outside. It is a play-as-metaphor, which refers to ideas and to the way in which ideas are fixed and communicated. Wilson uses two methods of doing this, both of which are found inside and outside the theatre, namely the use of language and behaviour as carriers of meaning. The former comprises various uses of writing ('literature') and rhetoric, the latter different types of ritual and performance.

Among the 'genres' to which the play refers are the fairy tale (p. V), the diary (p. VI), the sermon (p. VIII), narrative fiction (p. VIII), speeches (pp. XI and XIV), psychological theory (p. XII) and hagiography

(p. XIII); the 'performances' comprise a family performance of "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" (p. VI and later), the wedding ritual (p. VIII), the seance (p. IXf), a cricket match (p. XI, embodying particular values of character and behaviour), the nativity play (pp. XII-XIII), a newly devised funeral ritual (pp. XIII-XIV). To these should be added the playwright's use of the style of Victorian melodrama and of contemporary Fringe expressionism in Act One and Act Three respectively, serving to emphasize that this is a play where the characters can only be understood as a part of the play's fiction, not in relation to actual human beings of events off-stage. The characters have no existence outside the pattern of ideas and of ways of communicating ideas.

In Blowjob, irrationality was seen as a symptom both of actual madness and of moral anarchy. In Vampire, it has become a cultural phenomenon, expressed in the unnatural way in which human beings limit themselves artificially by accepting received ideas about sexuality (in Victorian times), gamesmanship and heroism (in World War One) in a way that does not necessarily change with the introduction of new ideas, such as those of Freud and Jung, because human beings continue to invent new rituals even when the old ones have lost their meaning (as in Dwight's funeral ritual in Act Three). Vampire lacks a balancing rationality, like Blowjob, but in Vampire this is less of a problem since the play takes place at the level of ideas and is not to be judged according to the standards of off-stage reality. This also gives the playwright a freedom which he has made use of in all of his later plays, a freedom within his own fictitional world.

The Pleasure Principle (1973), subtitled The Politics of Love, the Capital of Emotion, returns to the recognizable. contemporary world, where Pignight and Blowjob had been set, but has most in common with the former in the way that it blends fiction and reality within the play itself. Like both of those plays it has a mad central character, Robert, but here, and for the first time, Wilson attempts to link that madness with the notion of an "other life", to see it as evidence of the existence of a different,

spiritual dimension, and he uses Carl Jung's theories to support this. At the same time, the play proposes the equal reality of man's conscious and unconscious, as well as a conflict between ideal and reality.

The Pleasure Principle is a very complex play, difficult to sum up briefly, and this complexity is itself typical of Wilson's plays. In this instance, he has given his play two central characters, both of whom carry a substantial part of the play's meaning independently of each other, though with the emphasis on the millionaire Robert. His female counterpart is his ex-wife Marien's cousin, Gale. The main title and subtitle may be said to refer to those two characters respectively.

In the first of the play's three acts, Robert meets up with the other characters on holiday in Ireland. Robert is travelling with his chauffeur, Mack, whom he is trying to 'civilize' in much the same way that Mrs. Mullen attempts to do with Smitty in Pignight. Robert, a convinced materialist, is concerned with the way in which money can secure happiness and freedom and with using the power which it also bestows. However, a mysterious vision which he has inside his tent persuades him that the positive influence of money will not really turn England and Ireland into a new paradise, a new California, and he spends most of Act Two off-stage, trying to dispose of his wealth. For this, his ex-wife has him committed to an institution, for her happiness hangs on his wealth, but he escapes, breaks through the wall to Gale's London flat and persuades his ex-wife to follow him into a life in poverty, living as a prophet in an abandoned circus tent by the Yorkshire Moors. In spite of some success in his new career, Robert soon has to admit that he cannot survive without money, and only at the last moment are they both saved by the French owner of the circus tent, who offers both work in his circus, Robert as a clown and Marien as a tight-rope walker.

Robert has crossed from the material sphere to the spiritual one. Having abandoned the world of materialism and given up his wealth - a gesture for which he is locked up by the rational people who surround him - he

devotes himself to the spiritual side of life, only to find that such a life is in itself partial. One may apply the Freudian notion of the Pleasure Principle to Robert, for he is forced to accept the 'golden mean', forced to realize that he can no more do without money than he could do without a sense of spirituality. But Wilson also underlines, through the Jungian "Primal Force" who appears in Act Three in the shape of a golden gorilla, that there is, indeed, a spiritual dimension, even if he refuses to offer an explanation of what it is.

Gale, the other main character, is also on a quest for happiness, but in her case the quest is unplanned. She is accompanied, at relevant points in the play, by two representatives of her unconscious, two gorillas, who reveal to the audience her innermost dreams and desires. We thus learn from them that she has a sexual interest in Robert, although she suppresses that desire. In Act Two, it becomes obvious that she moves through life unaware of the value of material riches. Wilson does not see this as a virtue. Unlike Robert, who sets out deliberately to get rid of his material wealth, Gale is simply robbed of her belongings, without realizing that it is happening.

She shows a similar lack of awareness of the nature of her own emotions, her own love. When she marries, it is more out of a sense of duty to her unconscious desires than a conscious wish. She picks up an American ex-soldier, with whom she enters into a totally materialistic marriage. Her investment of her love in this marriage pays off: she has a normal sex life after many years' frigidity and even has a child by her husband, Alko. This materialistic attitude to love she shares with Marien who, even when Robert has become a "prophet", uses her love for barter in their relationship. He objects to this and expresses one of the central truths of the play, as he attacks Alko for his materialistic view of life:

> You're a Cartesian, you see. You've been brought up to think that your mind and the world are separate, but we're at the end of the Cartesian age. There is no separation between ourselves and the world. Between miracles and feats of the imagination. (p. 61)

Only Robert attempts to realize this ideal, and he is apparently frustrated, forced into taking a job as a circus clown. But he is not a real failure. As a prophet, he is a clown figure: his ambitions are great but he is hampered by the banalities of everyday life, as is the traditional clown. This duality - which was to reappear in the character of Aleister Crowley in The Beast - reflects Wilson's own dual world-view and it is an example of his inclusion of both aspects, rational and irrational, the worldly and the spiritual, in one character.

He uses the theatre's potential for creating illusion to the full in The Pleasure Principle, combining scenery with the play's overall structure to underline its point:

Act One, set in a real and contemporary Ireland of bomb attacks and economic exploitation, shows the play's characters together on holiday, in relative freedom, and this is indicated by using an open stage, locations being simply suggested with props.

In Act Two, we move into the rational, materialistic world which Gale inhabits (as do most of the characters apart from Robert himself), shown as a 'solid' box-set in the representational style, cluttered with her belongings and providing not only an environment for the characters but an image of the material world in a particular state: "affluence gone sour" (p. 36). It is through the walls of this apparently real world that Robert breaks in as a representative of the irrational.

Act Three is set in Robert's irrational universe, the "junkyard of the mind" (p. 57), a circus tent full of props, including those that have been used earlier in the play. As a tent full of props that no longer have any specific meaning - they are not there to represent real objects on stage, they are there as themselves - they show that the play has moved into a world of pure fiction, where reality and irreality, mind and world are not separable. It is a world which Robert has to leave eventually, just as the audience and the cast will eventually have to abandon the shared illusion of a theatrical performance, but he leaves it as a character aware of the need

not to attempt to separate the two aspects of human life. For a playwright with Wilson's own faith in the playwright's powers it can also be said to suggest how he would hope the play might influence the audience who might leave the performance equally enriched.

The duality of fiction and reality is again present in The Beast (1974), where Wilson deals with a historical character: the occultist, sex magician and charlatan Aleister 'the Beast' Crowley (1875-1947). Like Robert in the previous play, Crowley is a "prophet", but in this case he is genuine, having once attempted to create his own religion, Crowleianity, and the playwright uses theatrical illusion in this instance to prove Crowley's genuineness.

It continues trends in previous plays in two ways: by suggesting the presence of an irrational/unconscious dimension, exemplified in Crowley, and by explaining the historical development that lay behind Crowley's ideas, as he had also done in Vampire.

The play, which is in two parts, covers the period from 1837 to the 1940s, the decade of Crowley's death. It is structured as a narrative told by Crowley himself at a hotel in Ostend in the 1920s, the story of his and his family's background in the 19th century and his time as leader of a small community in Sicily devoted to his ideas, the Abbey of Thelema, also in the 1920s. The first half, which shows him at the Ostend hotel, presents him as an idealized character, a true magician, whereas the second half reveals how the pressures of actual relationships with his 'disciples' and the lack of funds force him to give up. The character thus has a great deal in common with Robert, whose ambitions are also kept in check by the realities of ordinary life, but Crowley is presented as two different characters. In the first part, where he demonstrates his magical powers, he is almost a caricature of a powerful magician, whose strength lies, partly, in his ability to make furniture fly through the air. In the second part Wilson has him struggling to persuade both the others and himself of the rightness of his ideas in spite of personal tragedy - the death of his

child - and the power-struggles within his group, and in adversity he acquires a certain grandeur as an individual and rounded character which is unequalled among the works dealt with here.

This is an unusual play for him in that it refers so specifically to a historical character and to actual events, and its later history is interesting. When he re-published it in 1982 in a new version, he cut most of the material dealing with Crowley's background in the 19th century because, as he explained, "I am not a social historian and so was pleased to leave social accountability out of the story".[67] In this way he indicates his increased interest in fiction at the expense of historical fact, and as a historical character Crowley does, indeed, present this playwright with problems. Not only is he too complex as a 'real' personality, too open to criticism as being a charlatan and male chauvinist as Wilson himself is open to criticism for his championship of such a person. Crowley is also a potential embarrassment to a playwright who prefers to follow his own nose when he writes and whose obsessions lead him to write plays that almost inevitably conflict with our normal expectations of reality. He must clash with historical reality, even when, as in Crowley's case, history seems to be going the playwright's way.

Of course, history proves that Crowley was not a real magician, and this is why the playwright has to work his own magic and turn historical reality into a fiction, where magic is possible and can be made visible. This happens in the first half where, at the Ostend hotel, Wilson pitches Crowley against a fellow magician, the hotelière, Mme. Poitier. She demonstrates her powers by evoking a scene from the past where W.B. Yeats is taking leave of Maud Gonne at Victoria Station in 1895. Mme. Poitier follows this up with a violent (verbal) attack on Crowley, accusing him of egocentricity, childishness and an inability to appreciate and deal with the

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[67] S. Wilson, "Introduction" to The Number of the Beast and Flaming Bodies, p. vi.

real problems of his own time, something that left-wing critics might also accuse Wilson of. But he can let his character fight back with means far exceeding those at his own disposal. Crowley counters her attack with a pandemonium of magical effects which demonstrate his superiority as a magician over Mme. Poitier, the middle-class realist:

> (The mirror smashes./ Pandemonium breaks out./ Crowley walks through the mirror, off stage. A chair whisks off.)/ MONSTER: (recorded voice) I'm taking this chair to borrow. J'emporte cette chaise./ MME POITIER: (cowering in a corner, weakly) Vas-y . . . naturellement. (A hail of broken chair bits comes through the mirror, with huge hoots of laughter. Then lots of crockery and glasses which smash on stage to shouts of delight, off./ MME POITIER creeps forward and looks at broken plates, reading the inscription.) MME POITIER: Hotel Parvenue. Hotel Parvenue . . . Merde. (I, p. 48)

The scene is, in the most straightforward way possible, anti-materialistic: Crowley's magic destroys the trappings of the small provincial business, which Mrs. Poitier has accepted as her reality and which signifies her parochial, materialistic outlook.

In The Everest Hotel (1975), fiction and reality, the spiritual and wordly spheres, once more share the stage. He wrote the play hurriedly for three unemployed actresses who needed a play, and he himself describes the result as "an entertainment masquerading as an imaginative problem".[68]

A song, sung towards the end of the play, suggests that what is at issue is the difficulty of finding values and moral guidelines in the modern world:

> Who will save us at the final hour?/ Will it be a rock star, or the holy power?/ . . . / At the final trumpet what do we do,/ Follow Yuri Geller, Lenin or the Who? (p. 50)

The Everest Hotel is a play within a play: three young girls, female delinquents, are performing a play to the governors of the School of the Sacred Heart. Their play tells the story of how three nuns form a pop group and go in search of the pop song that can save the souls of 2,000 million

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[68] S. Wilson, "A Theatre of Light . . . ", p. 13.

peasants from communism. From the start, Christianity and anti-communism are thus associated with each other and with the powerful modern phenomenon of pop music.

In the Himalayas, at the Everest Hotel, the Virgin Mary communicates the music to one of the nuns, but she misses the lyrics. To find them, the nuns attempt to travel back in time, walking on a silken rope from the Himalayas of the present to 1917 Portugal, where Our Lady of Fatima is supposed to have appeared. From her they hope to get the lyrics, but instead of 1917 Portugal they find themselves in the modern Portugal after the 1974 socialist revolution, where Our Lady of Fatima has been trapped in a force field by the revolutionaries.

From this point, the play concentrates on the collision of Christian and socialist ideas, although without favouring either: the people seem to benefit from neither, and the substitution of socialism for Christianity does not seem to lead to any immediate improvement. The liberalization of morality is exemplified by the free availability of pornography, a feature of revolutionary change of which the playwright himself does not seem to approve. It can be seen as a feature of that same value-less modern world which he had already postulated in the final act of Vampire, where everything happens on the surface and rituals had no meaning. If there is a serious intention behind the play it is perhaps to show the playwright's own doubts about the outcome of revolutions: they are not necessarily an improvement on the societies which they abolish.

Whether or not this is so - and he can hardly be said to give reasoned arguments for or against revolution - he does explore something that would become a feature of his future plays, namely the fantastic narrative. His plays had, of course, been fantastic before The Everest Hotel, but here he began to explore a kind of narrative which was completely self-contained and whose relationship with the off-stage reality is metaphorical rather than direct. This is evident in the way that he establishes the play as a fiction, as a play within a play and then proceeds to send his

characters out on a journey through time and space of a kind only possible in a fictional universe where the natural laws do not apply.

The fact that he does present it as a fiction should perhaps also be taken as an indication that he did not yet feel entirely confident about this kind of narrative. Like The Beast, The Everest Hotel refers to real historical events - the Portuguese revolution - and this again created a counter-productive tension in the play between the fantasy of the narrative and the topicality of its subject matter, a tension which prevented the playwright from commenting 'seriously' on revolution whilst also depriving him of the freedom of self-contained fiction.

The resulting confusion comes across in the scene where the "Old Woman" appears (p. 46), apparently to form a focus to the play. She debunks pop music by scratching pop singles with a wire brush, then scorns less admirable aspects of the revolution by burning legalized pornography. She proceeds to plant a bush in the ashes, a life-confirming act, perhaps, but one whose meaning remains vague: the bush may be the one in which Our Lady of Fatima appeared (a sacred bush) or where she was caught, according to the play (the bush-as-trap). Finally, the Old Woman shows her scorn - or care? - for the bush by watering it with her urine. Not only her actions but her identity remain obscure. She may be a representative of the peasant class or she may be a witch, she may either belong to the material world or to another, less obvious one. Wilson fails to make this clear, but he needs to make it clear in order not to confuse his audience, the more so because he is moving between the worlds of observable reality and of dream and the occult.

Part of the answer to this particular problem seems to have been to write with greater simplicity. With The Soul of the White Ant (1976, henceforth The White Ant) he achieved this. Like The Beast, this play has a historical character at the centre: Eugene Nielen Marais (1872-1936), South African lawyer, pioneer naturalist and Afrikaans author, who wrote the original Die Siel van 'n Miel (The soul of the white ant). Marais appears

in the play, which is set in the present, resurrected, in a small imaginary town in the Transvaal, Excelsis.

This is a play with political overtones, as a play set in the present among Afrikaners in the Transvaal must almost inevitably be, but there is no question of an explicit condemnation of the Afrikaners or the apartheid system. Rather, Wilson structures the play in such a way as to make it amount to an exposure of the shallowness of the Afrikaner characters and the outrageous nature of Marais' ideas. This he does with a humour that is, incidentally, present in many of his fantastic plays.

The play's criticism of conditions in South Africa lies not just in what characters say and do in the play but also in what the play does to them. This may be an unusual way of putting it, but it would be true to say that here the playwright has managed to create a miniature world where the characters, despite of their being identifiably contemporary, South African and racist, can only really be understood in the context of that fictional world.

The play's five characters (leaving aside Marais) lead uninteresting, everyday lives in Excelsis, described in a conventional, linear narrative, progressing in the normal way. Counteracting this is the rather extra-ordinary character of Marais, himself something of a magician like previous Wilson characters and his 'life' progressing wholly unnaturally, from death to life. At the end of the play, Marais is shown to be a giver of life, but, in fact, death, and not life, is his real province: he is a 'dead' character himself, the notion that he can resurrect the dead is outrageous, and, indeed, he takes the lives of two unborn babies at the same time as he brings another character back to life.

The White Ant is intended for small-scale production, with a cast of only six, but where in his previous plays doubling had played an important part, here each actor played only one character. The set is simple: "There are four sets, but they can all be accommodated in an environment by lighting selectively" (p. 5). This is the same kind of staging that was employed in

the two following plays, The Glad Hand and A Greenish Man (both 1978), and it has the effect of making the setting not just a background but, as had been the case in The Pleasure Principle, a part of the play's meaning. The stage directions suggest that the "surroundings should be shabby, filthy even, so one scene blends into the other without difficulty. . . . Termite damage and dust everywhere" (p. 5). In these surroundings of decay, the Afrikaner characters struggle to preserve their conservative moral values but the set also suggests that they are in a termite hill and thus ties the shabbiness to Marais's theory, referred to in the play's title.

This theory proposes that the termite - the white ant - lives through a continuous cycle of death and rebirth, and it is extended to the Afrikaners themselves. At one point, Marais claims to see Dr. Verwoerd, the assassinated ex-Prime Minister of South Africa, in an ant hill in Mabel's bar during the play, proving that the theory is right (p. 18).

Mabel runs the bar in Excelsis and Marais saves her life in the last minutes of the play. This would be a merciful and positive act, were it not that Mabel has been trying to escape from life in Excelsis by committing suicide. A theme in Vampire had been the unnatural way in which the female line survived over a 150 year period, and the problem of ensuring the survival of the human - white - race is also important here, centering on the character of Mabel, the unhappy wife of a travelling salesman.

Mabel sets the play going by confessing to the murder of her houseboy who, being separated from his wife due to South African race laws, has sought sexual relief by masturbating in front of the consenting Mabel. She has stored his sperm in her deep-freeze for later delivery to the wife, but when the freezer is full she has to stop the houseboy's activities and chooses to do so by shooting him. The disbelieving local policeman, Julius, refuses to arrest her for the murder of a black person but throws the sperm in the river. So fertile is this sperm that the play's two other female characters, June and Edith, conceive during a swim.

This leads on to the theme of the survival of the race: June and

Edith, who go out with Julius, the policeman, and Pieter, the journalist, respectively, are aware both that miscegenation is a legal offence and that their two boyfriends will find it unacceptable in any case. They go to Mabel for help and as she has made certain that her own unhappy marriage has borne no fruit, she is able to help: a friend, a travelling salesman in fertilizer (one of Wilson's less tasteful jokes) can carry out abortions. This person turns out to be Eugene Marais, who has been coming to life during the play, and who carries out the abortions magically in the last scene, where he also saves Mabel's life. The irony of his saving one life and stopping two others is emphasized by the fact that he also enables Julius and June to marry. Their union is unlikely to help continue the Afrikaner race as he dislikes the idea of undressing and prefers oral sex to actual consummation. Their marriage is, in any case, in danger as he cannot afford to marry June, but Marais steps in again and helps out with cash, possibly acquired through magic.

Marais is presented as a miracle maker, a magician, but his display of magic in the last scene reveals him as more than that: he is the main reason why the Afrikaners in the play's world can survive, for as they have been presented to the audience in the play there is little chance that they will be able to do so without magic. Nor was Mabel's houseboy, whose sexual drive cost him his life, but such is his vitality that he can do posthumously what the Afrikaners cannot do in life. In this way the play is, finally, a criticism of apartheid, with its claim that the white Afrikaners can only survive artificially whereas the black Africans can hardly be prevented from doing so.

More than in any other play dealt with here has he managed to create a fictional world in The White Ant, which seems entirely believable whilst at the same time being quite self-contained as a fiction. Its fictional world is believable because it represents a small provincial community, as enclosed as the fictional world itself. But at the same time, the playwright creates a narrative structure which makes of the play a metaphor that

can be read as a criticism of a particular political system without being an explicit attack upon it. The play's enclosed fictional world and narrative structure is supported by the setting and by the limited number of characters.

In The White Ant, he was able to perfect the small-scale Fringe/ alternative theatre play, intended for a small cast and a simple stage with few technical refinements apart from sound and light. With The Glad Hand (1979), he expanded that small-scale form, preserving the enclosed fictional world, peopled by real - though not necessarily ordinary - people, and using more complex stage technology.

The set is the hold of the supertanker, the Myrna Grenville, six months out of Liverpool and nearing its destination: the Bermuda Triangle. The tanker is on a special mission: it has been chartered by a South African magnate, Ritsaat, to go to the Bermuda Triangle where he intends to raise the AntiChrist through a combination of the mystical powers of the Bermuda Triangle and the theatre's powers to create illusion. He has brought with him a 'theatre company' of layabouts: the Hooleys, a narrow-minded Irish family which includes a pimp, Bill, and his daughter. His ex-wife and her lesbian companion join the company when the supertanker collides with their leisure boat. On the tanker are also two very undistinguished British actors; a similarly undistinguished American screenwriter; a hippy psychic surgeon, the ship's doctor; and a CIA agent, who is monitoring Ritsaat on behalf of the CIA, the sponsors of what they see as an experiment in psychic warfare.

Ritsaat's plan is to raise the AntiChrist by staging a play which recreates the occasion when he last appeared: the 1886 cowboy strike in Wyoming. His purpose is to kill the AntiChrist in a duel, and his motivation a belief that the AntiChrist is behind world communism and threatens the world with Armageddon.

The Glad Hand is a piece of meta-theatre, concerned with the background to, and staging of, a play about a strike, and drawing heavily on

working conditions in the real theatre. It creates a world of its own, this time one which capitalizes on the fact that it is a theatrical world based on illusion. However, Wilson hints that another reality lies beneath the theatrical make-believe.

Ritsaat shares Wilson's own interest in cultural assumptions, in man's imaginative understanding of himself and his surroundings rather than in those surroundings themselves. It is part of his project to create a kind of critical realism that challenges the idealized view of the Wild West offered by what he calls "Marxist Jewish Hollywood" (p. 29). The real Wild West, he argues, was a place of moral depravity, providing a moral vacuum that, in 1886, could "suck in the AntiChrist" (p. 30), and this is the situation which he hopes to recreate by staging his play.

The implication of this project is that the theatre is a place where reality can be recreated almost directly and that such a recreation can influence the off-stage world. In respect of the latter, his view of the theatre is reminiscent of two major trends in recent Fringe/alternative theatre: the (American) group theatre and the Socialist political theatre. In his belief that the theatre can work as an actual ritual and evoke 'spirits' (in this instance the AntiChrist, whom he sees as a 'political' spirit), he hearkens back to such recent groups as the Living Theater or, closer to home, Welfare State. On the other hand, his attempts to use theatre to uncover the reasons behind history and so show that there is a continuity behind the apparently random series of events normally offered to us as history (p. 29) is reminiscent of attempts by Marxist theatre groups to explain present-day capitalist societies as the result of centuries of continuous exploitation.

But Ritsaat's plan is seriously flawed. He is not himself so unprejudiced as to be able to define what is real and what is not. To him the cowboy is not the fictional Hollywood myth, but nor is he a real worker: he is "one of the primal states of man", accessible through the "racial memory", which the company supposedly share (p. 14), and

which he will use to create the play. This "archetypal" cowboy, the "glad hand", is an essential part of the play which he, Ritsaat, wants staged.

But he can, of course, not tell the actual difference between the Hollywood myth and his own, and as his third-rate scriptwriter is himself American, he is not likely to question or revise the Hollywood convention. Nor is the randomly assembled company likely to provide the necessary "racial memory" or even a credible piece of theatre.

Not only is the company not chosen for its artistic merits: they are quite unsympathetic to Ritsaat's ideas and respond to his autocratic behaviour by plotting against him, constantly planning to strike. Striking is the very type of reprehensible behaviour that is supposed to have called out the AntiChrist in 1886. But Ritsaat fails to understand that he is himself provoking that very phenomenon: he cannot appreciate the reality of what is happening about him whilst he is planning to stage his fiction.

As we experience the preparations for the play and witness its only performance it soon becomes evident that Ritsaat is blind not only to the reality of the Wild West and of the situation which he is in himself, sitting in the hold of a supertanker in the Bermuda Triangle. He is equally unaware of the gulf between the ideal ritualistic/political theatre and the theatre actually available to him. The characters in the play-within-the-play resemble the members of the company, as we have already met them, they are not the result of the artist's creative invention. The play itself is a strange cross between a conventional Wild West story with a great deal of action, and a socially conscious play referring to conditions in 19th century America, touching briefly upon the supernatural/spiritual.

The company very reasonably refuse to believe that their efforts will bring them into contact with the AntiChrist, but in order to put an end to the experiment they persuade the Cuban ship's cook to play the part. Ritsaat's acceptance of him as the real AntiChrist is, of course, more revealing of the former's confusion than of the cook's acting talent. Ritsaat naively believes that the theatre has the power to turn fiction

into fact, that there is no real difference between the two. Instead, reality begins to take over from him and his company: the cook shoots the script-writer, having refused to be a part of his fiction, and Ritsaat opens the ship's scuttles to flush out the 'AntiChrist' thereby forcing crew and company to abandon ship.

Reality becomes uncontrollable and, deserted by his troupe, Ritsaat finds himself alone on the ship with the dead body of the CIA agent, whom he addresses on the nature of reality. The world, he argues, has no objective existence, it "only exists as it does because people believe it to be so" (p. 57). Wilson is himself interested in drama which shows the world *not* to be "solid", but he nowhere makes the mistake of thinking that it is completely without substance. Ritsaat has tried to make theatre create reality, as if that was the distinguishing feature of that art form. But the opposite is the case: what is special about the theatre is its ability to create illusions of reality, and therein lies the playwright's power. In this instance it allows Wilson to turn the tables on Ritsaat and create a real AntiChrist out of the ship's cook, to have him kill Ritsaat on board the fictional tanker in this Bermuda Triangle of the playwright's creative imagination. The cook appears as "a huge black glistening figure atop the steps. Magnificent. Operatic" (p. 57). Assisted by the Irish pimp he shoots Ritsaat, and the two then reach for each other on the steps, their fingers touching in a manner reminiscent of Michelangelo's Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel: the creator of theatrical fiction, Ritsaat, dies in theatrical spectacle.

On the other hand, the spectator cannot be entirely certain what is 'fact' and fiction: at the end of the play the cook quotes words spoken originally by the CIA agent when, in a trance, he was back in 1886. These words the cook could not have heard, and he may then, in fact, be the genuine 1886 AntiChrist, whose Michelangelo gesture to the pimp shows that once he has been raised he cannot be controlled: he takes over from Ritsaat and begins to create new evil. And thus, having revealed Ritsaat as a

madman, who overestimates the powers of the stage and starts a real crisis on the ship which endangers the lives of all, Wilson lets his character die in a manner which both shows that the tanker, and his death, are part of a theatrical illusion but which also, finally, refuses to say for certain that the madman was wrong about his mad theories.

The hold of the Myrna Grenville is a fictional space, its relationship with the off-stage world is indirect and metaphorical. As a metaphor it suggests that the theatre's strength lies in its ability to create illusion, not in its direct relationship with the off-stage world. This confirms the view that Wilson saw himself as an individual creative artist rather than as a recorder of significant events and movements in the world outside the theatre, and insofar as the illusion is created by the playwright it also confirms that he has particular powers as a creative writer which makes him at least as interesting to consider in his own right as in the context of the theatre at large. But it also shows that he was still convinced that the world was not solid, that there was a dimension to human existence which was not easily put in words nor obviously controllable.

That is also confirmed by A Greenish Man (1978). Originally written for television, it was staged at the Bush Theatre before being screened in 1979. In it, he appears to have conformed to very conventional standards of playwriting: the narrative structure is quite straightforward, progressing regularly through a limited time-span of a few hours; the location is ordinary: derelict Kilburn; the subject is topical: fund-raising for the IRA at a Kilburn pub and the presence of an IRA bomb-factory in a disused paint-factory opposite. But the play soon reveals itself as a typical Wilson fantasy which attracts attention to itself as a narrative above and beyond any topical, political interest.

The settings are a Victorian pub, the paint-factory opposite and wasteland near the two. The first stage-direction specifies that all three "should blur into each other" (p. 1), as had the environments of The White Ant and The Glad Hand. The story is as fantastic as either of those two:

Troy, having suffered brain damage from the lead and titanium content of the paint made at O'Malley's factory, returns after six months' hospitalization to claim compensation. O'Malley offers him a ten year lease on the - now disused - factory and the recipe for a new ever-lasting green paint made from grass clippings. He will even let Troy take the place of his own son, killed in an explosion at the factory, on condition that he gets rid of the "owd ghost" who haunts it. Because of his brain-damage, Troy is without imagination and, hence, without fear, the ideal ghost-hunter.

However, it soon transpires that he is the victim of a plot, and, as the naive person he is, a willing victim. George, O'Malley's brother, who is arranging a fund-raising dinner for the IRA in his pub opposite, becomes involved, and it becomes clear that O'Malley's son, Patrick, is not dead. He has been maimed by one of the bombs which he produces at the bomb factory, and the O'Malley brothers want Troy to kill him because he is ruining business at the factory.

A Greenish Man is not so much about the IRA itself as about attitudes to the IRA and people's different uses of their imaginations to make sense of it. When Troy first confronts him, Patrick, the bomb-maker, is presented less as a ghost (or even a person) and more of an inhuman monster:

> . . . a hideous wizened figure on a trolley, legless, the face covered in scars. A punting-pole in its hands, relaxed. Alert eyes. The whole streaked and daubed with green. (p. 15)

Patrick is the main speaker at the fund-raising dinner ("walking with two sticks. Smartly dressed", p. 21), risen from the dead like a Vampire or like Marais in The White Ant. He proves himself to be one of Wilson's rhetorical demagogues, like Enoch Powell in Vampire or Ritsaat in The Glad Hand. In his speech, he points to the importance of distinguishing between truth and fiction (not, be it noted, fact and fiction), using theatrical tricks to add effect to what he says:

> So in history, there is truth, and there is fiction. The fiction in Ireland is rule of the oppressor. Where is truth? The truth is the dialectic process, which never stops. It simply goes underground. There is

> always an issue from the affairs of the day, however fruitlessly the blood of martyrs seems to be shed. In history, between thesis and antithesis, there may be delay, but there is always issue.
>
> (Music starts, distant, heroic, swelling as the YOUNG MAN brings on the covered cage.)
>
> There is never, finally, impotence.
>
> (YOUNG MAN draws cover off cage to reveal bright green doves . . .) (p. 24).

Through this manipulation of language, music and visual effect, he creates a fiction of his own, empty of content, but structured so to climax in the unveiling of the doves in a moment that undermines everything which Patrick has been saying.

The doves are intended for Patrick's only friend, his young cousin Deirdre from the pub. However, dyeing doves, symbols of peace, in the colour of Ireland is unnatural in a very straightforward sense, and this unnaturalness is also present in his oratory. A central theme there is that of the ever-progressing dialectic with its almost inevitable "issue" and, hence, constantly proven fertility. "There is never, finally, impotence", he claims, but these words are spoken by a legless man and one wonders whether the bomb damaged more than his legs, whether there is not, in fact, impotence and infertility in his own case. Being an IRA man has dehumanized him, rendering him incapable of reaching out to others, and this is confirmed by the fact that he kills the only two people who have not been tarnished by his, and the IRA's presence: both are killed by a bomb intended by Patrick for Troy only.

By the time that this happens Troy has ceased to pose a threat to Patrick, whom he cannot bring himself to kill. He has, however, been betrayed by his ex-wife Jane, who is attending the dinner with her boyfriend, the American tax-lawyer Marwood. Both are old IRA supporters, but neither is capable of understanding the implications of their support. As a student, Marwood supported the IRA in general, not knowing whether his money would go to the Official or the Provisional IRA (p. 12). He does realize

during the evening that the dinner is a facade and the IRA only interested in him for his money. Jane, who was once Patrick's girl-friend and whom Troy battered during their marriage, now takes a liberal stance and saves Patrick's life by revealing that Troy is planning to murder him. George and O'Malley, whose main interest is in making money, whether from producing paint or organizing fund-raising dinners, do not hesitate to betray Troy, once all is revealed.

Troy's decision not to kill Patrick is prompted by his catching Deirdre's eyes and seeing the green doves during the dinner. Presumably both make him decide that the violence must stop, but having become involved he is no longer able to escape. Like Ritsaat, he is hopelessly entangled in the play's fiction, which is also the "fiction" which the IRA have made of reality, and which is promoted by the sterile monster of a character, Patrick. He does so itself through theatricality, artificiality, drawing on words and spectacle rather than fact to make its point, much in the same way that the 'vampirizing myths' could be seen doing in Vampire.

This very artificiality also ensures that Wilson's fiction remains self-contained. In spite of the topicality of the subject, the play's meaning is to be derived from within the play, not by reference to events outside the theatre, at least not actual historical events. The play's characters remain unable - or unwilling - to understand the truth about the IRA, namely that it is a fiction covering impotence and death. They are caught up in that fiction like Ritsaat in The Glad Hand, and Troy, like Ritsaat, pays with his life. But this self-contained fiction is not without points of contact with the off-stage world, for this is what happens outside the theatre too: people are presented with false choices, for instance between 'truth' and 'fiction' rather than 'fact' and 'fiction', they are not offered reality but, as in The Glad Hand, a new myth in place of the old one.

There is a feeling in A Greenish Man that Wilson was moving in a new direction. The fiction was self-contained, it was too fantastic to be

mistaken for an attempt to duplicate events in the off-stage world, but it was more directly a metaphor for the way in which people are manipulated by rhetoric and propaganda in the off-stage world than a demonstration of the presence of a non-material side to life. The unconscious was not so much an area of mystical attraction as a place for the formation of our ideas about reality, and as such the object of misuse by demagogues.

On the other hand, Wilson was not writing topical pieces, even if his work was increasingly acquiring a quality of concreteness. He revealed new attitudes. Thus, Flaming Bodies (1979) saw him creating a dramatic character, Mercedes, with sufficient strength as an individual to escape from the dream which the play puts her in. She fights for her sanity and wins. Similarly, in The Grass Widow (1983), mysticism and a belief in the super-natural are confined to a single character, the old hippy debt-collector, Andre, threatening the relatively normal life of the English main character, Dennis. It would seem that the tension between this life and "the other", between the mundane, day-to-day lives of his characters and their contact with a different, non-material dimension has been resolved, and that the playwright has come to terms with the kind of drama which portrays life in a recognizable manner and considers madness to contrast with normality rather than to be its constant companion.

However, in both those plays he continues to explore a view of human experience as having two equally significant sides: the conscious and the unconscious, the view which legitimized his stance as an independent artist with a vision of his own which he also believed to be of general significance to his audiences. In spite of his start in the context of anti-verbal, physical theatre and collaborative creation, he made the theatre his own medium for which he wrote complete narratives which used the stage and its resources to create a stage world in both time and space which might express the play's meaning as suggested by the playwright rather than the whole company.

CHAPTER THREE

DAVID HARE:

FINDING TRUTHS BY TELLING STORIES

David Hare, the 'intellectual' among the three playwrights, must necessarily be considered in a different manner from Wilson. Apart from being a Portable playwright, he has little in common with his 'struggling' contemporary. Indeed, one is inclined to ask whether he can truly be considered a playwright of the Fringe/alternative theatre, or whether it might, perhaps, be more appropriate to bracket him with the radical dramatists of the 1956 generation.

In the first half of this chapter, I shall begin by considering him as a playwright of the 1968 generation. I shall then look at how he responded to the pressures upon the playwright in the late 1960s and early 1970s and how his practical experience of the theatre has influenced his view of the theatre as an art form and of himself as a playwright. The second half will be devoted to his major plays for the stage. As he is much more of a literary artist than Brenton or Wilson and part of his particular use of theatre is best understood from the way in which he handles the narrative structure of drama, I have spent more time on dealing with the plots of his plays than I have in the case of the other two.

(i) Hare is the most obviously successful of the three, a surprising fact when you consider that he became a playwright almost by accident, writing his first original play - How Brophy Made Good (1969) - when Snoo Wilson failed to deliver a play promised to Portable. On the strength of this play, the commercial producer Michael Codron, well-known for his support of new writers,[1] commissioned him to write Slag (1970). Since then, Hare wrote The Rules of the Game (1971, an adaptation from Luigi Pirandello), The Great Exhibition (1972) and Knuckle (1974) for Codron. Both Slag and Knuckle transferred into the West End, as did the later Teeth 'n' Smiles (premiered at the Royal Court in 1975); and Slag, Knuckle, Plenty (National

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[1] Michael Codron has been unusual among commercial producers as a specialist in new drama and has supported such playwrights as Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, John Mortimer, James Saunders, Simon Gray, Henry Livings, Charles Wood and David Halliwell. See Peter Ansorge, "Producing the Goods", PP, 21, No.11 (August 1974).

Theatre, 1978) and A Map of the World (Sydney Theatre Company, 1982, National Theatre, 1983) have all been seen in the United States.

He found himself in print at an early point in his career: How Brophy Made Good appeared in Gambit in 1970. Slag was printed by Faber in the same year, and that firm has printed all of his original plays since. It says something for Hare's success as a published playwright that his three original television plays, Licking Hitler (BBC, 1978), Dreams of Leaving (BBC, 1980), Saigon: Year of the Cat (Thames Television, 1983), and his first original screenplay, Wetherby (Greenpoint, 1985), have all appeared in print. Michael Coveney says of A Map of the World:

> The text, after several readings, I find an inexhaustible source of pleasure (how many contemporary dramatists outside of Pinter, Osborne, Stoppard, Hampton and Hare could you even bear to sit down and read once?)[2]

I would argue that you need to read most plays more than once, since they have not been written to be read, but Coveney is quite right insofar as one is certainly aware of Hare as a verbal artist to a quite different degree than either Brenton or Wilson.

Throughout his career he has received open recognition for the quality of his work. In 1970, he received the Evening Standard Award as Most Promising Playwright for Slag. For Knuckle, he shared the 1975 John Llewellyn Memorial Prize. His Licking Hitler earned him the 1978 BAFTA Best Television Play Award, and he won the Golden Bear Award at the 1985 Berlin Film Festival for Wetherby. Wetherby has, in a sense, brought his career full circle. His original interest was in film rather than in theatre, and he wrote several filmscripts in the 1970s: Somewhere in England (written in 1972, after a novel by Reg Gadney), I Fascistibile (written 1974, after a novel by Giulio Castelli), as well as a film version of Teeth 'n' Smiles (written 1976). His first television play was Man above Man (BBC, 1973), and apart from the three original television plays

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[2] David Hare, "Worlds Apart", Time Out, No.648 (21-27 January 1983), p. 14.

already mentioned above, he has written television versions of Brassneck (BBC, 1975) and Fanshen (BBC, 1975). Hare thus illustrates a particular problem encountered when dealing with contemporary British playwrights: they often write for other dramatic media than the theatre and it can be difficult - it may even seem artificial - to isolate their stage plays from the rest of their production.

With this playwright the problem seems especially acute as he only began to see himself as a playwright at a relatively late point in his career. It happened, he claims, when he was writing the script for Knuckle, while still a director of Portable Theatre, which he had co-founded with Tony Bicât in 1968. He explains that during that time he

> . . . used to snatch what time I could to write, never admitting to myself that I was becoming a playwright, choosing instead always to see myself as a theatre director who occasionally wrote.[3]

One critic, Steve Grant, claims that "Hare's contribution to contemporary drama begins in earnest in 1974 with Knuckle",[4] a view which Hare himself holds, but I do not believe that you can ignore the early years of his career in the theatre, starting with the founding of Portable Theatre in 1968 and with the writing, however accidentally, of How Brophy Made Good in 1969.

The idea for Portable appears to have been that of his co-director, Tony Bicât, rather than his own, and the company was, to begin with, interested in literary subjects rather than the new 1968 generation of playwrights. According to Hare, Portable only became a playwright's theatre proper when Howard Brenton became associated with it from 1969,[5] a fact which explains why Portable is often associated with Brenton rather than with its founder, Hare, or the playwright most dependent on it of the three,

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[3] David Hare, "Introduction" to The History Plays (1984), p. 9.

[4] Steve Grant, "Voicing the Protest: The New Writers" in Dreams and Deconstructions, ed. Sandy Craig (1980), p. 122.

[5] David Hare, "From Portable Theatre to Joint Stock . . . via Shaftesbury Avenue", TQ, 5, Nos.19-20 (September-November 1975), p. 109.

Snoo Wilson. This seems somewhat unfair towards Hare, for whom Portable was only the first of several companies co-founded or run by himself. In 1972, he organized the company behind the ill-fated England's Ireland. When Portable and Shoot collapsed in 1972, he co-founded Joint Stock Theatre Company in 1973 with David Aukin and Max Stafford-Clark, later joined by the Royal Court's artistic director, Bill Gaskill. In 1984, he and Richard Eyre were made joint directors of one of the new companies within the National Theatre. Quite unlike Wilson, he has not had to look for companies to produce his plays but has been actively involved in starting or running companies himself.

He has also directed a number of plays - he did consider himself to be a director early in his career. Among these are his own Inside Out (1968, an adaptation by himself and Bicât of Kafka's diaries), How Brophy Made Good (1969, with Bicât), England's Ireland (1972, collectively written, co-directed with Snoo Wilson), Brassneck (1973, co-written with Howard Brenton, co-directed with Richard Eyre), Teeth 'n' Smiles (1975), Plenty (1978), A Map of the World (1982/83) and Pravda (1985, co-written with Howard Brenton). To these can be added two television plays, Licking Hitler (1978) and Dreams of Leaving (1980), as well as his film, Wetherby (1985). A 'special relationship' can be said to exist between him and Howard Brenton of whose plays he has directed Christie in Love (1969), Fruit (1970) and Weapons of Happiness (1976). In directing the latter, he was directly involved with the introduction of a play by the 1968 generation to the new National Theatre. Add to this list of plays directed, Snoo Wilson's Blowjob (1971) and The Pleasure Principle (1973), and David Hare's central position among the so-called Portable playwrights is clear.

From an early point in his career, he was associated with the Royal Court, the artistic home of several of the new writers of the 1956 generation and an active champion of freedom from theatrical censorship in the 1960s. He was literary manager there in 1969-70 and then followed Christopher Hampton as the Court's resident dramatist in 1970-71. At first sight, he

appears to be a 'Royal Court playwright'. In his concern for the inability of the British to show their emotions, he reminds one of the early John Osborne when he said that he wanted to "make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards".[6] Hare would not be likely to agree with the last part of the statement, believing that both emotion and thought should be found in the theatre.

Hare's work is characterized by a number of major female roles, for which he attracted the sceptical attention of feminist critics:

> I am never sufficiently ideologically correct, feminist, vegetarian or whatever for them. I'm sick of all that. At least I find that abroad my plays are listened to without prejudice.[7]

Again one is reminded of the new playwrights of the 1956 generation, for instance Arnold Wesker or John Arden, whose plays have been more immediately popular abroad than at home. However, Hare has little in common with either, having forged his way successfully (though, it must be said, not always with critical or economic success) to a position among the major playwrights of the present. One has a feeling that he could have been a Royal Court playwright, had he started in the theatre only a few years before he did, but as a playwright of the 1968 generation he has been unable to associate himself so directly with that company.

Unlike the playwrights of the 1956 generation, their successors of the 1968 generation had no 'home' in the theatre. In this respect they were not uniquely disadvantaged. The idea of having a single theatre to nurture new writers in London had begun to seem obsolete by the mid-1960s when theatres and television were competing eagerly for new plays. In the 1970s, the concept of the studio theatre, the small stage attached to a larger theatre and providing space for new writing, had become established. And yet, there was a feeling among the new writers that no institutions had

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[6] John Osborne, "They Call It Cricket" in Declaration, ed. Tom Maschler (1958), p. 65.

[7] Hare, "Worlds Apart", p. 15.

developed to deal with the new drama. As Hare complained, referring to himself and fellow-playwright Trevor Griffiths,

> Both Trevor and I pick our way across the theatre and feel a purely practical commitment about where our work should be done and how it should be presented. We simply have to move from house to house. There are no institutions to which we feel particularly attached except in my case Michael Codron.[8]

His complaint was not entirely justified. At Nottingham Playhouse, Richard Eyre, artistic director from 1973 to 1978, commissioned and staged a number of new plays by young or new writers, among them Brassneck (1973, by Hare and Brenton), The Churchill Play (1974, by Brenton) and Comedians (1975, by Trevor Griffiths). Hare himself was literary manager and resident dramatist at Nottingham from 1973, and yet there is, in fact, no indication that he did become more attached to that theatre than he had been to Michael Codron, or that Nottingham became the company to support new British playwriting.

In his specific criticism of the Royal Court as he encountered it in 1969-71, he does make significant points which both describe how the theatre had changed and indicate how Hare as a playwright differed from the 1956 generation. Looking back in 1981, he initially commented positively on the Royal Court of ten years before:

> . . . what struck me and cheered me there from the first day was finding a group who assumed, without a moment's self-doubt, that the dominant culture of the day was garbage, because the values of the society were rotten; that, in particular, literary affairs in this country are largely in the hands of a sold-out right-wing middle-class who can't write; and that therefore in artistic matters you must, at whatever cost, trust your own experience and believe nothing you read in the newspapers.[9]

But he also, in the same place, criticized the Court for having insisted on continuing to support humanist drama and neglecting the new political

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[8] Trevor Griffiths and David Hare, "Current Concerns", PP, 21, No.10 (July 1974), p. 18.

[9] David Hare, "Time of Unease" in At the Royal Court, ed. Richard Findlater (1981), p. 141.

theatre of the 1970s, a criticism with which Brenton might sympathize.[10] Nor did he find that the Court, at the time when he was there, did enough to support the new drama. Certainly they did not stage his own The Great Exhibition (1972), they failed to live up to their promise to stage the collectively written Lay By (1971) and their support to its successor, England's Ireland (1972) was limited to a single performance. It should be recalled that the Court did stage several of Brenton's early plays as well as Wilson's The Pleasure Principle, but Hare's criticism is given weight by the fact that they allowed Nottingham Playhouse to take the lead in presenting important new drama in the 1970s.

However, the Court's lack of support during his early years as a writer did not deter him. His remarks above about the Royal Court reveal many of his own concerns. Like many of his generation, including Brenton and Wilson, he was fired by a fundamental distrust of the dominant - 'bourgeois' - culture and the values inherent in it. Some of these values were expressed in the Royal Court's humanist tradition which (in Hare's quotation from memory of the director Lindsay Anderson's words) saw theatre as "something which belongs above social and political questions".[11] Hare identified himself with "a group of English writers . . . who feel broadly that theatre is also a social and political activity".[12] It is worth noting his caution: these writers feel "broadly" that it is "also" such an activity. He only fits into that group if it is defined broadly, and he has never himself lost sight of the non-political side of theatre. Other values, which he does not touch on here, but which are even more important in his work, are the moral values of the society in which he lives and writes. Hare accepts, throughout his work, that he lives in a capitalist society, where one group exploits the others, and he believes that this

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[10] See Howard Brenton, "Petrol Bombs Through the Proscenium Arch", TQ, 5, No.17 (March-May 1975), p. 4ff.

[11] Griffiths and Hare, "Current Concerns", p. 22.

[12] Ibid., p. 22.

society is inherently devoid of moral values: it is based on self-interest.

But even if this is so, he will not accept that human beings are also naturally amoral. He believes that people have and need a sense of justice and the belief that they live in a just society.[13] The implication is that in the present society this is not possible and that, in fact, they are driven mad by the gulf between what they believe and the lives they are forced to lead,[14] something which becomes a central motif in his plays. This may sound like a version of the vulgar-Marxist idea that the individual is produced by the social and economic system in which he lives, but Hare's angle is quite different. He claims that his middle-class background makes him think "that what people believe is much more important than where they come from",[15] and his own experience of the discrepancy between revolutionary theory and actual developments during his own life-time has made him suspicious of such theory. As he explained in a lecture in 1978 (his main contribution to drama theory):

> . . . we have lived through a time of economic depression, which classically in Marxist theory is supposed to throw up those critical moments at which the proletariat may seize power. And yet, in my own estimate, European countries have been more unstable during these times of affluence than times of depression. It is hard to believe in the historical inevitability of something which has so frequently not happened . . .[16]

His lecture was, partly, an attack on the kind of political theatre which offered art as simple as the theory, and he spoke of

> . . . that sinking of the heart when you go to a political play and find that the author really believes that certain questions have been answered even before the play has begun. Why do we so often have to endure the demeaning repetition of slogans which are seen not as transitional aids to understanding, but as ultimate solutions to men's problems? Why the insulting insistence in so much political theatre that a few gimcrack mottoes of the Left will sort out the deep problems of reaction in modern England?[17]

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13 Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . ." p. 114.

14 Ann McFerran, "End of the Acid Era", Time Out, No.285 (29 August-4 September 1975), p. 12.

15 Griffiths and Hare, "Current Concerns", p. 20.

16 David Hare, "A Lecture" in Hare, Licking Hitler (1978), p. 62.

17 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

The relationship between people's ideas and their lives was not simple but intrinsically complex, and Hare insists on writing plays which reflect that complexity, even if it may bring him into conflict with more theoretical critics. But he is not anti-socialist, he is not opposed to change: part of his complaint against the revolutionary theorists (and artists) is that by failing to offer a theory that could be seen to correspond to reality they have also made the practice of change seem impossible. As he observed in 1975:

> If you have a period like 1968, when you believe in a revolution and then afterwards, the objective criteria for a revolution are missing, indeed definitively absent as they were in this country, you're soured with the impossibility of change. And if what you believe bears no relation on how you act, people go mad. I do believe that people go clinically mad if what they believe bears no relation to how they live.[18]

He was speaking here of his play, Teeth 'n' Smiles (1975), set in Cambridge in 1969 and based on his own experience as a university undergraduate, but his perspective broadened in later plays - Plenty and Licking Hitler (1978) - to the discrepancy between theory and practice in war-time and post-war Britain, to what Hare saw as "the deeply corrosive national habit of lying".[19] Lying, it is obvious from his plays, is not only a question of lying to others by concealing the truth from them but also of lying to oneself by refusing to understand the truth oneself and appreciate the gap between theory and practice. If he believes that there is such a thing as a 'sin', such self-imposed ignorance is one.

The gap between ideal and reality does not only lead to "clinical madness". It also leads to human suffering. In the interview about Teeth 'n' Smiles, he claimed that the middle class lacked 'real' suffering, that they

> . . . are conscious of the absurdly over-privileged lives they've led, that nothing has ever been really difficult

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[18] McFerran, "End of the Acid Era", p. 15.

[19] David Hare, "Broken Rules", Radio Times, 226. No.2931 (12-18 January 1980), p. 17.

> for them. In the middle classes, there's very little experience of suffering at all except on the level of personal bereavement or personal failure.[20]

Hare respects the people he writes about, and though it may sound so, he was not trying to suggest that a bad conscience was the only kind of suffering known to the middle classes. He believed that England was living through a period of change,

> . . . but because this is England it is not always seen on the streets. In my view, it is seen in the extraordinary intensity of people's personal despair. . .[21]

It was to that personal despair he turned in Plenty and Dreams of Leaving (1980). In the latter, he appeared to move away from the political theatre completely, saying in an interview in 1980:

> If you've written a long time about social and political things you're aware that the question of who sleeps with whom is of more interest and daily currency than the state of the economy or the decline of the West.[22]

Again, his statement must be read carefully. He was saying that the question of who sleeps with whom was of more interest and daily currency than matters of political or historical importance, but not that those matters were not important as such. He was changing his own emphasis as a playwright:

> I'm trying . . . to push aside the business of being a teacher or moralist because that is a trap for a writer. The longer I've been at it, the more I've felt it's silly telling people what to do. They're not taking any notice.[23]

But, as he also revealed, his central interests had not changed greatly. Dreams of Leaving was

> . . . partly about the appalling intimacy of people's real desires compared with how they actually live and about the way with sex all the normal rules are broken.[24]

The discrepancy between ideal and reality, between theory and practice,

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[20] McFerran, ibid., p. 15.

[21] Hare, "A Lecture", p. 67.

[22] Hare, "Broken Rules", p. 17.

[23] Ibid., p. 17.

[24] Ibid., p. 17.

remained central although it appeared in various guises. His interest in the people he was writing about - most often members of the middle class - prevented him from making simple political theories into the foundation for his plays. That was not to say that he found the concepts of socialism or communism simple, rather, he found it difficult to accept the way they were presented to him by their supporters. He himself sees those concepts as moral challenges:

> . . . I write about politics because the challenge of communism, in however debased and ugly a form, is to ask whether the criteria by which we have /been?/ brought up are right; whether what each of us experiences uniquely really is what makes us valuable; whether every man should really be his own cocktail; or whether our criteria could and should be collective, and if they were, whether we would be any happier.[25]

Collectivism is a "moral challenge"[26] to the traditional individualism of the middle classes. I write 'traditional', for Hare himself does not consider individualism to be a universal middle-class value:

> I don't actually believe that left-wing middle-class intellectuals are intrinsically shallow or alienated or hopeless.[27]

Thus, as a (broadly) left-wing middle-class writer, Hare was concerned not only with the discrepancy between theory and practice in the actual lives of people but also with collectivism as a means of bridging the gap between theory and practice. But he deviated from the mainstream of the British political theatre by considering collectivism to be not so much a logical solution to a problem of organization (political or otherwise) as a moral alternative to the values by which we live. He retained his interest in the individual, but his perspective was not individualistic. This is evident in the way in which he rejects the use of a dominant main character in his plays written after The Great Exhibition (1972), paralleled by his attempts to avoid the narrow perspective of the 'play-set-in-a-room'. This

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[25] Hare, "A Lecture", p. 69.

[26] Ibid., p. 67.

[27] Griffiths and Hare, "Current Concerns", p. 20.

concept was one that he had borrowed from Howard Brenton,[28] whose works had always shown the individual in context, whether that context was political, social or moral. Snoo Wilson had similar misgivings about dominant central characters although his reasons were different, and had to do with his wish to create plays that were 'total experiences' rather than character portraits.

The rejection of characters as psychological case-stories was a common feature of the post-1968 theatre and here it can be taken as an indication of Hare's belonging to that theatre, as can his interest in female characters. From Slag (1970), a play with only female characters, women have played a central part in his drama. This has earned him a place in Michelene Wandor's study of the new drama of feminism and sexual politics, Understudies (1981). "For Hare", she says, "women are essentially innocent bystanders to the main events of history, powerless to influence them, and rarely responsible individuals."[29] One must respect that Wandor writes from a particular point of view, with a special interest in the position of women in theatre, both as artists and as characters, but her assessment of Hare's female characters is incorrect. He is a male writer, using female characters to emphasize the failure of his male characters to understand the world they live in, illustrated by their unsuccessful love relationship with women.

Admittedly, Hare, as a modern male writer, did not pretend to understand how the world is seen with female eyes. But with his interest in the disparity between people's beliefs and their actual lives, he can use female characters to demonstrate how that disparity manifests itself in people's actual lives and in situations where people are most vulnerable: in their love relationships. At the same time, this allows him to avoid a dominant main character by placing a couple, a man and a woman, at the

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[28] Ibid., p. 22. Brenton's remark about the "two kinds of play - those set in rooms and those outside rooms" is found in Howard Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 14.

[29] Michelene Wandor, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics (1981), p. 83.

centre of his works, as happens in, for instance, Teeth 'n' Smiles, Knuckle, Licking Hitler and Plenty.

In Dreams of Leaving, he appeared to have given up politics in favour of love stories. This was not - or at least not quite - the case. Rather, he seemed to have accepted the feminist dictum that 'personal is political' and to have begun to deal with broader issues as they emerged in people's personal relationships. The gulf that may exist in people's lives between the way they (are expected to) behave in private and in public has similarities, as a theme, with the gap between theory and practice in politics, where our behaviour in public can be said to show how we ought to behave, in theory, and our private lives what we do in practice. In the late 1970s, the political theatre would accept the importance of seeing political problems in the light of the experience of individuals, and it can be argued that Hare anticipated this development, the political theatre catching up with him eventually.

(ii) I have suggested that the playwright working in the theatre of the 1960s and 1970s Fringe/alternative theatre was under pressure from the real events of the off-stage world, events deemed so significant as to make art seem irrelevant, and from the new demands for collective creativity and an increased respect for the actor/performer's creativity. In what way can Hare be said to respond to these pressures? Certainly, an amount of 'respect' for factuality is a part of his drama. Only in his film Wetherby (1985) has he consciously indulged in inspiration without any reference to actuality. He said, in an interview with The Observer:

> It started out . . . as a dream-piece. I felt I'd been writing a lot of rational, organised work and I decided, for once, not to worry about what I was doing meant but to follow my own instinct.[30]

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[30] David Hare, "What excites me about Pravda is that we're challenging the Government in the best way we can - on the stage", The Guardian, 2 March 1985.

Usually, his attitude to playwriting - and to theatre in general - was that it was "hard work",[31] that to "write a play at all you have to work extremely hard on what you believe about the subject".[32] Like many playwrights of his generation, he found it difficult to write openly about his own experience and he consciously strove to avoid self-indulgence.

This was seen in, for instance, Fanshen, based on William Hinton's account of the Chinese revolution, and in A Map of the World, a deliberate attempt on his part to escape from the limitations of writing only about British problems. When challenged to write about the experience of his own generation, he decided to treat it as factual material in Teeth 'n' Smiles (1975):

> I think it's so boring and dishonest when writers dress up their own experience. They think that by changing a few details they distance themselves . . . To write about yourself in disguise is a form of grotesque self-pity which the English stage is sick with. So I thought, if you were going to write about something you'd experienced, it was much better to be honest and not change any of the critical details . . . Everything on the surface is documentarily accurate.[33]

It is worth recalling Peter Cheeseman's comments on the difference between the normal, playwritten drama, based on the playwright's personal experience, and the documentary play, based on factual material and, as he thought, appropriate to a modern, scientific age. Hare has not, in fact, written any plays which can be described as documentaries, even though they do refer to events in the off-stage world, but he did acknowledge that his drama must deal with the off-stage world, that it must be based on an element of factuality. Even in the case of Dreams of Leaving, the television play where he decided to avoid "social and political things", he insisted on carefully researching the details of the play:

> For me . . . getting things right is an earnest of good intention. If a writer can't be bothered to do the groundwork, then I can't be bothered to listen.[34]

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[31] Hare, "A Lecture", p. 71.
[32] Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 111.
[33] McFerran, "End of the Acid Era", p. 15
[34] Hare, "Broken Rules", p. 17.

Even if it is difficult to pigeon-hole him as a political playwright, because of his insistence on a complex rather than a simplified view on politics, he has nearly always dealt with recognizable major issues: the (im-) possibility of revolution in England in How Brophy Made Good; arms-dealing in Knuckle; corruption in provincial England in Brassneck; the state of the nation in post-war Britain in Plenty. Indeed, he came to consider himself as a writer of history plays, thus explicitly claiming the status of a writer who was not only concerned with individuals or the events of the present:

> . . . if you write about now, just today and nothing else, then you seem to be confronting only stasis; but if you begin to describe the movement of history, if you write plays that cover passages of time, then you begin to find a sense of movement, of social change, if you like; and the facile hopelessness that comes from confronting the day and only the day, the room and only the room, begins to disappear and in its place the writer can offer a record of movement and change.[35]

He did not, however, claim to be a historian. He approached history as a writer, with the specific aim of explaining why people behave the way they do in the society in which they - and he himself - find themselves. The playwright can, he said,

> . . . put people's sufferings in a historical context, and by doing that, he can help to explain their pain. But what I mean by history will not be the mechanized absolving force theorists would like it to be; it will be those strange uneasy factors that make a place here and nowhere else, make a time now and no other time. A theatre which is exclusively personal, just a place of private psychology is inclined to self-indulgence; a theatre which is just social is inclined to unreality . . .[36]

Both, he argued, should be given weight, both the personal and the social. One has a clear feeling that Hare was deliberately seeking to write 'significant' plays. Not, perhaps, plays with messages but certainly ones

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[35] Hare, "A Lecture", p. 66.

[36] Ibid., p. 69.

that were intended to express a thought-through view on the real world.

There is a clear difference here between Hare and Snoo Wilson, where the latter attempted to establish the equally 'real' status of both the rational and the irrational, coming to rely increasingly on his own handling of dramatic fiction and theatrical illusion to achieve this. Hare was concerned with the material, rational world. By referring to historical reality and refusing to write plays simply on the basis of his personal experience he showed himself as a playwright of the new theatre of the 1960s and the 1970s, not self-assured - or arrogant - enough to believe that his own personal vision would be sufficient to help make his work a significant statement about his own time or history. David Edgar suggested that in the absence of "a bedrock of shared assumptions on which he could build his vision of the human condition",[37] the contemporary playwright had to anchor his plays in a recognizable reality, and David Hare seemed to confirm this. Even Wilson was not able to dispense entirely with the real, contemporary world or with ordinary humanity, and real events inform almost all of Hare's plays in one way or another.

Hare did not experiment with theatrical form: "It's always the content of the work that determines everything . . .".[38] His primary concern was for the actual off-stage world rather than with formal experiment 'per se', and the majority of his plays are concerned with some aspects of the world outside the theatre. To that extent, he must be said to have responded positively to the demand that the playwright must concern himself with the contemporary world and not indulge in art for art's sake. But at the same time, it is also clear that he used the fiction of his drama as a way of exploring the world in the light of his own personal interest in the relationship between the public and the personal and between theory and practice. Even where he claims to be dealing with facts, such as, for

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[37] David Edgar, "On Drama Documentary" in Edgar et al., Ah! Mischief (1982), p. 18.

[38] Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 113.

instance, that modern life can drive people insane, it soon becomes clear that this is a contention on his part, that it is, indeed, a particular point which he wants to make through the theatre. It is a part of his personal vision of life in his own time. His positive response to contemporary events does thus not entail a surrender of his right, as a playwright, to offer a personal view of those events in an imaginative form.

But what of his attitude to the new physical theatre and the concept of collective creativity? The former has had very little influence on his work. He appears to have remained largely unaware of it, even when it dominated the early Fringe, during his time with Portable:

> La Mama happened at the same time, we had never heard of La Mama. And similarly, when after the first Portable production two of the actors started saying it would be much more interesting to use our bodies rather than these dull words, we were actually bemused. We couldn't think what they were talking about. So they went off and founded the Freehold . . .[39]

Indeed, performance skills other than straight acting play little part in his work except in the early - and, apparently, hastily written - How Brophy Made Good (1969). There, on the other hand, it is used almost to excess, giving one the impression that Hare attempted to write a play 'in the style of a Fringe play'. Apart from ordinary dialogue, it contains poetry (pp. 103-4, p. 110), shared lines (p. 115) and acrobatics (p. 122) as well as narrative (pp. 85-89, p. 124), a 'borrowing' from another form, the television interview (Scene Five and pp. 124-25), back-projection (p. 125) and, throughout the play, various examples of music and sound and lighting effects. In later plays he abandons most of these types of theatricality, although one instance of acrobatics is found in Knuckle (p. 26) and narrative occasionally occurs, in Knuckle (where it is a natural part of the Micky Spillane style which he is parodying) and in a later play for television, Dreams of Leaving. Both are instances of first person

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[39] Ibid., p. 109.

narrative by a central character, whose account of events is contrasted by the play's presentation of the events he is speaking about.

Unlike Wilson, Hare only shows an explicit interest in one kind of narrative fiction, namely the detective novel, in particular that written by authors "who work against the form to make it do something to which it is not apparently suited".[40] He has himself used the thriller form openly in Knuckle and his film, Wetherby, and he refers to Dick Francis as a central influence on the latter because "what he does is create a world which isn't real but which is truthful".[41] I would suggest that his use of fiction in his plays, like Wilson's, is a sign of his consciousness of himself as a writer rather than an attempt to add a stylistic effect to his theatre. It fits into his general interest in the discrepancy between people's ideals and their lives, because people themselves, in the off-stage world, can be said to create 'fictions' to make sense of their lives, of their own reality, a fiction that is often flawed because - this is Hare's contention - it is based on a flawed understanding of those lives. As a playwright, Hare can illustrate this through his own fictions, his plays, and one therefore finds a certain similarity between his and Wilson's position as playwrights: they can claim a particular kind of access through their writing to the truth about human existence. Not an absolute truth, founded in objective fact, but an imaginative truth.

Otherwise, Hare rarely makes use of theatrical stylization, beyond using lighting effects (to change the focus of a scene, or from scene to scene, rather than for any intrinsic expressiveness) and music, often written specially for his plays. The most obvious example of the latter is Teeth 'n' Smiles, where Nick Bicât wrote the music (and his brother, Tony Bicât, co-founder of Portable, the lyrics) "to provide another text, another world"[42] which the band at the centre of the play created for

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[40] Hare, "Introduction" to The History Plays, p. 10.
[41] Hare, "What excites me about Pravda . . .".
[42] McFerran, "End of the Acid Era", p. 14.

themselves when they played. Music has had a less independent status in other plays, having been used primarily to add to their mood.

Early in his career, Hare was interested in a particular aspect of Portable's work, namely the "stripping down of stage craft",[43] a part of the general tendency in Portable to concentrate on the content rather than the form of theatre, and of the similar rejection within the Fringe of traditional, 'bourgeois' culture. In 1975, Brenton argued that the Fringe failed

> . . . when the audience became sophisticated. At a discussion or talk in the bar afterwards, they wouldn't say, 'I don't think you're right about the police, they do a wonderful job', but something like 'Why don't you use acts like the Freehold, why do you still use words, why don't you use rock music?' The fringe circuit audiences became spuriously sophisticated. David Hare identified it quite rightly and that was when it was time to get out - it was becoming 'arty'.[44]

A stage direction in one of Hare's early plays revealed this interest in the paring down of the stage craft, namely in Slag (1970):

> The play is written deliberately with as few stage and acting instructions as possible. Blackouts should be instant, gaps between scenes brief, and scenery minimal. (p. 9)

It is tempting to see this as an example of the playwright standing back from the theatre, leaving it to the company to give his play meaning in performance, but this is not necessarily correct. What Hare insists on is that nothing, or as little as possible, should stand between the play's subject-matter and the audience. In fact, that the theatre should not draw attention to itself. The idea of "stripping down stage craft" is far from a new invention in the theatre. The Royal Court had deliberately attempted to create a simple style of presentation in the 1950s and I think it is possible to argue that Hare was as interested as Snoo Wilson in ensuring that what he had written should reach his audience without undue interference on the part of the theatre.

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[43] Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 110.

[44] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", pp. 11-12.

This leads on to the next aspect of the new theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, namely that of collective creation. I suggested, in the previous chapter on Snoo Wilson, that Hare was involved in such work on an experimental basis, in particular in Lay By (1971) and England's Ireland (1972). Indeed, he got the idea for the former and was instrumental in organizing the production (and writing) of the latter. He also, on two occasions, wrote plays with Howard Brenton, namely Brassneck (1973) and Pravda (1985), and he wrote one play for the company which 'institutionalized' collective creation, namely Fanshen (1975), for Joint Stock, of which he was himself a founder member. This is in itself sufficient evidence that he has responded in a positive manner to the new notion of collective creativity, but it is not evidence of a commitment to such creativity.

In fact, all the above-mentioned projects were either playwright-oriented or, in the case of Fanshen, allowed the playwright to create the playscript independently. None of them put Hare in a situation where he, as an expert craftsman, provided lines for the actors to speak on the basis of the actors' creative, improvisational work. This is how he described his work with Joint Stock on Fanshen:

> We did a five or six week workshop period, during which we explored different ways of approaching the work [William Hinton's Fanshen]. The actors mostly dealt with the question of 'how do I play Chinese?' which to me was a non-question, but to them was very important, and they satisfied themselves with their answers. The way we eventually dealt with it I worked out on my own, and then with Bill Gaskill and Max Stafford-Clark. And the story I found is one of, oh, a hundred and fifty possible narrative paths through that book.[45]

His own concerns as a playwright were distinct from those of the actors and his words do not give the impression that he was involved in intrinsically collective creation. That was not what Joint Stock tried to achieve, so it

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[45] David Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 114. Hare has also commented on Fanshen in connection with the screening of the television version in Melvyn Bragg and Ann McFerran, "Fanshen Yourself", Radio Times, 209, No.2710 (18-24 October 1975), pp. 7-8. Hare took part in a discussion about Fanshen and Joint Stock in 1977, printed as "After Fanshen: a Discussion" in Performance and Politics in Popular Drama, ed. David Bradby (1980).

is not surprising. Joint Stock was looking for a way of reconciling the two creative impulses in the modern British theatre, the two trends going back to the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop of the 1950s with their emphasis on writer and company respectively. As was the case with Wilson, it is possible to see a similarity with Peter Brook's ideas in the 1960s, in particular his attempt to get a writer and a company to create a play together in US (1966).

Hare did see certain advantages in collective writing, as he explained in connection with the Lay By project: it prevented the playwright both from indulging in character description and from indulging in his own private ideas. It was thus an aid in pointing the play's attention to the subject matter of the play and away from 'individualistic' concerns. But his insistence on the importance of the subject matter did not automatically lead him to do collective work. Asked, in 1975, whether he would want to continue working in the way he had with Joint Stock, he answered:

> It certainly was very exciting, and I enjoyed it very much, but, again, the main attraction was the subject matter.[46]

As could be seen from his further comments, it was not just the subject matter: Fanshen also satisfied his need to

> . . . do without the things that English playwrights usually rely on - irony, sarcasm, innuendo, all the shadings that make playwriting easy. There aren't many things that make playwriting easy, but the fluency of the English language is a tremendous help. Now if you choose to write in Ur Chinese, you haven't got that, you've only got the meaning of what's being said. And that was bracing, after years of tweedling around with words.[47]

Here, speaking as a playwright and not as a member of a collective, Hare showed an interest in stripping down his craft, but more than that, he was attempting to strip away the very kind of language that had always seemed to come naturally to him. Hare has been called "the university wit of his generation",[48] but I would suggest that he is a very different kind of

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[46] Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 115.

[47] Op.cit.

[48] Grant, "Voicing the Protest . . .", p. 122.

writer, albeit equally traditional. He writes in the witty, word-conscious tradition epitomized by Oscar Wilde but which, in fact, reaches back through the English comic tradition to the Elizabethan theatre. Hare is, for better or for worse, a 'quotable', epigrammatic writer, who would be more at home in the Age of Reason than in the Romantic Age, where Snoo Wilson's work has its ancestors. His desire to learn to write with greater precision can be seen as an expression of his Classicist attitude rather than as an attempt to learn to take part in a more collective organized type of creativity. The fact that he has collaborated twice with Howard Brenton does not disprove this: they seem - on those two occasions, twelve years apart - to have proved to themselves that they can work together as one. As Howard Brenton said about Brassneck,

> . . . I feel it's wholly my play, David feels it's wholly his, and yet it's neither of ours. Yet it was. Both of us take full responsibility for it as a work.[49]

However, as Hare pointed out such collaboration has its limits. Brassneck, he pointed out,

> . . . worked on the lowest common denominator. Howard and I stopped short at exactly the point where we began to diverge politically in our approach to the subject. Brassneck is as far as Howard and I can go in agreement. The play ends with the simple statement that these are 'the last days of capitalism'. On how exactly the system will be transformed, we couldn't agree.[50]

In the light of this, one understands Brenton's refusal to ascribe the play to himself more than to Hare: the authorship is genuinely shared. On the other hand, both were prevented from giving it the ending they personally wanted, and I believe that Hare saw this as a serious limitation of the collective method in general.

It is thus only in respect of the demands for due attention to the realities of the off-stage world that Hare can immediately be seen to respond to the pressure of the new theatre. However, other features of his work do show him to be indisputably a writer of the 1968 generation. One

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[49] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 19.

[50] Griffiths and Hare, "Current Concerns", p. 20.

of these is his claim that the playscript is no longer finished once and for all as a literary work. This can be seen from an introductory note to Hare's Teeth 'n' Smiles, where he says that

> When Teeth 'n' Smiles was first played it ran just under three hours. It was then cut during previews to what the English think is a more palatable length. This text accommodates most of those cuts, but not all of them. The text was further re-written for a West End production. I don't think plays are ever finished, and the version you read is one of several.[51]

This does not imply that the playwright's rights, as it were, to the playscript have changed, it has not become the property of the theatre. But it has, in the eyes of playwrights themselves, ceased to be a fixed entity: unlike a novel, it is a 'living organism', capable of being adapted to different environments.[52] Hare explained that he was more than willing to alter his scripts in rehearsal, indeed more than his directors found necessary,[53] and his Fanshen was changed at the request of the author, William Hinton, who pointed out that Hare had misunderstood certain details of Hinton's original book, Fanshen. In 1977, Hare took part in a debate - printed under the title "After Fanshen: A Discussion" - during which Trevor Griffiths remarked:

> I think that somehow we ought to get rid of this notion of the sacredness of the work, the notion of the work of art as organism. You don't plant a play; it's made, like anything else, like chairs, tables, houses . . . We make them, we unmake them, we can test them, find out if they work or not, and if they don't work we can make them work.[54]

Griffiths was emphasizing what he saw as significant similarities between playwriting and work outside the world of art, seeing playwrights as workers. I do not think that Hare saw his plays or himself in quite that way, but if one substitutes "painting, sculpture and poetry" for "chairs, tables, houses",

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51 David Hare, Teeth 'n' Smiles (1976), p. 9.

52 Tom Stoppard referred to this fact in a recent - "Darwin" - Lecture given at Cambridge. See Valerie Grosvenor Myer, "Stoppard on the Bard", PP, (February 1986), p. 6.

53 See Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 113.

54 "After Fanshen: a Discussion", in Performance and Politics . . ., ed. Bradby, p. 312.

one would almost certainly reach a description with which he could sympathize: theatre was hard work and in the modern theatre the creative work was shared to varying degrees, the playwright being able to draw on the expertise of the company to finish his script during rehearsals.

Even more significant was, perhaps, the way in which he had come to define theatre. He liked to compare playwriting with other types of writing, in particular with journalism, of which he often seems extremely suspicious, possibly because of its claim to being an objective reporter of the truth. His suspicion surfaced clearly in Pravda (1985) but could also be seen in Dreams of Leaving (1980) and, even further back, in Knuckle (1974). He referred specifically to journalism when, in 1976, he wished to suggest why the theatre might have a "unique propaganda function". It could, he said,

> . . . perform a function which no revolutionary newspaper can do and very few radical books are structured to do. This is to point out the absolutely vital and essential connection between unemployment and the family, areas that have tended to get categorised (even within the Marxist tradition) into Politics, Sociology, Economics and so on. I think this is a vital function and a genuinely artistic function.[55]

He was speaking in the register of 1970s political theatre, but between the lines one can discern a very traditional view of drama and theatre as art: he was claiming a special status, a special function for his own work in that it was supposed able to provide a more comprehensive vision than other, apparently more objective types of writing.

Paradoxically, he seems to have reached this point of view by working with Portable on tour during the early years of the Fringe. Like Brenton, he came to realize the special quality and power of an art form which relied on a live confrontation between actor and audience, and this affected him in several ways. For one thing, it taught him the limitations of the word used for its own sake in a theatre that, like Portable, aimed to establish

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[55] Peter Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.1: Portable Playwrights", PP, 19, No.5 (February 1972), p. 18.

a "one-to-one relationship between an actor and an audience who had not come for 'aesthetic' reasons".[56] As he commented,

> Literary values don't survive on the road. Long simmering plays can't survive. You must have plays with a strong physical force. You have to find the lowest common denominator for a show.[57]

More than this, he had come to realize that the tension between actor and audience in small-scale theatre imposed a quality of honesty on the playwright and, hence, the play:

> It's really only as a writer that I've begun to think myself straight, work out for myself the answers to political questions. It's a rigorous discipline, playwriting, in the sense that you need to answer questions which are never answered by polemic or journalism or propaganda. (. . .) Playwriting is a ruthlessly truthful medium, and I've come to believe in it more and more as I've gone on working. I think that the judgements the audience make show up insincerity, reveal the superficial, and more and more I have trouble writing until I've worked out in the greatest possible detail what I think myself about some subject or other, whatever I'm writing about.[58]

Nevertheless, such ruthless self-questioning does not improve the playwright's chances of creating a play which will communicate a particular content in a precise form to an audience, for the kind of theatre which he has in mind does not permit the playwright or the actors to treat the act of theatre as a controllable instance of communication:

> A play is not the actors, a play is not a text: a play is what happens between the stage and the audience. A play is a performance. So if a play is to be a weapon in the class struggle, then that weapon is not going to be the things you are saying; it is the interaction of what you are saying and what the audience is thinking. The play is in the air.[59]

The problem for the playwright intent on using the theatre for straight propaganda or information - and the advantage for a playwright who, like Hare, "chooses the theatre as the most subtle and complex way of addressing an

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[56] "Gambit Discussion: New Gothics, Realists and Phantasists", Gambit, 8, No.29 (1976), p. 28.

[57] Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 109.

[58] Ibid., p. 112.

[59] Hare, "A Lecture", p. 63.

audience he can find"[60]-is that the theatre is eminently suited for uncovering what can be described as 'imaginative truths' about human existence. That is, not a truth to be judged according to how it corresponds to known, objective facts, but a consensual truth, reached by the theatre's artists and the audience on the basis of their shared knowledge and experience as human beings. This is why Hare rejected the kind of political play which assumes, beforehand, that "certain questions have been answered even before the play has begun", but also the traditional type of radical art which assumes that its audience needs to be enlightened in its supposed ignorance.

Hare expected a modern theatre audience to know about social inequalities and economic exploitation and insisted on respecting both this and the uncontrollable nature of performance:

> . . . we are dealing, all of us, actors, writers, directors, with something we cannot calibrate because it is in the air and nowhere else . . .[61]

It emerged in his 1978 lecture that he still believed the playwright to have an essential function in the theatre as the person who could focus simultaneously on the historical reality of the off-stage world and on the ordinary lives of the people that he was writing about. He was not rejecting the idea that the theatre could have a political function, but he was insisting that its special strength lay in its inherent complexity and unpredictability.

Ultimately, it cannot be said that Hare has accepted the view of the playwright as primarily a member of an artistic collective. Working with film - Licking Hitler (1978), Dreams of Leaving (1980) and Wetherby (1985) - showed him that the writer/director in film controls his art to a quite different extent than the playwright in the theatre. In film he had great artistic freedom, whereas the theatre performance "must be re-created every

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[60] Ibid., p. 57.

[61] Ibid., p. 64.

night by many people, each of whom must understand the exact reason for each artistic decision",[62] as he put it in a 1982 article about working in television. Referring to the fact that the BBC is run by journalists, not artists, he made a further claim for the playwright as a special kind of truth-finder, and at the same time gave a description of the nature of the playwright's work as he saw it:

> . . . there is a sense in which journalists neither understand nor accept the claims of fiction. They are bewildered and hurt by the idea that a playwright offers something which is necessarily partial, which is only an aspect of the truth, because for them, of course, the truth is verifiable. . . . They are most unsettled by the storyteller's central claim - that by compressing events and telling unrepresentative stories in personal ways he may reveal truths which are at least as important as the journalist's.[63] /my emphasis/

Hare was clearly identifying himself as a literary artist, as a storyteller. Elsewhere, in an article published in the same year, he claimed a central position for theatre and television drama in contemporary literature, saying that

> . . . from the early fifties public forms became those in which the most gifted writers chose to work. 'Literary' England, isolated, still has no sense of this, still prefers to read and propagate the truly dreadful old novelists and poets who represent the official culture. . . . it is in music, television and theatre that artistic life flickers, not often excellent, but broadly to the point.[64]

After early years in opposition to that "official culture", he had reached a point when he was considering his work - and that of his contemporaries - as art and the playwright as an artist. A visit to America had convinced him

> . . . how lucky an English playwright is, for he works under the illusion that what he says may affect people's lives.[65]

This is certainly a far cry from the self-assurance of the contributors to Tom Maschler's Declaration (1957). Hare spoke with none of their authority, but he at least implied that the playwright's views can be of central

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[62] David Hare, "Ah! Mischief: The Role of Public Broadcasting" in David Edgar et al., Ah! Mischief, p. 47.

[63] Ibid., p. 43.

[64] David Hare, "Green Room", PP (October 1981), p. 49.

[65] Ibid., p. 49.

significance.

Hare, who had only hesitantly come to see himself as a playwright rather than a director, had reached a point when he could speak with some confidence of the value of his work and define it as art. Indeed, still speaking about working in television, he observed in 1982:

> In the shambles of the marketplace, there does seem to me an important role for the single voice, uncensored, the voice that promises to speak only when it has something to say . . .[66]

He has, increasingly, emphasized the importance of crafting the play, both in terms of form and content, on his own rather than in creative collaboration with theatre companies. However, working in the Fringe/alternative theatre of the 1960s and 1970s influenced his view of himself as a playwright. Most significantly, he has regarded the subject-matter of his plays, rather than their style and form, as important. Like Wilson, and like playwrights of the modern, post-1956 British theatre, he has not been able to refer to set values or set artistic standards in his work. However, where Wilson used this freedom to develop a view of life that comprised both the material and the immaterial, Hare concentrated on the material world and on a dual vision of human existence as being personal/individual and political/historical. It is here that one can detect this playwright's personal vision, one that is, in effect, as complex as Wilson's. Hare based it both on factuality (evidence of the influence of the growing political theatre of the 1970s) and on his view of the theatre as an innately complex and honest art-form. This meant that the theatre, in spite of its potential as a part of the class-struggle, was ill-suited as a dogmatic art-form or as a medium for precise communication. This makes him a traditional playwright in the sense that it points to the fictional, explorative nature of his work and to the fact that, as a playwright, he draws on the realities of ordinary human life. Although he is no Naturalist, Hare is a writer in the

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[66] Hare, "Ah! Mischief . . .", p. 46.

realistic tradition, intent on showing life as he sees it in such a way that it is directly recognizable to the audience.

But his view of himself as a playwright is not autocratic and he does not consider his playscripts to be final even after their first production, as a result of the conditions under which playscripts now come into existence. The most important indications of his belonging to the 1968 generation are his interest in politics and his view that the theatre is an art-form based on a confrontation between stage and audience. Neither an interest in politics nor a practical knowledge of the theatre are new attributes to the British: both have become part of modern British playwriting after 1956, but Hare does not share the 'instinctive leftism' which Kenneth Tynan claimed to find in the 1950s. He is part of a new political environment, where the failure of the Labour government of the 1960s and the new revolutionary ideals of his own generation are essential points of reference. To him, politics is not just a matter of theory: it is actual, recent history and a real part of his characters' lives. Similarly, his understanding of the theatre reflects not modern theories about the advisability of the playwright's integration into the theatre company, as was the case in the 1950s and 1960s: it is the result of his having worked in small-scale touring theatre. His view of life and his definition of theatre were both the result of his practical experience but when brought together they resulted in a complex view of both politics and theatre.

(iii) Most of David Hare's stage plays have been published, with the exception of What Happened to Blake (1970), which Hare does not himself set great store by; and Deathsheads, his contribution to the collection of short plays by himself, Wilson and others, staged in 1971 under the title Christmas Present. Excluding collaborations (Lay By, 1971, The Great Exhibition, 1972, and Brassneck, 1973), that leaves six original plays written for the theatre in 1968-78, namely How Brophy Made Good (1969), Slag (1970), The Great Exhibition (1972), Knuckle (1974), Teeth 'n' Smiles (1975) and Plenty

(1978). I do not consider Fanshen to be a purely original play, but its place in Hare's development as a writer means that it cannot be ignored here.

I would suggest that his three earliest published plays - How Brophy Made Good, Slag and The Great Exhibition - should be considered as experimental plays, showing how he came to terms with his (reluctantly entered) new profession. He does quite clearly become a writer, a word-artist, as is evident from the advances in narrative technique in his next two pieces, Knuckle and Fanshen. Knuckle is based on a genre of narrative fiction - the thriller - and Fanshen is his most 'epic' play in the Brechtian, 'anti-dramatic' sense. The two plays that follow, Teeth 'n' Smiles and Plenty, are basically in the representational style, using little overt theatricality, and the latter being more of an experiment in narrative structure than in the use of theatre. Given Hare's increasing interest in film and his awareness that a writer-director can control that medium to a far greater extent than he can the theatre, I would further suggest that he is, in fact, happier when he can express his personal vision both verbally and visually in his own terms, as he can in film. His playscripts give the impression that he is more interested in dialogue than theatricality and I suspect that his visual sense is more suited to film than to theatre. This would be supported by the fact that his most 'theatrical' play, A Map of the World (1982) is actually concerned with the relationship between reality and film realism rather than with theatre.

I have already referred to the profusion of stylistic features to be found in How Brophy Made Good (1969), Hare's first play, written for Portable Theatre and the only debut play to have been published by any of the three playwrights. Brophy was written to fill a gap in Portable's repertoire and it does show signs of having been composed in some haste by a writer keen to use every trick of the theatre current at the time. Nor does Hare appear to have been certain enough of the dramatic form to allow it to work on its own. The entire first scene is thus devoted to

exposition spoken by the entire company (three men and one woman) directly to the audience, explaining that the main character, Brophy, is a typical 1960s working class boy-made-good and turned into a media personality. We meet this character at a point in his short career when he has realized that he has become nothing but a continuous media event, a phenomenon to be analyzed and commented on by others but not taken seriously.

The entire action of the play is governed by the media: the revolution is planned but fails because the revolutionaries themselves turn it into a media event. Indeed, the play's characters are unable to take any action unless it resembles a television entertainment. In the play, real action is therefore impossible, and this is a theme to which Hare was to return on many later occasions. Through his characters, he explicitly characterizes Brophy as a fraud, who fictionalizes his own life:

> PETER. What he tells you is true: only the facts have been changed to protect the innocent.
> SMILES. What he tells you is false. Only the facts are true. (p. 87)
> (. . .)
> LEONARD. This man is fiction.
> SMILES. Only the fiction is true.
> ALL. The facts have been changed.
> (pp. 88-89)

Again, this theme would recur in Hare's later plays: the relationship between reality and fiction in the off-stage world, along with the claim that reality as presented to us through the media or even in history books need not be true and can indeed be considered to be a fiction, a version of the truth. Like Snoo Wilson, Hare reached the conclusion that the playwright's fiction could offer a valid alternative to the truth normally offered to us by governments etc.

One character, Peter, claims that "How Brophy Made Good is concerned with the sexual problems of the middle classes." (p. 95), which remark points forward to the playwright's continuing interest in the middle classes and, in particular, the way they handle the most personal side of their lives, namely their love life. In later plays, he was to use the love life of his characters as the focus of their experience in general. In Brophy he

makes a rather crude distinction between Brophy's uncomplicated approach to sex and, as a contrast, the inability of Peter, the literary middle-class revolutionary, to deal with it at all. Smiles, the play's only female character, is the subject of Brophy's attentions rather than a really individual character, and Leonard is little more than a caricature of a university-educated, homosexual left-wing intellectual.

The seeds of Hare's later work are present in Brophy but not integrated in the way they would eventually be. It differs from all of Hare's other plays in being a science fiction play, set in a fictional Britain of the 1970s and showing in fiction what he later considered a fact: the impossibility of a revolution in Britain. Insofar as it can be said to attempt to deal with the realities of revolution, Brophy can be grouped with Fanshen, but significantly he was only able to deal positively with revolution by moving outside Britain altogether, as in Fanshen. Hare is a pragmatist throughout, both in his approach to theatre and to the subject-matter of his own plays, and for that reason alone it was not likely that he would have written Brophy as a positive Utopian play: that would have been to take unacceptable liberties with reality. Fanshen, based on historical fact, was a different proposition.

Slag (1970) is surprisingly conventional, compared with Brophy. Hare dispenses with the stylistic gimmickry of that play and makes use of very straightforward and conventional playwriting techniques. Thus, he chooses a known environment as the play's setting: a private boarding school for girls, somewhere in the provinces. In this isolated place, he is free to manipulate his three female characters - Ann, the headmistress, and her two teachers, Elise and Joanne - so-to-speak under controlled conditions. Furthermore, using a school as his setting/with traditional situations for his characters: in conversation in the common room, during a cricket match against another school, cleaning the baths on governors' visiting day, a hockey game in the common room.

Where Brophy's time-structure is not defined, the published script

of Slag specifies that the play spans a few months in the present, from the summer of one year to January of the following, from a parents' visiting day of that summer, when only eight pupils are left, to the beginning of the Easter Term when only the three women are still at the school. On both occasions, they find themselves at a crossroads, having to decide how to save the school, and the fact that they are still there in the last scene becomes an indication of the futility of their lives and their failure to change them.

Slag starts with an attempt by Joanne, feminist and socialist, to begin the revolution against male society by swearing her two colleagues to sexual abstinence. To her, Brackenhurst is a political Utopia, a model for a future all-female society, but reality crushes her dreams. She is opposed by the other two: the authoritarian headmistress, Ann, who is willing to kill to develop her school along traditional lines, and who is finding sexual abstinence impossible; and Elise, Ann's ally, whose declared interests are sex and cricket. Elise becomes pregnant, in spite of her celibacy, through sheer will-power and thus seems to prove that womankind can survive without men. This, and her discovery that Ann is, in fact, trying to poison her political opponent, Joanne, makes Elise change sides and she escapes as Joanne finally stages her revolution. However, this is only apparently successful, for Elise's pregnancy is, predictably, not real, and Joanne only has a toy gun with which to fight her revolution. At the end of the play, the three women are still at the school, albeit without a single pupil. Elise and Ann are reconciled and the latter is full of hope for the future, although the school does not seem to have one.

In spite of the characters' declared wish to change the school they all fail to understand that change is impossible as long as they remain at the school, trying to reform the system which is obviously crumbling around them. They are as much caught up in the institution they work in, as the revolutionaries in Brophy were trapped in the world of the media, and they are, in a similar manner, rendered incapable of acting. Joanne's puzzlement

at the absence of action reveals a gap between ideal and reality, and a certain disillusionment with left-wing political ambitions:

> Why are the workers silent, Ann? Why does the revolution land with such a sigh: Twenty-five years the war is over, and everyone trying to get the workers to respond. And they won't. Where are the working women? Lulled by romantic love and getting home to cook the dinner. (p. 75)

Joanne, the character, herself provides part of the answer to this question, central to Hare himself, for she draws on fiction for her inspiration rather than real experience, as seen in her reference to Robinson Crusoe in her criticism of Brackenhurst (pp. 12-13) and her attempt to tunnel her way out of the school in the manner of the war-film, The Great Escape (p. 67). In her attempts to solve real problems she draws on 'un-reality', on fiction, but when challenged by Ann to make practical suggestions for improvement, her only answer is, "Do as you like. You're in charge" (p. 13). Elise is equally unable to correlate dreams and reality, her pregnancy illustrating the extent to which her hopes of becoming a mother will take her into pure self-delusion, and Joanne's delight at this the "first feminist birth" (p. 73) showing her lacking sense of reality. Ann's ambition to expand the school is, of course, equally unrealistic.

By setting the play at a remote school and peopling it with just three women, Hare had been able to create a better defined fictional world than in Brophy, something that, in conjunction with the much simpler style, made it a much more efficient play. Within this fictional world, he allows his characters, caricatures rather than fully-rounded and detailed character studies, to engage in a series of verbal exchanges, which reveal their attempts to gain control over each other. This allows him to exploit a basic and essential ingredient of theatre: conflict. Such conflict is not restricted to verbal exchange in Slag. It is also seen in various forms of physical action: Joanne making Ann leave the stage to investigate the presence of a (fictional) dog-dropping on the tennis courts (pp. 18-19) and a (fictional) leak on the roof of the school (p. 24ff); Elise making Ann bite off one of her - Elise's - toe-nails in a display of sexual domination

(p. 27f); Ann and Elise giving Joanne a faulty deck-chair which collapses under her (p. 33f); Elise causing a bucket of water to fall on the unsuspecting Joanne's head (p. 42); and Joanne messing up the floor with Ajax on Governors' visiting day (p. 46). The women are as childish as their actions suggest: cooped up in their peculiar environment, they have little to do beyond fighting each other. Cut off from all real issues, they are reduced to simple, childish powerstruggles which, finally, lead nowhere.

The dialogue reveals the women as being involved in unreal, purposeless conflict, where no single character is allowed to dominate. Ann remarks that Joanne has "a hell of a way with words" (p. 54), and the same might be said of all three as they engage in word-play but not in really productive verbal interaction. Like their actions, their speech remains superficial, if witty, and that is true of the play as such, which shows Hare's ability to write entertaining dialogue, though, sadly, with little depth or insight.

Slag - which Hare does not himself hold in high regard - certainly shows that Codron's judgment of Hare's potential was correct: it is an effective, entertaining play, though one with little promise of a challenge to dramatic conventions. Hare made use of straightforward dramatic techniques to produce a playscript that seemed remote from the anarchic type of Fringe plays written at the time, and which perhaps also showed early evidence that he was most at home in traditional theatre.

In The Great Exhibition (1972) Hare wrote for a conventional proscenium arch stage and made full use of the resources this offered him, by setting the play in a 'solid room', a conventional box-set, which could be 'magically' dissolved before the eyes of the audience and the play's main character, Charlie Hammett.

It resembles Brophy and Slag in several respects. Like the latter, it shows characters trapped in a particular environment, and as in both, its characters are incapable of taking action to change their own lives. However, and in this respect it differs from Slag, it shows that there is an

important world outside the limited environment where the play's characters find themselves during most of the play: the study-sitting room of the main character, Labour MP Charlie Hammett. Hammett leave his home - or rather his home, a conventional box-set, leaves him:

> The back wall of the set recedes, and the two side-pieces slide into the wings. MAUD /his wife/ goes out with the back of the set. The top of the set is hoisted into the flies and the furniture in the middle is either pulled back or lowered through traps. It's essential that this should be a quite magical effect of the whole room receding and flying apart as HAMMETT looks at it, darkening. (p. 71)

At the point in the play where this happens, Hammett is trying to escape from his failure as a husband and politician, hoping to change what has caused the failure: his inability to face other people. His way of doing this is as strange as it is revealing: he flashes in front of a number of women on Clapham Common. One of these, Catriona, turns out to be an old friend of his wife. Hammett takes her home, gives her his wife's place, and prepares to re-enter Parliament as a Labour member, but before he can do so, Catriona confesses to be on a mission on behalf of her Tory father, to lure Hammett over to the Conservatives. Hammett's wife, Maud, has meanwhile tried to take over his old constituency. Both women have kept Hammett under surveillance, using the same private investigator as Hammett himself employs to spy on his wife. In this play, it transpires, nobody can be trusted, nobody is quite what he or she seems, but at the same time nobody can escape from their roles, nobody can change.

Hare creates a wholly theatrical world for his theatrical characters. The apparent solidity of that world, the box-set, is seen to dissolve before the audience's eyes, warning them that they are watching a theatrical illusion. The characters themselves are almost wholly unreal, presented not as psychological portraits but as comic characters: the MP flashes to regain his self-confidence but proves himself a poser in both his private and his public life. Maud, his wife, a failed actress turned casting-director, who leaves Hammett for Jerry, an Australian merchant-banker turned

drop-out, a left-over from the psychodelic summer of 1967, with whom she travels to see that great theatrical phenomenon of the 1960s: La Mama (Nairobi and La Mama Birmingham, in this instance). Linking all these characters is Abel, the private investigator, who hides, farcically, in cupboards, working for three of the play's characters simultaneously. The only character with some claim to seriousness and honesty is Clough, former Labour Home Secretary, who believes politics to be a nasty profession for which he himself, as a self-confessed nasty character, is ideally suited.

In Slag, no character was allowed to win the verbal battles, but in The Great Exhibition the characters are at least given more effective verbal weapons. Both Hammett and Maud are eloquent people, involved in a more conventional verbal battle than was seen in either Brophy or Slag: that between a husband and wife breaking away from each other in the midst of arguments, self-recrimination and ruthless criticism of the other party. This verbal struggle, aided by Hammett's identity crisis, allows us an insight into his and his wife's background, and it is really here that the play's topicality becomes clear. Hammett belongs to the generation before Hare's own, the radicals of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, he met his wife at the 1962 Aldermaston March, where he persuaded both her and himself that he should become a politician, not out of actual political conviction but because of his own eloquence.

From the start Hammett's politics are thus superficial, based on a kind of 'theatricality', but also on a typical middle-class misunderstanding of the nature of his Sunderland working-class constituency. He says, to Clough:

> I can't talk about what I believe in. I can talk about anything else. Eloquence should be reserved for things that don't matter. I went into socialism like other people go into medicine or the law. It was a profession. Half out of eloquence, half out of guilt. (p. 68)

Maud, to whom Hare gives a number of revealing remarks in the play, explains what has caused his guilt:

> We are rich, we are white, we are middle-class, we are English. We are the single most over-privileged group of people in the world. (p. 80)

Such affluence takes away the middle-class characters' 'right' to be unhappy and complain about their lot, and Hammett accepts the corollary, that the working classes are more 'genuine' and deserving of attention than his own class. Indeed, Maud herself, surrounded most of the time by actors, married Hammett to gain access to 'real' working-class people. The middle-class characters are obviously unhappy but their inability to come to terms with their unhappiness and even fight it, is a recurrent motif in Hare's plays, one which he was later to approach with greater sympathy towards his characters. Instead of self-pity, he came to see it as a symptom of a greater malaise in post-war Britain. However, in order to do so he had to reach a more serious view of the middle-class than he achieved here.

In this play there is a clear feeling that he was defining his own central interests: the problems of (a part of) the British middle class; the apparent paradox that affluence had not brought with it happiness and satisfaction in post-war Britain, seen in the context of political and historical developments. He claims that Brassneck (1973, with Brenton) was the first play where he began to concern himself with recent British history, but even here, in The Great Exhibition, one can see it emerging.

But there is also a feeling that he was still trying to find his way in the theatre, learning how to make subject matter and expression one, so that what was still an entertaining exploration of the theatre and its resources could become a way of exploring human experience in order to reveal the playwright's insight and lead the audience towards insight of their own.

He achieves this in Knuckle (1974), a play based on a narrative form, the thriller. On hindsight it is clear why Hare has chosen the thriller. Not only is it his favourite type of narrative fiction, the crime story is a constant influence on his work in general: Brophy's downfall in How Brophy Made Good is caused by his alleged murder of a middle-class revolutionary; Ann in Slag attempts to murder Joanne, who poses a threat to her rule at

Brackenhurst; in The Great Exhibition, a private detective forms a link between the main characters. In Knuckle the thriller form dominates the entire play: an amateur detective, Curly Delafield, international arms dealer, has returned to his childhood Guildford after twelve years' absence, to investigate the disappearance of - and possible murder of - his younger sister, Sarah. But Knuckle, as it turns out, is much more than a murder investigation. Hare uses his main character, Curly, to show his audience that peaceful Guildford has an undercurrent of fear and guilt. Under the apparent perfection of middle-class affluence lies a moral vacuum. Curly penetrates the surface to uncover the real story behind his sister's disappearance, a story of ruthless economic exploitation and blackmail, the brutal reality underneath the Zen-like perfection of Curly's merchant-banker father's life. As he pursues his investigation, Curly realizes that the real problem of Sarah's death is not that she may have been murdered on a beach near Eastbourne, what is at issue is not violent crime: it is goodness. Sarah is, in fact, the only good, innocent person in Guildford - at least the Guildford of Hare's imagination - and the characters who knew her are all, deep down, afraid that their intrinsically amoral lives, the way they make their living on the money-market with no consideration for their fellow human beings, has driven Sarah to commit suicide. Such a gesture would implicate them all, including her own father and Curly.

In The Great Exhibition, guilt and a bad conscience were Hammett's motive for entering politics, but they also prevented him from becoming a complete human being, from understanding himself and the people around him. Curly, on the other hand, is much more like the straightforwardly nasty Clough, whose only redeeming feature is that he knows what he is doing. Curly, an arms dealer, is clearly involved in an immoral occupation, but, as he says,

> I don't run them. I sell them. It's a perfectly legal profession. Like selling insurance. (p. 18)

He is not unaware of the moral implications of his work - "I'm a tissue of

moral issues", as he puts it (p. 14) - but he cannot see it in those terms himself. This duality in his view makes him a convincing dramatic character, although Hare fails to allow him to develop as a result of that conflict in himself. He uncovers the story behind Sarah's disappearance with detachment and with an unscrupulousness to match that of the merchant bankers and stockbrokers peopling Hare's Guildford, and nobody is better suited than he to uncover their weakness: the fear that the superficial perfection of their lives, its quiet discretion, can be disturbed, for he knows that fear himself.

In fact, Curly has chosen his profession because it was the noisiest he could find and therefore the one most unlike his father's. The mistake in his reasoning is obvious. There is no real difference between Curly's attitude to work and life, and that of his father, Patrick: Curly has his own asceticism to match Patrick's perfection, he needs nothing, there is no "pleasure that isn't more pleasurable for being denied" (p. 20). Curly can understand his sister, Sarah's disgust for their father's life-style, but there is an essential difference between Sarah and Curly: she has accepted the moral implications of capitalism (a word which nobody in the play uses), that she herself has "contracted one of Surrey's contagious diseases - moral gumrot, internal decay" (p. 8). She accepts the consequence, leaves her father and, when she hears that he is involved in the financing of a building scheme that has cost an elderly lady her home, she stages a disappearing act on the beach at Eastbourne.

Having initially left home, she moves in with her friend Jenny, manageress of the only breathing hole, the only place for hopes and dreams in Guildford: the Shadow of the Moon Club. Jenny, a woman as tough as Curly, presents him with a moral test, which he fails. Jenny is the first woman Curly has been interested in for several years, and the one to challenge his cynical approach to life, which he explains to her:

> CURLY . . . Newspapers can be bought, judges can be leant on, politicians can be stuffed with truffles and cognac. Life's a racket, that we know.
> JENNY Christ, I'll make a person of you yet.
> CURLY Forget it. (Pause) Listen - sugar plum - the horror of the world. The horror of the world is there are no excuses left. There was a time when men who ruined other men, could claim they were ignorant or simple or believed in God, or life was very hard, or we didn't know what we were doing, but now everybody knows the tricks . . . at last greed and selfishness and cruelty stand exposed in white neon: men are bad because they want to be. No excuses left. (pp. 40-41)

What Jenny can offer Curly - implicitly - is an opportunity to enter into an honest relationship with somebody who stands outside the morally rotten world of stockbroker Guildford. The alternative she represents is, perhaps, not well defined within the play, but Curly's attitudes make it obvious that it is needed, and through their words and action, Jenny and Sarah imply that such a moral alternative can exist. Curly in unable to accept it. Having discovered the real story behind Sarah's disappearance and his father's involvement, he chooses to cover it up:

> /Curly:/ I was holding my father's life in my hands. I had to make up my mind. If I ditched my father, told the newspapers the story of those days, all I would be doing would be to bang down my tiny flag on the same mountain-side as Sarah. Somewhere every so often in this world there will appear this tiny little weed called morality. It will push up quietly through the tarmac and there my father will be waiting with a cement grinder and a shovel to concrete it over. It is inadequate. It cannot help us now. There are no excuses left. Two sides. Two sides only. (p. 50)

He pretends to Jenny that Sarah has, in fact, committed suicide, but by then Jenny already knows the truth and is in possession of a letter, presumably from Sarah, confirming that she is alive and advising Jenny to

> Insist we are degraded./Resist all those who tell you otherwise./At all costs fight innocence./Forbid ignorance./ Startle your children./Appal your mothers./Know everything./ Love everything./Especially - /Decay. (p. 51)

At the end of the play, Jenny and Curly both know that Sarah is likely to be alive, and yet Curly simply decides to return to his arms trading. But an essential fact has been established: even if amorality appears to rule supreme, a sense of morality does exist, and if Curly chooses to

ignore it, his choice is conscious and, as it is immoral and wrong, it makes him guilty of deliberate immorality. In his own words, "men are bad because they want to be". Curly, like Clough in The Great Exhibition, knows what he is doing, and for Hare that implies an important development in his view of his own characters as human beings: no longer 'guilty' like Hammett, they could be held responsible for their actions. Curly is a villain and the crime investigated in the play is not a murder but Curly's abandonment of morality.

Hare turns the thriller into a serious play, using the investigation typical of the thriller to investigate a contemporary moral problem: the fact that in the present, irreligious age there are no excuses for acting immorally: people know, or should know, what they are doing, and they can therefore also be held responsible for what they do. However, this does not necessarily make them change their behaviour. In spite of his self-knowledge, Curly is unchanged at the end of the play, and this is typical among his successors in later plays: they cannot act on their own knowledge, theory and practice remain separate, and this, I would suggest, is what prevented Hare from writing simple political plays. Reality, including political reality, is complex.

By borrowing the thriller form, Hare found a way of giving his material a shape that could contain it and give it clarity: form and content became one. But Knuckle is also very clearly a 'written' work, relying on dialogue rather than physical action. Hare is even able to make extensive use of the first-person narrative encountered in some crime fiction, and used in the play by its 'narrator', Curly, giving it a 'literary' tone. Of course, Hare uses this convention in his own way by contrasting Curly's self-knowledge - as revealed in his narrative - with his failure to act. By using an accepted form of fictional narrative, he is also able to take liberties with reality and create a fictional Guildford, where good can be confronted with bad without the playwright having to take actual, contemporary facts into account except as they are

relevant to his story. Knuckle therefore demonstrated that Hare was aware of the power of fiction as a means of suspending reality for the duration of the play in order to comment on reality.

From Knuckle onwards, Hare appeared as a playwright, confident that he could make artistic statements about the Britain of his own time through his writing. Indeed, beyond sound effects and very straightforward lighting effects, Knuckle makes few demands on the theatre and apart from a brief display of acrobatics by Curly and Jenny (Scene 8), no special demand for performance skills is made beyond those associated with straight acting. The scene does, however, show that Hare can make use of isolated instances of visual theatre to make a particular point: it shows Curly and Jenny as equals in physical terms, shortly before Jenny will demonstrate her ability to outmanoeuvre Curly in other ways. Thus, the physical theatre of the Fringe might be said to have left traces in this play by Hare, but not much beyond what might have been found in a play written before 1968. The most important evidence that Hare is a post-1968 writer, found in this play, is the 'toughness' of his attitude to Curly, the fact that he does not allow Curly any excuses for his behaviour. Hare had, on several occasions, rejected the Humanism associated with the Royal Court, and in Curly he created a character who showed the irrelevance of such Humanism. He does, however, retain his faith in mankind: Sarah's presence (even off-stage) suggests that morality and a sense of justice still exist.

Fanshen (1975) has a unique position in Hare's work between 1968 and 1978 in that it is the most conventionally 'political' of his plays, coming closest to what one would expect of such a piece in the early 1970s. It has a 'collective central character': the people of a Chinese village rather than any individual, and it "should be played with about nine actors taking the thirty or so parts" (p. 13). In Brophy, the use of stylization and of shared narrative dialogue had counteracted a complete concentration on Brophy himself. In Slag, none of the characters had been allowed to dominate the play. The Great Exhibition had a dominant central character, Hammett, but

he was to a certain extent counterbalanced by his wife, Maud, who was given the task, as a character, of providing a comment on their marriage and the reasons for Hammett's behaviour. Curly is the obvious candidate for the central character in Knuckle, but not only is he to some extent balanced by Jenny but also by an absent character, Sarah, who is arguably his real counterpart. The growing tendency in Hare's plays in 1968-78 was towards making a couple rather than a single individual the central character. Fanshen, as I have already noted, goes even further than this by making the population of a Chinese village, Long Bow, a collective central character. This is entirely appropriate, for the play tells the story of developments in a community, not in any particular individual.

Even more typical of Fanshen as a political piece is its structure: it is, in the Brechtian sense, epic rather than dramatic, narrating the story of how Long Bow underwent a revolutionary change between 1946 and 1949, told in a series of scenes - "sections" - each of which is intended to make a particular point, as the author makes explicit in the introduction to the published edition: "At the end of each scene ask the question: what political point is this scene making?" (p. 9). In Fanshen, Hare employs the Brechtian 'alienation effect' (found in, for instance, The Life of Galileo) of giving scenes 'titles', the kind of device used by Brecht to break up the action and prevent the audience from becoming engulfed in the play's plot, directing their attention, instead, to the play's argument. This is what Hare wanted to achieve, for the play's argument was close to his heart: the process - seen here in an actual and recent revolution - of correlating theory with practice. In previous plays, this had been a problem suffered by individuals, for instance by Hammett and Curly, but Hare saw it as one typical of the left wing as such in Britain in the late 1960s: their inability to correlate their revolutionary theory with the actual, non-revolutionary situation in Britain at the time.

He was concerned with this in both Brophy and Teeth 'n' Smiles, but in order to present the struggle between revolutionary theory and practice

as a real struggle, he naturally could not write about conditions in Britain. In Fanshen, he deliberately tried to work on a wider canvas:

> I think like everybody I was sick to death with writing about England - about writing about this decadent corner of the globe. The excitement of Fanshen was to write about a society and to cover a period of time in which one felt that people's lives were being materially and spiritually improved, in a culture that was completely different to anything we knew about. We wanted to write a positive work using positive material.[67]

His writing should touch on matters of wider importance for his audiences, matters that involved both the material and the spiritual side of their existence. Fanshen represented an attempt to widen the scope of his art and change its emphasis:

> European literature of the last seventy years annotates the decline of the West, both in theory and in practice. Nearly every outstanding piece of writing since 1900 belongs to a culture of dissent. Writers have been trapped in negatives, forced back into sniping and objection, or into the lurid colours of their private imaginations. At some stage they will have to offer positive models for change, or their function will decay as irrevocably as the society they seek to describe.[68]

The subject of Fanshen - communist revolution - makes it unlikely that he was thinking of giving up dissent to join the cultural mainstream, but it is also clear that he did not want to stay on the cultural fringe: he wanted the playwright to intervene more actively and positively in off-stage reality, perhaps even to inform his work with a vision.

In Fanshen, he could not mean a personal vision since this script was the outcome of collaborative work, and he does say , above, that "we", not "I","wanted to write a positive work". Fanshen is unlike any other play-script bearing Hare's name . Although written by him alone, it bears the stamp of the company producing it: Joint Stock, a company which stressed the actors' right to take part in the creation of the play. This is seen in the way in which the play requires the actors to handle

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[67] Hare, "From Portable Theatre . . .", p. 114.

[68] David Hare, "Author's Preface" in Hare, Fanshen (1976), p. 7.

fast changes from one role to another. Such versatility is also demanded by the complexity of the narrative, which only the actors in performance can make clear.

Hare seems to have rejected the episodic structure in his later plays - he and Brenton are reported to have rejected it in favour of more conventional story-telling[69] - but the sheer complexity and range of the original material, and the fact that it was set in a remote part of the world and a culture entirely different from his own, gave him the opportunity to write in a manner atypical of the British literary tradition. He could adopt a neutral style of writing which gave the subject matter priority over matters of style and could thus achieve greater clarity than, for instance, in such a literary pastiche as Knuckle, where the style itself attracts the audience's attention. Fanshen must be seen as an "exercise" for the playwright, an exercise in clarifying his own language and in treating, in a form which he would not use again, the problem of how to propose a new reality in political theory and turning that imagined reality into fact through a dialectical process. Because it is concerned with an imagined reality, it is, of course, of central interest to the playwright, himself an imaginer of reality.

I have not touched on the story told in Fanshen - the story of how the village of Long Bow goes through the process of becoming a revolutionary community - having preferred to deal with the issues relating specifically to the playwright. In later plays, Hare rejected the 'Brechtian' approach, but one can perhaps detect a trace of Fanshen in his next play, Teeth 'n' Smiles (1975), where the main character again seems to be a group rather than an individual. This time, the group is not a whole community but a rock group, brought into conflict with established culture. The play tells the

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69 Peter Hall, in Peter Hall's Diaries, ed. John Goodwin, writes, in the entry for 31 May 1979: "David Hare to see me full of cheer. He says he and Howard Brenton had now decided that those epic plays of many self-contained short scenes that are so exciting to write and to act, actually burn at a lower level for the audience than plays that follow through." (1983), p. 441.

story of the group's visit to Jesus College, Cambridge (Hare's own College), where they are to play a gig at the May Ball on 9 June 1969. At the end of the play, the group has broken up, essentially because its minority appeal has made it economically non-viable in the eyes of its veteran manager, Saraffian. That minority-appeal is caused by its vocalist, Maggie, a former folk-singer and a member of a radical movement in music in the 1960s. The group's collapse is bound up with Maggie's arrest for possession of hard drugs, an offense of which she is not guilty: the drugs have been placed in her bag by the group's bass player, who is too dazed by drugs to save Maggie. Maggie's arrest is also bound up with the collapse of her relationship with Arthur, her song-writer. Arthur originally gave up his music studies at Jesus College when he met Maggie, the folk-singer, because she made it seem "academic just to go on reading it" (p. 58), and the collapse of the group and of his and Maggie's relationship suggests that what motivated both has ceased to exist.

Hare has said that this play is about "whether talking has any point at all",[70] and within the play he cleverly makes this point by interrupting the action with musical numbers where the rock group retreat from the play's otherwise dominant dialogue to express themselves in musical performance. But the music does more than that. It acts as a musical "sub-text" to the play, fully integrated into its structure. The first set (p. 27ff) illustrates the group's typical style of defiant, anti-authoritarian songs, seen in the chorus to Maggie's number, "Passing Through":

> Shut your mouth honey
> I don't wanna know your name
> Shut your mouth honey
> I don't care why you came
> Pass me the bottle
> Roll over let's do it again
> (p. 29)

These words express Maggie's refusal to settle down, and as the assumption is that they have been written for her by Arthur, one would expect

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[70] Ann McFerran, "End of the Acid Era", p. 15.

him to share their sentiment. But something has happened to Arthur: he sees himself as having been 'made' by Maggie, he has come to define himself in terms of what she is (p. 80). This, as an undergraduate, Anson, discovers by interviewing Maggie, is the opposite of the normally accepted publicity version of Maggie's and Arthur's relationship, which presents her as playing Trilby to Arthur's Svengali. Maggie accepts neither version: she will not be pinned down, she insists on being a free agent and, in particular, she denies the primary importance of Arthur's writing. Just before the second set Arthur explains the significance of his work, his 'art', only to have Maggie turn on him:

> ARTHUR: Leonardo da Vinci drew submarines. Five hundred years ago. They looked pretty silly. Today we are drawing a new man. He may look pretty silly.
> MAGGIE (to ARTHUR): You still want it to mean something, don't you? You can't get over that, can you? It's all gotta mean something . . . that's childish, Arthur. It don't mean anything. (p. 52)

It has certainly ceased to mean anything to her, as can be seen when her next set (p. 53f) fails to materialize: she parodies her press-release's attempt to make her, personally, 'mean' something, undermining her own 'meaningfulness' by singing nothing but "Yeah yeah yeah . . .". The next number, sung by the whole group except Maggie, gives an impression of what the group's work is intended to do: it is, in fact, political, directed at the class that is being educated at Cambridge. The first line of Don't Let the Bastards Come Near You goes, "I come from the rulers and you come from the ruled" and the song expresses the former's feeling of solidarity with the latter, as is seen in the chorus:

> Don't let the bastards come near you
> They just want to prove that you're sane
> To eat up your magic and change you
> So I'll help keep the bastards away.
> (p. 66)

But the group expressing this solidarity (presumeably in Arthur's lyrics) is already breaking up. Its manager, Saraffian, has arrived with a replacement for Maggie: Randolph, an old pop-idol from the 1950s, the time when pop music was still business and had no ambitions as art. He leads the third

set and finds himself accepted without problems by the group, whose allegiance to the meaning of Arthur's words is, obviously, not sincere. The last two scenes are given over to Maggie's confrontation with the two men in her life: her lover, Arthur, and her manager, Saraffian. Arthur has, throughout the play, revealed that he does not understand Maggie. The question, asked about Maggie's assumed addiction, "What is she on?", almost becomes his catch-phrase in the play, parodied by other characters. He believes that she is behaving irrationally, perhaps because of drugs, but she points out to him that he has changed. He may have given up his academic studies to get closer to actual music, but he has returned to a position where verbalization and intellectual analysis are of the greatest importance. And so she rejects him.

In the last scene, Maggie, already suspected by the police of possessing drugs and resigned to going to prison, has burned down a tent to the delight of the group and its manager Saraffian. He declares that she has "totally restored my faith in the young" (p. 81) and proceeds to tell an anecdote from his own youth in war-time London when, as a young working-class man, he experienced the bombing of the Cafe de Paris. In the darkness, somebody took him for dead and looted him, and this experience has helped him form his own world-view:

> He is looting the dead. And my first thought is: I'm with you, pal. I cannot help it, that was my first thought. Even here, even now, even in fire, even in blood, I am with you in your scarf and cap, slipping the jewels from the hands of the corpses. . . . And I just brush myself down and feel lightheaded, for the first time in my life totally sure of what I feel.
> (p. 83)

But Maggie is quick to see through this attempt to base a career of commercial exploitation of music on a rationalization of war-time a-morality:

> MAGGIE: What a load of shit. You're full of shit, Saraffian. What a crucial insight, what a great moment in the Cafe de Paris. And what did you do the next thirty years? (Pause.) Well, I'm sure it gives you comfort, your nice little class war. It ties up things very nicely, of course, from the outside you look like any other clapped-out

> businessman, but inside, oh, inside you got it all worked out. (Pause.) This man has believed the same thing for thirty years. And it does not show. Is that going to happen to us? Fucking hell, somebody's got to keep on the move. (p. 84)

At this point, Maggie broadens the play's perspective, for Hare lets her object not only to Arthur's betrayal of his own 1960s ideals but also to the way in which an older generation, Saraffian's, has failed to take action on its knowledge about the "class war". Arthur is reminiscent of Hammett in The Great Exhibition, each of them illustrating two different radical tendencies in the 1960s, and Saraffian shows Hare's horizon widening to the entire post-war period. This widening of his interest had already been clear in his and Brenton's Brassneck (1973), and it was to be central to his next stage play, Plenty. In the context of the Teeth, Arthur is not any better than Saraffian: both have failed to act on their original insight, and both have come to treat Maggie as an 'object' rather than as a person. Arthur has become dependent on her at a personal level, although the original attraction was, probably, their shared political ideals, whereas Saraffian has turned her into merchandise, sold in the market-place as 'art'. Both fail, Arthur being too intellectual, and Saraffian too shallow.

Inevitably, it must be asked whether Maggie herself has anything to offer that is 'better' than the male characters. Although she is too obviously flawed to be presented as an ideal by the playwright, she does, implicitly, represent the force of radical ideals of the 1960s, the ideals of socialist revolution, emptied of the idealism but with the defiance intact. The play is set twelve months after the famous summer of 1968 but it is already obvious that the world after 1968 is not radically different.

Finally, and unsurprisingly given that the play is by Hare, she presents a moral problem. She goes to prison for an offense which she has not committed, in an act of defiance both against conventional norms of justice and against the failed ideals of Arthur and Saraffian,

and she leaves a gap in the play by consciously refusing to act rationally. Her going to prison does not 'mean' anything, indeed, it is a denial of the very idea that everything must mean something, an idea implicit in Arthur's and Saraffian's constant need to explain themselves. But, even more significantly, it is a protest against the failure of other characters to act. The play does not, perhaps, prove that there is no point in 'talking', but it does indicate that talking is not enough. The characters in Teeth seem only to have a choice between talking or escaping into music. Given that neither leads anywhere, Maggie's decision to go to prison is, at least, not more irrational than the alternatives.

Teeth ends with musical numbers, two solos by Arthur and Maggie, his a thoughtful song about the need to explain, and hers a defiant warning. The chorus of hers, Last Orders (Last orders on the Titanic . . .), goes:

> Because the ship is sinking
> And time is running out
> We got water coming in
> Places we don't know about
> The tide is rising
> It's covering her name
> The ship is sinking
> But the music remains the same
> (p. 92)

The political situation to which Arthur and Maggie both responded in the 1960s has not changed, and their music has not made any difference to it.

I have chosen to refer extensively to the songs, both because they are intended by the author to throw light on the plot, and because they are evidence that Hare would, on occasion, collaborate with other artists: the songs were written by his director-colleague from Portable, Tony Bicât, and the music by his brother, Nick Bicât, who has also written incidental music for a number of Hare's plays. Because it relies on musical performance, this play also relies on the skills of the performers, even if in a very specialized way: the cast must also be musicians. As a playscript, it it quite different from Fanshen: not a 'Brechtian' episodic play but rather a more conventional one, with the musical numbers as a kind of alienation

effect. Rather than showing him as a playwright exploiting the full register of stage expressiveness, it reveals him admitting that his own art-form co-exists with other art-forms, in this instance music, and, in a limited way, that creative collaboration has become an established principle in the theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, but it is very much Hare's play, a verbal structure whose meaning can be derived from a reading of the script.

In spite of Hare's emphasis on the play's factuality - he based it partly on his own experience - its significance lies in the fact that he turned this factuality into fiction, not giving a factual account of events in 1969 at Cambridge but rather an imaginative version of them. Teeth is, in the final analysis, a metaphor expressing the author's own view of reality.

The last of his stage plays to fall within the 1968-78 period was not staged until three years later, in 1978. Plenty was presented at the new National Theatre, where he had already directed Brenton's Weapons of Happiness (1976), and it was, like Teeth, directed by himself, with incidental music by Nick Bicât.

Plenty joins together themes that had emerged in earlier plays. It is concerned with the absence of radical change in Britain (already dealt with in How Brophy Made Good, Slag, The Great Exhibition and Teeth) placing particular emphasis on the apparent inability of the British to take radical action even when, intellectually, they seem to understand the need for it. In The Great Exhibition, he had begun to look at the relationship between the private lives of his characters and the wider, public issues that surround them, and he developed a tough view of this relationship in Knuckle. The exhortation to continue the fight, given in Sarah's letter, was unusual in Hare's work. Nothing similar was found in Teeth, and the explicit politics of Fanshen were special to that play. Although he believes the playwright to have the ability - and right - to provide his audience with positive 'models', he is unable to write a wholly idealistic play, one that takes no account of the realities and complexities of ordinary life.

This puts him outside the mainstream of revolutionary writing in the British theatre of the 1970s, as does his concentration on middle-class characters, whom he shows baffled by the difference between what they think should happen, and what does happen to them, who are not given political consciousness by events around them. His characters do not conform to Roger Howard's idea of dramatic character in political theatre. Hare does not give the individual higher priority than society, but he does insist on dealing with both and with dealing with individual characters at a very personal level, where they are likely to become too complex to be seen simply as products of their environment. His plays are similarly complex, offering the audience not political statements but fictions so constructed as to require the audience to draw its own conclusion. These fictions are much closer to the off-stage reality which playwright and audience share, than were Wilson's plays, nor is he as interested as Wilson in making the audience see reality in an unusual way.

Although he is not a revolutionary playwright, he is obviously interested in post-war politics in Britain. The Great Exhibition was his first attempt to make politics - in particular the Aldermaston marches and the radical movement of the early 1960s - part of his characters' lives. He went much further in Brassneck (1973), written with Brenton and dealing with corruption in the provinces since the Second World War. Brassneck is the most openly 'theatrical' play since Brophy to carry Hare's name, and its theatricality is so atypical of Hare's work that it seems fair to assume that the deliberate use of theatrical imagery - for instance, the Vatican scene at the beginning of Scene Five - is Brenton's rather than Hare's. In Teeth, the characters' real problem was the fact that their 1960s ideals had not crystallized into some kind of action, and Hare appears to have discovered that the tension between ideal and reality was itself intrinsically theatrical. It is on this kind of dramatic tension rather than on physical stage expression he has relied. As was the case with Wilson's, Hare's work, regardless of his occasional use of theatrical

imagery, ultimately relies on his manipulation of dialogue and story to create a work in words and, significantly, all of his plays, with the exception of Brophy and Fanshen have been more concerned with the absence of 'real' action than with theatrical imagery.

This is quite evident in Plenty, which refers to actual events of the period from the Second World War to 1962 (which was, incidentally, the year when Hammett and Maud in The Great Exhibition first met). But the fact that it refers to actual events - the 1951 Festival of Britain and the 1956 Suez Crisis - and that every scene is dated in the script, does not mean that Hare sticks to historical chronology. Plenty is an example - and a very straightforward one at that - of the creative writer shaping the raw material of life into a narrative so structured as to give it a particular significance, as chosen by the playwright. He deliberately upsets the chronology of events so as to place the development of the central character, Susan Traherne, into perspective and suggest that she has, in fact, not developed at all. At the end of the play she is back where she began, in war-time France, looking forward to a 'promising' future, whose promise the audience by then knows has not been fulfilled.

Susan Traherne is Maggie's heir: a female character trying to remain independent, insisting on 'doing her own thing'. Her independence is explained, in the play, by her war-time experience as a British agent working behind the enemy lines in France. During that time her life had an intensity that has never since returned, an intensity which also became part of her relationships with the opposite sex, and a sense of purpose in her life which had nothing to do with the conventional roles of the sexes. In the play, we meet her in different relationships with men: on a dark night in France in 1943 with a fellow agent, code-named Lazar (Scene Two). At the British Embassy in Brussels in 1947, arranging the funeral of another fellow agent, with whom she has temporarily escaped from trivial post-war England. At the Embassy she meets her future husband, Raymond Brock (Scene Three). However, back in London in 1947 she asks for a time apart

from Brock, now her boy-friend (Scene Four); and in 1951 she attempts to conceive a child by a casual male acquaintance, Mick, deliberately trying to avoid any emotional involvement (Scene Five). The attempt fails, and when, on New Year's Eve of 1952 Mick tries to provoke some emotional response from her she has a nervous break-down (Scene Six). She ends up in hospital where (between scenes) Brock contacts her. They marry, and she appears in 1956 as his, the diplomat's,wife (Scene Seven). In 1961 she refuses to return to Iran with him, he deserts his post for her sake and she then makes a desperate attempt to salvage his career by secretly contacting his superiors at the Foreign Office (Scenes Eight and Nine). Brock leaves the diplomatic service but their marriage is beyond salvation and in 1962 she leaves him, having offered their home in Knightsbridge to her friend Alice to use as a refuge for unmarried mothers (Scene Ten). She meets up with her former agent-colleague, Lazar, at a hotel in Blackpool, but refuses even to become emotionally involved with him, saying

> I've stripped away everything, everything I've known.
> There's only one kind of dignity, that's in living alone.
> The clothes you stand up in, the world you can see.
> (pp. 82-83)

I am not convinced that Hare hiself agrees with this and do not believe that he believes her final acceptance of isolation to be the ideal conclusion to the play. Rather, it is presenting the audience with a case : a woman who, like Maggie, responds irrationally, and whose response is an invitation to the audience to question whether the irrationality is simply Susan's, or whether she has been forced into it by circumstances. My outline of the story so far is, in fact, incomplete. It is not framed by her meetings with Lazar and it is not only concerned with her failed attempts to realize herself as a woman, with or without men.

The first scene is clearly intended to puzzle the audience. Its place in 'real' chronology is between Scenes Ten and Eleven, between her final confrontation with Brock and her second meeting with Lazar. It shows Brock, apparently unconscious on the floor, naked, his private parts being

inspected by Alice ("Turkey neck and turke gri tl i ' th t l ?" (p. 11)). No names are mentioned although the Susan actress refers to the lifeless Brock as "my husband". The Susan actress leaves, having given Alice the keys to the flat, and Brock stirs, asking "What's for breakfast?", receiving the (for him) unexpected answer from Alice: "Fish" (namely a take-away). A new day is starting, and whilst the "husband" is still asleep, the women are clearly ready for it.

The audience is left with a series of unanswered questions: who are the characters, what has led to this marital break-up, how could the male character wake up naked on the floor of his own home with a woman who is apparently not involved in the break-up? Hare does not give the answer in the second scene, where we see the still unidentified Susan in the dark with fellow-agent Lazar, also unidentified. Only in Scene Three, where Susan poses as the wife of the deceased agent, Tony Radley, in a situation where she meets the old-fashioned British diplomat, Darwin, do we discover who she is, as she reveals her true identity to her future husband, Brock. Even then, she involves him in an act of lying by asking him to conceal her real identity from Darwin: their relationship begins with a lie, and arguably, neither Susan nor Brock discover her real identity in the years that follow.

Plenty is a play about lying. During her time as a British agent, Susan has been able to tell lies for a purpose, as a part of her work. However, in the post-war world she finds herself unable to escape from lies. She is forced to pretend - with Tony Radley - to be properly married in order to escape from the normality of England, and she involves Brock in that deception. Brock is an excellent conspirator, for as the play states, his profession, diplomacy, is based on deceit. At an early point Susan seizes on his professional tendency to conceal the truth, first and foremost by pointing out to him that he is using phrases, cliches which are not "his words" (p. 34). Indeed, he is later hear almost quoting the older diplomat, Darwin, who tells Susan in 1947 in Brussels that

> The diplomat's eye is the clearest in the world. Seen from Djakarta this continent looks so old, so beautiful. We don't realize what we have in our hands. (p. 27)

In 1961, Brock states that

> . . . the pleasure of diplomacy is perspective, you see. Looking across distances. For instance we see England very clearly from there. And it does look just a trifle decadent. (p. 65)

His conclusion about the view from abroad is different from Darwin's, but there is no indication that seeing England at a distance has really made him see it more clearly than Darwin: they are equally blind to reality.

Brock represents a generation of post-Empire diplomats succeeding Darwin's. In Scene Seven, set at a dinner-party at Susan's and Brock's home during the Suez Crisis, Darwin expresses his disillusion with a British government that has staged the war in order to seize the Suez Canal and has not acted in good faith. The latter, in particular, has caused his disillusionment, as it indicates the collapse of the traditional values of imperial Britain:

> I would have defended it, I wouldn't have minded how damn stupid it was. I would have defended it had it been honestly done. But this time we are cowboys and when the English are the cowboys, then in truth I fear for the future of the globe. (p. 54)

But the collapse of those values has not improved the diplomatic service. During her visit to the Foreign Office to try to save Brock's career, Susan is told that with the collapse of the Empire, and thus of real power, the diplomatic service relies entirely on 'tact', on the kind of behaviour so admired by Curly Delafield's father, Patrick, in Knuckle. The Foreign Office officials are incapable of having a straight talk with Susan about her husband's career, for the very idea of talking straight is against the rules of diplomatic behaviour.

Nevertheless, when Brock leaves the diplomatic service to go into insurance (an occupation which Hare has already made suspect in Knuckle by letting Curly consider it), he does so with a certain sense of nostalgia for his past as a diplomat. In 1956 he had seen through the hollowness

of Darwin's argument (that one could support a bad thing as long as it was done openly), but his own attitude to his former career is little better. As he tells Alice,

> There's not much glamour in insurance you know. (He smiles.) Something in the Foreign Office suited my style. Whatever horrible things people say. At least they were hypocrites, I do value that now. Hypocrisy does keep things pleasant for at least part of the time. Whereas down in the City they don't even try. (p. 75)

The only real difference between him and Darwin is that Brock has lost the 'innocence' which Darwin still had. Brock knows that diplomats are hypocrites but accepts that as being better than the alternatives. At one point he attacks Susan for her refusal to "face life" (p. 78). She must face life which, he argues, would lead her to admit that she has "utterly failed, failed in the very, very heart of your life" (p. 79).

Certainly, in her attempt to prove her ability to live as an independent, honest person Susan has failed. However, her first nervous breakdown seems partly to have been caused by her career, it happens when she is working as a 'professional liar', in advertising, the kind of dishonourable occupation open to her in post-war Britain, and one which she replaces with marriage to Brock, who is engaged in lying not only about consumer goods but about his country. One may question the validity of her decision to give up all earthly possessions and walk off into the unknown to become was looks like a vagabond, but it is also a defiant gesture. Like Maggie in Teeth, she refuses to admit that she is the failure and thus implicitly points a finger at a Britain which has failed. The final scene underlines the failure of the age of material plenty after the war. It is a piece of stage-expressionism rare in Hare's work but also seen in The Great Exhibition, when Hammett leaves his home and goes off to Clapham Common to face humanity. In Plenty, as in Exhibition, the reality of the main character's world magically dissolves:

> /End of Scene Eleven, Blackpool. June 1962:/
> (Lazar opens the door of the room. At once music plays. Where you would expect a corridor you see the fields of France shining brilliantly in a fierce green square.

> The room scatters.)
> /Scene Twelve, St.Benoit. August 1944:/
> The darkened areas of the room disappear and we see a French hillside in high summer. The stage picture forms piece by piece. Green, yellow, brown. Trees. The fields stretch away. A high sun. A brilliant August day. . . .) (pp. 84-85)

Scene Twelve shows a young Susan talking to a French peasant about the tendency of the English to hide their feelings, but she offers hope that "things will quickly change. We have grown up. We will improve our world." (p. 86)

What Hare has done is, cleverly, to turn his narrative upside down. He starts the play with one of the final scenes, pretending to the audience that it will be about the break-up of a marriage, but in the process of explaining the background to that scene over a number of years, he reaches the point where he can end the play with a scene which looks forward to what has already passed and been described to the audience, making it clear that the world has not changed and, in both private and public affairs, honesty has been neglected and forgotten.

As was the case with Wilson's The Glad Hand, Plenty shows Hare in command of his art. The play is no call to political action, it avoids simplification of the issues it deals with, but it is clearly concerned with politics. It deals with this in a traditional manner insofar as Hare makes politics part of the lives of his characters, trying to show the effect of developments in post-war Britain on a relationship between two people. His view on politics is not openly guided by any ideology, his main interest being to explain how life was experienced in Britain by particular, not necessarily typical, characters, with an emphasis on questions of morality (in this instance honesty) in personal and public relationships.

Plenty illustrates Hare's belief that the imaginative writer in the theatre can attempt to find new truths about real life in post-war Britain through his fictions. Finally, even though his interest in the interconnection between the private and the public spheres of life can be seen as evidence of his contemporaneity, there is little to show that his experience

of having worked in Fringe theatre - with Portable - had influenced his own creative work in other ways than by helping him to appreciate the value of writing with clarity and precision, something which occupied him not only during his time with Portable but also later in his career, pre-eminently in the writing of Knuckle and Fanshen. Being able to write and work with a company in the theatre and to develop the text with others had not made Hare a collaborative writer, nor had it influenced the style of his drama radically.

To conclude, Hare soon revealed himself as a political playwright, but as one sceptical of the deceptively easy models of political development offered by, for instance, Marxism. Such models were too simple to correspond to the complexity of human life. On the other hand, he himself developed a view of life in present-day Britain as being characterized by dishonesty, in the sense that people did not live as they knew they ought to live: political theory did not correspond to political practice, conventional ideas of morality did not suit the immoral behaviour of contemporary people. Hare chose to investigate this through the lives of individuals but, typical for a playwright of his generation, he avoided concentrating the audience's attention on single individuals by making a couple a type of double central character.

He can only be said to have responded positively to the pressures put upon the playwright after 1968 in one way: in his respect for the realities of life in the off-stage world. Nowhere in his drama does one find the kind of fantastic narrative typical of Snoo Wilson. On the other hand, like him, Hare has not shown any particular enthusiasm for the idea of collaborative creation in the theatre, in spite of having initiated such work himself. He is a playwright in the Joint Stock mould, accepting that the writer in the theatre must work with other artists of the theatre, but also insisting that he is the creator of the play-script.

It must be said that practical experience is what forms the basis of his understanding of the theatre and of the playwright's position in it.

Working with Portable taught him not to overrate the importance of the writer in an art which depended so much on a live confrontation of actor and audience and where communication was so unpredictable that the writer could not hope to control the audience's response. On the other hand, one feels a tension in him, common to all three playwrights and, perhaps, unavoidable in a theatre writer: he still believes that the single voice - that of the playwright - is important in the theatre and that what the playwright says is important.

Hare has said that the dramatic forms - theatre and television - are the most important literary forms in modern Britain, a claim supported by the popularity and variety of drama in Britain since 1956. His plays, and his development as a playwright, do indicate that he is, and sees himself as, a literary artist. He has only used physical, visual imagery in limited instances and then, as in Exhibition and Plenty, to make a point about the reality of the image, the fiction, of life which people and nations make for themselves, of themselves. As was the case with Wilson, Hare is concerned with the relationship between reality and fiction in off-stage life, and he uses his own fictions to explore that relationship, often through a description of the love-relationships of his characters.

His basic interest in fiction was central to his next stage play after Plenty: A Map of the World (1982), which was both an experiment in widening his own horizon beyond the shores of England to the Third World (as Fanshen had been), and dramatic presentation of the way in which the film industry can turn real politics into clicheed fiction. Pravda (1985), written with Brenton, dealt with the situation in the national press as seen by the two, where economic interests take precedence over matters of truth and moral responsibility. In other words, those who are charged with shaping our view of the world in our imaginations do so with no consideration for whether they form a truthful or a fictional view.

His early success in the theatre is not surprising: he behaved like a traditional playwright, capable of handling words wittily, keen to work with

intellectual ideas and using non-verbal imagery only to stress the meaning latent in the words, not to leave gaps in the text for creative actors to fill. In this respect, he was very much a playwright in the pre-1968 tradition. The gap that seemed to have opened between the old and the new, between the mainstream theatre and the avant-garde in the 1960s was not, after all, unbridgeable. Where Hare revealed his 'age' was not in experiments with theatrical form but in the fact that the would, now and again, strive to discipline his language in order to ensure that it would be as transparent as a medium for his play's content as possible. In spite of this loyalty towards the political theatre (where he has never truly belonged), Hare is best seen as a traditional playwright who continues to acknowledge his debt to the avant-garde theatre where his career began.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOWARD BRENTON:

MOVING THE AUDIENCE TOWARDS ENLIGHTENMENT

Discussing his selection of playwrights for inclusion in An Introduction to Fifty Modern British Plays (1982), Benedict Nightingale, who excludes Hare (and Wilson) but includes Brenton, asks: "Is Howard Brenton really a better dramatist than his friend and associate David Hare?"[1] The question would be extremely difficult to answer, since it implies a certain value-judgment, and Nightingale avoids the answer himself. However, even if,as I do, one admires the ambition of Snoo Wilson's attempts to use the theatre to present a comprehensive view of human existence or applauds David Hare's pragmatic (if, perhaps, unadventurous) understanding of the theatre's unpredictability, one is also struck immediately by Howard Brenton's instinctive feel for theatre. All three playwrights develop their own dramaturgy, their own view of how the theatre functions and how they can use its potential to express themselves. With Hare and Wilson, one feels that this is a gradual process, a result of their experience of writing for and working in the theatre, leading them from more loose experimentation with plays in the early Fringe style to one showing their absorption of lessons learned in the theatre. With Brenton the situation is different: he gives the impression of being a more natural theatre practitioner whose career illustrates a consistency of approach throughout. Whether this makes him a "better" playwright than Hare or, for that matter, Wilson, is perhaps not easy to say, but I would venture to suggest that it does show him as a playwright with a better understanding of theatre than either of those two.

Wilson's drama has always been complex, and Hare worked consciously to simplify his. Brenton has, throughout his career, maintained a view of the theatre as being a 'simple' art-form, simple not in the sense of being incapable of complexity but in the sense of being accessible to all: not only as an art-form to be appreciated but also as an activity in which anybody can take part, accessible because it is not only an art-form but also a

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[1] Benedict Nightingale, An Introduction to Fifty Modern Plays (1982), p. 10.

specialized use of a common human activity. In 1980, Methuen re-issued a number of his early short plays, among them one of the finest Fringe plays, Christie in Love (1969), and in the "Author's Note" he presents a view of the theatre which places him securely among the Fringe generation of writers:

> Theatre takes place all the time. We do it all the time. It is not an art exclusive to massive stages graced by highly trained actors beneath massed lights. As most of us will sing a few notes during the day and song is not exclusive to a concert hall or opera house, so theatre is part of our daily discourse with each other. When you tell a joke, the day's events to a friend or loved one, when you set out to tell a truth or a lie - you set up theatre.[2]

One is immediately reminded of Brecht's use of the traffic accident to illustrate how Epic Theatre works,[3] but Brenton is no Brechtian writer, and his words show him to be closer to a more recent trend of community theatre, to such theatre practitioners as Ed Berman and Albert Hunt, to a view of theatre (and the arts as such) as the property of all members of a democratic society rather than a fine art produced by specialists and requiring an education to be appreciated in full. Brenton's view of the theatre is distinctly political, as his further remarks in the Note show:

> I have been and will go on trying to write big plays - 'Magic Flutes' and 'Boris Godonovs'. But that said, if the wreckers who run this country at the moment strangle the possibility of big, publicly financed theatre, playwrights and performers will not be silenced. The poor theatre wants to be used. Theatre is the one performing art that can be practised at the highest level of skill and intensity naked of technology, its only instrument being - ourselves.[4]

From his early days in the Fringe theatre, the days when he wrote short, basic plays for performance by touring groups in non-theatre venues, Brenton has retained a faith in the theatre's strength as an oppositional art, which needs only its most fundamental elements to succeed: the performer and the

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[2] Howard Brenton, Plays for the Poor Theatre (1980), p. 6.

[3] Bertolt Brecht, "The Street Scene" in The Theory of the Modern Stage (1976), p. 85ff.

[4] Brenton, Plays . . . p. 6.

audience. This is a particular strength at a time when, as Brenton himself realizes, the dominant dramatic medium is television, where radical playwrights have frequently felt that their work has been subject to organizational and political restrictions. In the theatre, the artists themselves can be in control of their art, and it was one of the most essential lessons learned by many playwrights of the Fringe and alternative theatre, that small-scale group theatre could offer them a relatively high degree of artistic freedom.

But there is more at issue to a political playwright like Brenton, who feels himself to be almost naturally in opposition to the prevailing political system. To him, the small-scale theatre provides a channel of communication too simple to be controlled completely by authoritarian political systems, in the way in which a complex and expensive medium such as television can, and Brenton is obviously convinced that such a channel of communication might be needed at some point in Britain during his own lifetime. As he explained in an interview in 1973, the Fringe

> . . . could be the one surviving democratic means of communication. That could well happen. If the police surveillance and interference became very heavy and the Arts Council was nobbled - and there are signs of that happening already, that kind of thing - then the back street activity, almost at the level of being an abortionist, an illegal doctoring service, could be one of the few surviving possible means of communication with people. . . . The poverty of means and the idea of underground theatre, which is habitually underground, shouldn't be forgotten.[5]

I would suggest that Brenton is given to a certain amount of theatricality, not only in his plays but also in his views in general, but what is more significant for an assessment of him as a playwright is the fact that he sees the theatre as a simple art-form whose very simplicity is also its strength.

As is the case with Hare, he is more immediately concerned with the content than the form of theatre, with its potential as a medium of

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[5] Howard Brenton, "Messages First", Gambit, No.23 (1973), p. 31.

communication than with its intrinsic qualities of art, but this does not mean that artistic considerations are irrelevant to an understanding of his work. Brenton's plays are far from simply attempts to communicate a precisely defined content or 'message'. He does not believe, any more than Hare, that the theatre can function as a straightforward channel of communication. His plays are creative works of art and show him dealing with political and ideological problems in terms of theatre. In several of his plays, he deliberately breaks through the surface reality in ways that are reminiscent of Snoo Wilson. In many respects there are close similarities in the way that Brenton and Hare define and describe theatre, but when it comes to the way the three use theatre, there are far greater similarities between Brenton and Wilson than between Brenton and Hare.

In Howard Brenton, then, one has a playwright who has remained faithful to the principles of the early Fringe theatre, who insists on the values of small-scale theatre even after his ascent to the larger stages of the mainstream subsidised theatre, who insists on the essential political function of his drama and on the importance of content over form, yet reveals clear artistic and imaginative talent in the way he actually writes. This focusses attention on a special feature of Brenton's work, one that is essential in understanding his position vis-à-vis the theatre: although he is an accomplished and recognized contemporary playwright, he resists attempts to evaluate his work in traditional terms, as aesthetic objects.

In this chapter, I shall examine the way in which he developed a drama in which content was given priority over style, while arguing that the style of his drama remains important. I shall then look at his involvement in the collective creation of plays in order to see to what extent such work can be said to deprive him of his individual status as their creator. Finally, before moving to a discussion of a selection of his plays, I shall

attempt to show that an appreciation of his individuality as a playwright is essential for a full understanding of his work.

(i) Brenton was soon recognized as one of the most accomplished writers of the new Fringe theatre, receiving Arts Council Writer's Bursaries in 1969 and 1970, sharing the 1969 John Whiting Award for his Christie in Love and, in 1976, writing the first original British play for the new National Theatre, Weapons of Happiness, for which he also received the Evening Standard Best Play Award for 1976. He soon found himself in print, a series of his shorter plays from 1969 being published in one volume by Methuen in 1970. That these were reissued in 1980 in an extended volume to which I have referred above, is in itself a tribute to his early works. Out of the 41 plays he has written/adapted/collaborated on/translated between 1965 and 1985, 27 have been printed. Fewer than half of these are full-length plays which can be described as entirely 'his'. A number of the remaining titles are short plays, mostly written early in his career but also including an adaptation from Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes: The Saliva Milkshake (1975).

More importantly, a substantial number of his published plays have been written in collaboration with other artists, starting with his adaptation of Rabelais' Gargantua (1969). He was, as has already been mentioned, engaged in the two Portable-related writers' collaborations, Lay By (1971) and England's Ireland (1972), and in the company-created Hitler Dances (1972), with whose director, Max Stafford-Clark, he was again involved in the production of Epsom Downs (1977), partly developed in work-shops by Joint Stock. His willingness to collaborate with others is seen in his two plays with David Hare, Brassneck (1973) and Pravda (1985), and he has deliberately experimented with such collaborative writing in the recent Sleeping Policemen (1983), written with a younger writer, Tunde Ikoli, for Foco Novo. Brenton is the only one of the three writers dealt with

here who has consistently been involved in active collaboration with a range of other artists in a variety of contexts throughout his career. This is one of the lessons he has learned from working in both Fringe theatre and in the political, left-wing sector of the alternative theatre. Speaking of his own generation of playwrights in a 1973 interview, he said that:

> We're different from the previous generation of writers in a way, that collaboration seems necessary and we practise solidarity on all kinds of levels. Reading each other's plays, discussing things, trying to set up each other's plays.[6]

In the same interview, Brenton claims to have tried to promote this by arranging weekly meetings at the Royal Court theatre during his time there as resident dramatist,[7] and the list of playwrights involved in Lay By and England's Ireland testifies to the fact that the playwrights of the Fringe/alternative theatre do seem to know and come into contact with each other, even where their plays might seem to suggest that they have little in common. With Brenton, one is therefore dealing with someone for whom a playwright's work involves active collaboration with others and who does not consider the playwright to be dominant in the theatre. This must be borne in mind in any consideration of his work.

Like other playwrights, Brenton has had his work produced by a number of different companies; notwithstanding his close association with Portable Theatre he in fact wrote only two original plays for them: Christie in Love (1969) and Fruit (1970), and he proved his early interest in creative collaboration much more clearly with his work with Chris Parr and his Bradford University Theatre Group. They presented Brenton's Heads (1969), The Education of Skinny Spew (1969) and his two environmentally staged

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[6] Brenton, "Messages First", p. 31.

[7] Ibid., p. 32.

plays performed at the Bradford Festivals, Wesley in 1970 and Scott of the Antarctic in 1971. Brenton worked with Parr on other occasions, Parr directing his early Winter, Daddikins (Nottingham Playhouse, 1966), his collaboratively created adaptation of Gargantua (Brighton Combination, 1969), the Bradford University Theatre Group production of his show for Brighton Combination, Gum and Goo (the Combination, 1969, Bradford, 1969-70), his first full-length play, Revenge (Theatre Upstairs, 1969), and his A Fart For Europe, written with David Edgar (Theatre Upstairs, 1973). This selection of Brenton's early plays not only shows that he worked repeatedly with the same director during his early years, but also that he was extremely prolific and had his plays produced by a variety of companies. It also reveals that his career started before the Fringe, the Royal Court having staged his first professionally produced play, It's My Criminal as early as 1966. Before he joined the Brighton Combination in 1969, he had already worked as stage manager in various repertory theatres, and although his work with the Combination can be said to represent the true beginning of his career as a playwright, it did not mark his entry into the theatre. This 'head start' may account for his greater understanding of the theatre.

Like Hare, he has been a resident writer at the Royal Court, and, as has been said, has had several plays performed there, the most important, perhaps, being Magnificence (1973). Again, as with Hare, the question arises of whether Brenton can be considered a 'Court writer'. The answer must be 'no', and for the same reasons as in Hare's case: although he has been employed by the Court (thus, as he has explained, coming into contact with playwrights of the previous generation)[8] and has had plays staged there, he, too rejects traditional concepts of 'humanism' such as Hare found them during his years at the Court. In an interview given in connection with the opening of

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[8] Brenton, "Messages First", p. 32.

Magnificence, he explained that he felt

> . . . very strongly against the humanist tradition in the theatre. Edward Bond, for instance, isn't a humanist but a real anarchist. Humanists have to believe that people basically love each other and an anarchist doesn't. That's clear in The Sea. I'm not saying that one shouldn't be loving and that humanist ideas have become totally corrupt and their value has been wrecken by the people who run things.[9]

His interpretation of 'humanism', crude as it seems and simply as he puts it here, is political. As he explained in a later interview (in 1975), humanism in the English theatre

> . . . is always conservative, always right-wing, always for the status-quo, always saying, 'You can't do anything about this', always with an attitude of dignified suffering, which I find loathsome and retrograde.[10]

As it emerges later in the same interview, his main complaint against this so-called humanism is that it refuses to accept that things can be changed, and as an openly Socialist playwright such change, political and social, is a central concern of his. One finds in him, as in Hare and Wilson, the same rejection of the traditional concept of the strong central character, described in terms of detailed psychology and made to carry the play's central message. But in Brenton's drama the rejection can be linked to his politics: he denies the validity of isolated, individual action, emphasizing instead collaboration, not only in the theatre but in life. Like Hare, he cannot accept the Court as his theatrical home because of that company's lack of political commitment. It would hardly be fair to describe the Royal Court as an apolitical theatre, but it has eschewed Brenton's brand of uncompromising, tough politics. Of the three writers dealt with here, he is the one who seems most prepared to countenance the idea of actual revolution, the one most willing to see his art as a weapon in a political struggle. On occasion, this had seemed to limit his perspective

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[9] Howard Brenton, "Disrupting the Spectacle", PP, July 1973, p. 23. The Sea, by Edward Bond, first perf. 1973.

[10] Howard Brenton, "Petrol Bombs Through the Proscenium Arch", TQ, No. 17 (1975), p. 18.

and, compounded by his refusal to give up the shock effects of the Fringe, made him write plays that appear to conceal rather than reveal his insight and bring him into the arena of public controversy. But such controversy can be seen as an indication of his unwillingness to compromise, of his integrity as a playwright.

His somewhat unusual sense of humour may also be the source of some of the controversy. The 'building bricks' in his early plays were "gags", as he has put it in a major interview in Theatre Quarterly, published in 1975:

> The first thing I discovered was that playwriting was like painting. You discover the skill to draw - like hands and heads - and then you can paint, or write, what you like. I discovered I had the ability to tell jokes and write gags, and for a time I was overwhelmed with the joy of entertaining.[11]

Eventually other concerns began to make themselves felt in his work, as he explained in 1976:

> I don't know whether plays can change things but I would like to think that they could. The problem a writer faces is that the art can be very good but 'so what?' When I first started I learnt how to write gags, by which I mean the way two characters face each other and the words that crackle between them, and I exploited that for all it was worth. But . . . it was not enough. The question of content drags at you and you are continually forced on by a kind of 'So what?' again. And the plays begin to turn, I don't know how, but they became sourer and better and I found that I was being politicised by my own plays.[12]

But this sourness did not exclude humour. In an article written in 1985, printed at the premiere of his and Hare's Pravda (1985), which is subtitled "A Fleet Street Comedy", he declared that their only real common trait was "that there has always been laughter in our plays",[13] giving his own Epsom Downs (1977, a "sulphurous social comedy"[14]) and A Short Sharp Shock (1980,

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[11] Ibid., p. 5.

[12] Howard Brenton, "Sourer and Better", Time Out, 16-22 July 1976, p. 7.

[13] Howard Brenton, "Writing for Democratic Laughter", Drama No.157 (1985) p. 9.

[14] Loc.cit.

"a satire", co-written with Tony Howard) as examples of his work in the comic genre.

By comedy he does not merely mean plays that raise laughter. Rather surprisingly, he refers to one of his least amusing works, The Churchill Play (1974), as being humorous, so much so that he originally wanted to call it "The Churchill Comedy".[15] In connection with the play's revival at the RSC's Other Place in 1978, Brenton made it clear what purpose humour had to serve in his mature, "content-oriented" plays: it was intended as satire, and this play, set in a future Britain of 1984 was "not a prophesy, it's a satire for the present - though a satire which aspires to the heavy-mob tradition of Swift and Orwell, not the debased satire of silly walks and literary send-ups that passes today."[16] It would not be true to say that all of Brenton's mature plays are satires, but recognizing a satirical trend in his writing does help to understand his apparent delight in exaggeration and in cruelty towards his political enemies, and it makes sense of his choice of Rabelais' Gargantua for adaptation for the Brighton Combination in 1969 as well as of the almost brutal tone of some of his early small-scale plays. In such plays as The Romans in Britain (1980), where the humour is missing, he seems to come dangerously close to indulging in exaggeration and violence, but in other contexts, for instance, in his version of Georg Büchner's Danton's Death (1982), humour becomes a key to his understanding of the play:

> The play he /Büchner/ wrote is not (as is often said) a tragedy, but a comedy, a celebration of what we are; like all great comedies it sings and celebrates, it does not judge.[17]

His feeling of hostility towards the dominant political system in Great Britain - which, in 1972, he saw as being "in its last dying spasm

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[15] Loc.cit.

[16] Howard Brenton, "The Churchill Play", RSC Newspaper, Summer Issue (1978), p. 6.

[17] Howard Brenton, "A Crazy Optimism", New Statesman, (20 July 1982), p. 26.

as a nation"[18] - and his preference for anarchism rather than more optimistic, traditional humanism, isolated him from the cultural mainstream. This he shared with other playwrights of his generation, including Hare and Wilson, but like them he came to resent his isolation from larger theatres and began to write for them from 1973. In that year the Royal Court staged his Magnificence, as it did Wilson's first play intended for a proscenium arch theatre, The Pleasure Principle (albeit in its studio theatre, the Theatre Upstairs) and in the following year Hare's first 'serious' play, Knuckle, was staged. Brenton had begun to show an active interest in political theatre even before Magnificence, namely in England's Ireland and his anti-EEC revue, written with David Edgar, A Fart For Europe; but Magnificence, and the year 1973, must be said to mark his final departure from the already moribund Fringe and his entry into its most vigorous heir: the political theatre.

He had been moving in that direction for some time. In the aforementioned interview for Theatre Quarterly, in 1975, he identified 1968 as the year when the foundations for the new political theatre were laid and when the true nature of the official culture became clear:

> May '68 disinherited my generation in two ways. First, it destroyed any remaining affection for the official culture. The situationists showed how all of them, the dead greats, are corpses on our backs - Goethe, Beethoven - how gigantic the fraud is. But it also, secondly, destroyed the notions of personal freedom, freak out and drug culture, anarchist notions of spontaneous freedom, anarchist political action. And it failed. It was defeated. A generation dreaming of a beautiful utopia was kicked - kicked awake and not dead. I've got to believe not kicked dead. May '68 gave me a desperation I still have.[19]

He felt isolated from the cultural mainstream, but was not alone in this: it showed that he belonged to a particular generation, and by rejecting individual anarchy in favour of collective action, he revealed that he

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[18] Howard Brenton, "The Theatre is a Dirty Place" in Peter Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.1: Portable Playwrights", PP, February 1972, p. 16.

[19] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 20.

believed it possible to replace the official culture with one more democratic. What he describes here as the effects of 1968 only became clear in his own work with Magnificence.

His growing political awareness, his rejection of traditional humanism and his relatively frequent involvement in different kinds of collaboration in the theatre raise the question, central to this study, of whether his rejection of individualism and his espousal of the principle of artistic collaboration can in any way be correlated. It should be made clear that Brenton's increased political awareness did not lead to a corresponding involvement in practical politics: his response was, first and foremost, artistic. Looking back on his early work with the Brighton Combination in the late 1960s, he himself felt that he had made a conscious choice in favour of working through theatre and not by attempting to intervene in the off-stage world. He himself explains how the Combination then worked:

> We didn't really know what we were doing at the Combination, we were feeling our way. But all the elements that are in the fringe, that have developed since, were there. There was the idea that theatre should be communicative work, socially and politically active. There was the idea of very aggressive theatrical experiment. And there was always the tension in the Combination - which has been resolved now that they are at Deptford - between theatre and community work. They really are a socially active group now, not a theatre, I went the theatre way. Also the idea of group work was there, the idea of instantly writing, the idea of responding to events - street theatre, multi-media ideas . . . I did a collective show, and included a local painter who painted us - the actors and the whole theatre - for it. (My emphasis)[20]

Apart from giving an insight into the life of an early Fringe theatre and showing how Brenton, who had deliberately chosen to work for such a company, entered into an environment of artistic experiment at the beginning of his professional career, this also demonstrates that much as he rejected the 'official culture', he did not simply adopt an egalitarian

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[20] Ibid., p. 7. On the history of the Combination see, for instance, Catherine Itzin, Stages in the Revolution (1980), p. 320 ff.

or 'community art' approach; he did not necessarily see theatre as something which anybody would do for himself, even if he believed it to be based on a general human tendency to use theatre in everyday life. Conversely, his rejection of a definition of theatre as a fine art must be connected with his insistence that what matters in theatre is its content. He thus believed Portable to have reached the end of its useful life when its audiences began to concern themselves with form rather than content:

> . . . they became theatrically literate and the discussions afterwards stopped being about the plays' content and began to be about their style.[21]

In his early days he did strive for great stylistic simplicity. In this respect, one is reminded of Hare's similar ambition to learn to write with simplicity, achieved most successfully in Fanshen, but where Fanshen seemed almost like a unique and deliberate experiment on Hare's part, Brenton worked permanently in Fringe theatre context, where the actual physical and economic conditions imposed stylistic economy on him:

> . . . I found poverty of means a great help. It began really at the Combination when they were in Brighton in 1968 and we had very little money. And we began trying to adapt to this and derived great strength from it. 30 shillings was the average budget for a play, and for that you could only have two torches and a board. Ever since I've thought like that.[22]

This is very much in evidence in his play of 1969, Gum and Goo, first performed by the Brighton Combination and later by Parr's Bradford company. Gum and Goo is a one-acter for two men and one woman, performed with the audience on all sides. It relies almost entirely on the acting skills of the three actors, requiring them to mime the sets and some of the props, and to change roles rapidly while sharing a number of schematically drawn characters, who surround the girl at the centre of the action. Torches

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[21] Brenton, "Messages First", p. 27.

[22] Ibid., p. 25.

are among the few real props used in the play (p. 74), and they turn up again in later plays where more sophisticated technology was available to the writer, for instance in Christie in Love (p. 36-37) and The Churchill Play (Act Three, p. 52ff), almost as a 'trade-mark'. Gum and Goo differs from the early plays I have discussed by Hare (How Brophy Made Good, 1969) and Wilson (Pignight, 1971) in its very simplicity and reliance on the actors, both of which features recur in his two other published plays produced by Parr at Bradford, Heads (1969) and The Education of Skinny Spew (1969). In spite of their simplicity, they do, however, reveal a growing sophistication, Heads making use of tape recording (p. 86), and Skinny Spew of the same (pp. 93-95, p. 104), other sound effects (drum, bell) and a linen sheet which is used in various ways in the play, such as to simulate waves on the sea (p. 98ff).

Finest among the early plays is Christie in Love (1969), his first play for Portable, about the infamous mass murderer John Christie. The actors - three men playing two policemen and Christie - are again at the centre of the play, but Brenton displays his grasp of not only the verbal side but the whole dramaturgical range of theatre by setting the play in and around a now famous pen filled with shredded newspaper, representing

> . . . CHRISTIE's garden, his front room, a room in a police station, an executioner's shed, a lime pit. But it's not a 'Setting' in a conventional sense. I don't want it to be like a garden, or a room. It's a theatrical machine, a thing you'd only see in a show. It's a trap, a flypaper for the attention of the spectators to stick on.[23]

With this simple, non-representational device he is creating a centre for the play which does not attract any attention to itself: it is wholly functional and can become whatever 'set' is required at any moment. But is it entirely neutral? It appears not. Christie in Love is a sordid play, dealing with Christie's perverted sexuality in contrast to the

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[23] Howard Brenton, "Author's Production Note", Plays for the Poor Theatre (1980), pp. 26-27.

conventional, hackneyed, male view of sexuality of the two police officers, with its implied objectification of women. This latter point is made clear by letting a doll represent women in the play. The set is clearly intended to express the basic sordidness, being "a filthy sight. The chicken wire is rusty, the wood is stained, the paper is full of dust."[24] Rather than being without style, it is in the style of the play as such and an example of the perfect use of scenery, of the kind towards which Wilson worked later in his career. Brenton designed the pen himself, and it is tempting to speculate whether his original ambition of becoming a painter accounts for the almost sculptural quality of the Christie in Love set, and for the visual/physical quality of his later plays. Apart from the set, and the use, once more, of a torch, he also employs tape-recordings and more sophisticated lighting effects than in previous shows, suggesting that his use of stage-technology was developing (and, perhaps, that more of it was becoming available to him).

I write 'sophisticated' on purpose, for although that word has acquired as bad a reputation as 'style', it seems clear to me that Brenton's use of the theatre is anything but unsophisticated. It is, however, simple, minimalist. And so, although the restraints imposed on him by actual working conditions in the Fringe helped him to write in a minimalist style, and to use the theatre appropriately, they gave him the basic style on which he could build his later, larger plays. His use of the theatre's multiple expression was evidence of his growing sophistication and revealed that in spite of his objection to the audience's concern for the stylistic aspect of his work, he was well aware of the importance of finding the appropriate style for a play, one that was sufficiently unobtrusive not to distract from what he wanted to say, from the content which could make his work a part of a political struggle. His playing-down of the aesthetics of drama was, to

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[24] Ibid., p. 26.

an extent, polemical and could not conceal the importance of his achievement as an artist.

(ii) He has been involved, in different contexts, with the collective creation of plays, in particular with other playwrights but also with actors. This raises the question of whether his creative output should be considered as his alone or as that of a collective enterprise.
In spite of his socialism, I am not convinced that such collaboration amounts to a complete espousal of collectivism in artistic creation. Indeed, his experience of working with Brighton Combination on Gargantua, the play which marked the true beginning of his playwriting career led him to conclusions very like those of other artists who were involved in democratic ventures of this kind in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Gargantua grew out of workshop sessions. To begin with, the group, including the director, Chris Parr, improvised pre-planned sections of Gargantua, which were then scripted in the evening by Brenton before a rehearsal of that script the following morning, a pattern followed by many later workshops. Brenton, summing up his experiences, felt forced to admit that in such a workshop the group could survive without a writer, but it still needed a "non-acting director"[25] who could act both as a member of the company and as its leader or co-ordinator. On the other hand, he did not consider the collective approach to be the best for the writer:

> It's good in a workshop to be without the claptrap mask of Author, capital A. But it encourages paranoia to have personal obsessions go to the wall in public simply because you can't explain why they should be performed. (A group can't tolerate irrationality.)[26]

Many writers have learned to appreciate the demand that the playwright should be willing and able to explain during rehearsal what he is trying to do in his play and to change it if necessary, but even if this is the

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[25] Howard Brenton, "The Gargantua Workshop", Gambit No.4, No.13 (no year), p. 112.

[26] Loc.cit.

case with Brenton, he was not enthusiastic about having to write during rehearsal, as he explained in 1975:

> In have in the past been faced with great pressure of delivery dates and written a good deal in rehearsal. That's invigorating, but dangerous. Now I'm writing without pressure and I like it more, I can get further into it.[27]

This is reminiscent of David Hare's discovery that writing was a lengthy process, requiring him, as a playwright, to concentrate on his own work. Indeed, as Brenton also said in the same 1975 interview, even the plays he wrote for Portable were "private acts of creation", not the fruit of work in the company. From the beginning of his career as a professional playwright, he has worked, like Wilson and Hare, as an individual creative artist whose works are his own and not the joint property of a group or company. This does not mean that he is unaffected by the collaborative relationship between playwright, director and actors in the Fringe/alternative theatre; but I would suggest that he has learned to use the theatre, not vice versa, and both his early, 'poor', plays of the late 1960s and the workshop-developed Hitler Dances (1972) show him making a virtue of the somewhat primitive conditions that prevailed in the early Fringe.

Richard Boon says in the Introduction to the published version of Hitler Dances (dated 1982) that it represents "an unusual and very different departure in the writer's career" (p. xiii), and in the sense that it reflects the improvisational nature of the work that went before the presentation of the play,this is certainly true. From the very start, the play is presented as a work relying on the skill of the performers, their ability to give life to characters on stage. In itself this was not new in his work, but the very simple way in which it is done is uncharacteristic. In the first scene, one of the actresses puts on one of the actors the mask of the play's male central character, Hans, a long-dead German soldier, along with his soldier's uniform. The company then proceed to help the

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[27] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 16.

character come to life with "insults and catcalls" (P. 3) until he has found a voice of his own, then continue to manipulate the character in a way that demonstrates both their 'command' of him as a function of the stage and the fact that they share him as a character.

Hitler Dances has two central characters: Hans, the dead German soldier brought to life by a group of playing children in the 1970s; and a historical figure, Violette Szabo, a British agent working in France, like Susan Traherne in Hare's Plenty. These two characters are shared by the three men and three women in the company in an attempt on Brenton's part to create a play without a strong central character. One of the actresses in the original production, Carole Hayman, saw this as being in line with the new physical Fringe theatre such as was produced by, for instance, Pip Simmons, and of which she herself had experience in Chris Wilkinson's Vanguard Company: "We were portraying bouncy, fast-changing, two-dimensional characters."[28] This kind of characterization was not new to Brenton and should not be attributed simply to his participation in the preliminary improvisational work. It can be seen in his short plays for the Brighton Combination and for Chris Parr's Bradford company and it is also evident in his first full-length play, Revenge (1969), where one actor takes the part of both the play's two central characters, the old criminal, Hepple, and his old enemy in the police force, MacLeish. Brenton's purpose here was to deny the actors (and, presumably, also the audience) the possibility of using the psychology of the individual character as a way of explaining the play solely in terms of their 'personalities':

> One of the formal ways of doing that was to emphasize the role, the action. If you fit the two conflicting elements of the action into the same actor, there is no danger, or it lessens the danger, of an actor working out a psychological performance.[29]

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[28] Peter Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.4: War Games", PP, May 1972, p. 61.

[29] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 8.

The denial of the importance of the central character, the play's 'hero', is not the only link between Hitler Dances and his earlier plays. Like Gum and Goo and Skinny Spew, Hitler Dances takes the world of children as its point of departure, showing parallels between children's play and the behaviour of adults, in particular in connection with the story of Violette Szabo. Children's games had already provided him with a means of formalization, stylization, in the earlier plays, and so they do in this, his most stylized play. Hitler Dances is Brenton's 'poor theatre' on a larger scale than before, still requiring the six actors to take a variety of parts and to provide not only characters but also, through mime, the props and settings. The Traverse Workshop, as a matter of policy, let themselves be "guided by the ideas and personalities of the writers they choose to work with",[30] which in this instance meant that they were required to work out their personal responses to the Second World War. Their comments on the play reveal that they did, indeed, influence its composition. The dominance of the actors in the play's fabric, the importance of their performance skills in its narrative, support a view that creative responsibility for Hitler Dances was not Brenton's alone. The workshop was undertaken as a response to a "literary distaste for pre-conceived written scripts",[31] identified within the Fringe by the Traverse Workshop's American member, Sabin Epstein, while the group's director, Max Stafford-Clark, saw their workshop work as "an alternative to a writer sweating it out in his lonely garret".[32]

There is every indication that Brenton entered into the workshop in the 'right spirit', willing to develop the play with the company, and the drama-exercise nature of some of the writing shows that the script was not

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[30] Ansorge, op.cit., p. 14.

[31] Ibid., p. 61.

[32] Loc.cit.

entirely of his own invention. This said, it must also be emphasized that Hitler Dances can be seen as an extension of his earlier plays for the 'poor' theatre, of the type that he was about to abandon in favour of more conventional plays for larger spaces. It was the logical consequence of his early career, not only using but working with the actors, yet surprisingly he chose to move in the direction of more traditional working methods.

This did not imply an abandonment of workshop work. Brenton took part in a similar workshop for his Epsom Downs (1977), presented by Joint Stock, the company for whom Hare wrote Fanshen (1975), and like Fanshen, Brenton's play shows a dependence on the actors' ability to impersonate a large number of characters. In this case, 9 actors play no fewer than 43 parts, making the play a kaleidoscopic view of the British nation gathered for one of the great national events, the Epsom Derby. Joint Stock is known for its special use of the workshop approach, involving the playwright in exploratory sessions with the company before he goes away and writes the play on his own. Epsom Downs, however, came into being in a slightly different way. Brenton has not said much about it himself, but he apparently offered the company a partly written play which was accepted as the basis for their next production. Simon Callow, who was in the original production, explains in his book, Being an Actor (1984), that the company was presented with a single act, "an extraordinary account of a modern feminist haunted by the ghost of Emily Davison and driven by her to follow her example and shoot the monarch's horse on Derby Day".[33] This element has remained in the eventual script although it is not prominent: the modern feminist has become a young mother who, with her husband, successfully gambles their savings in the Derby, winning them enough to pay the deposit on a house of their own. The ghost steps in towards the end of the play to remind her that there are other, more important problems for her as a woman to solve before she can have a good life. Callow claims that Brenton

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[33] Simon Callow, Being an Actor (1984), p. 66.

allowed himself to be persuaded by actual feminists to turn his original work of art into something more in line with the feminist view of woman's situation. This is of course impossible to check without access to Brenton's original script, even though it would demonstrate his willingness to allow non-artists to influence his writing.

Possibly a more direct indication of the influence of working with Joint Stock may be seen in the (for Brenton) unusually light-hearted and joyful tone of this celebration of Derby Day and in the flowing quality of the story, something it shares with Hare's Fanshen. Both bear the hall-mark of the improvisation-based play (seen also in Mike Leigh's work), namely the fact that they try to give equal weight to all actors. In both Epsom Downs and Fanshen (though not in Leigh's plays) a large number of parts are allocated to a small number of performers, thus taking the attention away from individual characters and emphasizing instead the play's story. This allows Brenton to use an unbroken, almost film-like kind of narrative, as seen in the play's opening scene, and in the race itself, enacted by "the Epsom Derby Stakes", "the Derby Course" and five "Crowds", all played by the 9 actors. Writing plays with an episodic structure was not new to Brenton, but with this play he learned to write with a particular fluency which recurs in his later The Genius (1983). I stress this element, the narrative, because it is something shared by Epsom Downs and Fanshen, and because in spite of its reliance on the actors, this is far more a written play than Hitler Dances, far less stylized. It certainly employs other types of performance technique than straight acting, but they are not used in their own right, for their own expressive value: they are there as additional ways of telling the play's story, for instance by giving "the Epsom Derby Stakes" a voice of its own. This instance of Brenton co-operating with a company does therefore seem to indicate not so much the playwright's continued reliance on the actors' creativity as his ability to develop his writing in collaboration with a company. Like Hare and Wilson, he recognized that the playwright relies on the theatre and must respect

its right (and competence) to influence the play, but, again like the other two, his development has revealed an increasing degree of independence and individuality.

The most recent instance of Brenton working collaboratively - excluding his collaborations with Hare - was Sleeping Policemen (1983), written with Tunde Ikoli, for Foco Novo. It falls outside the time-span chosen for this study but deserves a mention because it does show Brenton's willingness to surrender his rights as individual creator of the script, at least in the interests of experiment. The two playwrights took part in a workshop with the company before going away to write a script each in isolation, on the basis of agreed characters (three white and three black) and incidents, and the two scripts were then fused. This approach, reminiscent of others in which Brenton has been involved, had a specific purpose: that of reproducing the 'schizophrenic' way in which life is experienced in the area of London where it is set, Peckham. The result was also quite similar to that found in the previous collaborations: the play prevented the company from using traditional ideas of character motivation, for the characters had been created by two different minds; and it helped the younger of the two playwrights, Ikoli, to gain a better understanding of theatrical narrative than he had felt able to achieve on his own. Thus collaboration does not necessarily lead to formal experimentation and can even be seen to promote an exploration of more conventional sides of playwriting: the business of telling stories in the theatre. For Brenton as the older partner, it would appear to demonstrate his belief that getting a play written on a significant subject - here, life in the inner city - is of greater importance than manifesting the playwright's sole right to the written script.

It must be concluded that he, as a creative artist, is not 'only' part of the theatre's creative collective: in his development as a playwright, he learns to use the theatre in his own way. But he has no qualms about sharing responsibility for the creation of the playscript with others when

this seems to serve a purpose. And he can, at least to some extent, be said to reject the concept of the playwright working in isolation in the same way as he rejects the idea of people in the off-stage world being able to achieve their goals in isolation from others.

(iii) To what extent can this influence an appreciation of his work? In spite of their involvement in collaborative work, both Wilson and Hare developed their own personal vision which they embodied in their own ways in their plays. Certainly, both were influenced by the theatre in which they worked and both could be seen to experiment to a greater or lesser extent with theatrical expressiveness, but they also both reached a point where they seemed to believe that their fictions held a particular kind of truth, imaginative truth, with a value of its own. This imaginative truth, contained in fictional narratives and expressed in words, in dialogue and a conscious use of the stage as indicated in stage directions, seems to justify an emphasis on the playwright's script as a work that can and should be considered in its own right, and analyzed independently of any specific production in order to uncover its 'meaning' or 'message' and explain how it is formulated in a way that is specifically theatrical.

With Brenton, the problem seems, at first, to be more complex. He is adamant that he, as a playwright, is not an extraordinary human being with any special insight. Thus, in 1976, he observed that

> I do feel the weight of the moral tradition in the theatre that Shaw played around with - whereby you were more saintly or more knowledgeable about life because you were a writer, more wise. It's not true! The meanings of my plays are none the wiser than anything said on the street. Why should they be?[34]

He repeated this view in another interview two years later, adding that

> . . . the message, the truth, of a play is not within the province of artistic originality. The message of a play must be about common concerns, fears or hopes. It must

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[34] Brenton, "Sourer and Better", p. 7.

> be an answer, or the ghost of the possibility of an answer, to fundamental, 'gut' questions on the minds of all who see the play. A play that says 'This is how it is', or if it is a history play, 'This is how it was', is not good enough. I want a play to move toward enlightenment. What's enlightenment? It's knowing what to do next. It's action. So plays either enter the arena of public action, or they fail and are worthless.[35]

"Perhaps", as he says elsewhere in the same interview, "an artist's job is simply to state something that is staring everyone in the face."[36] One must respect Brenton's wish to be 'inconspicuous' as an artist or, at least, to contest the view of the artist as a person with special qualities that raise him above the rest of humanity, as Wilson seemed to see him. But there is an inherent paradox in his words, one that I have pointed to when discussing the documentary play earlier, in the chapter on text and context. For much as he may argue that he - or the playwright generally - is simply saying "what is staring everyone in the face", he is also well aware that he himself does not <u>just</u> do that. For one thing, a choice is involved: "there is no point in writing something unless you want to write it".[37] In Brenton's case, the choice does seem to have been mainly his own. For another, he does not see it as his task to simply state something that is obvious: he must also enlighten his audience.

Brenton had a clear opinion about what his art should do, how it should work. It was directed at the world outside the theatre and, he hoped, touched upon "something that is living out there in the street or in life behind the theatre wall".[38] This concern of his for political issues can be traced back to his early days in the Fringe. The plays that he wrote for Parr's Bradford company were performed in non-theatre venues, in the context of other kinds of entertainment offered to students at Bradford

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[35] Howard Brenton, "Interview: Howard Brenton", <u>Performing Arts Journal</u> (Winter 1979), pp. 139-40.

[36] Ibid., p. 138.

[37] Brenton, "Messages First", p. 29.

[38] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

University (for instance rock concerts), and he claims that the impulse behind them had little to do with art in a conventional sense. It was "fear",

> Fear of the play not 'holding' in the rough circumstances, and not being 'held' by the good but elementary, straightforward performances you get from students. That fear was very creative - when playwrights lose it, they go otiose . . . flabby.[39]

Brenton learned from working in a very simple kind of theatre, and often in circumstances where what was performed almost seemed intended to bait the audience. This resulted in a view of theatre as almost a confrontational medium, an art where the relationship between actor and audience is tangible, physical. It is, of course, generally accepted that the essential feature of theatre, what distinguishes it from, for instance, film and television drama, is the fact that it depends on an actual interaction between stage and auditorium, where the actors respond to the audience's reaction to what the actors do on stage. But to Brenton's mind, that interplay <u>is</u> the theatre; to him, as to Hare, the play is "in the air" as a kind of "force" binding actor and audience together. As he explained in 1975, discussing his early plays,

> With the plays that are not done on stages - like Portable plays weren't plays for stages - the space between people defines the actual physical theatre, the space between the audience itself and the actors. And that space and relationship becomes an almost moral force in the writing and in the presentation - a sense of bodies and will and concentration, and laughter or abuse. From that feeling, you begin to want to write about how people conduct themselves in life as groups, as classes, as interests.[40]

The tension which he sensed between actors and audience parallels the tension between groups outside the theatre, and the space between actor and audience, the space they 'share', so to speak, inspired him to write for what he preferred to call "public" rather than "political" theatre. His feeling

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[39] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 7.

[40] Ibid., p. 10.

for theatre as physical space applied to any kind of theatre space, not just small-scale theatre: " . . . you write not only the words, but for the place where the words are said".[41] More than that, his whole view of theatre was based on the idea of space, space not just in the sense of an area of tension between actor and audience or as performance space, but as a space of ideas. To Brenton's mind, there were

> . . . two kinds of plays - those set in rooms and those outside rooms. . . . There is a huge divergence in the ways of looking at the world amongst playwrights who write inside and outside rooms. Outside means using an epic structure . . .[42]

He was aware that he was speaking about a kind of theatre - epic theatre - which had been invented and practised by others, first and foremost Bertolt Brecht and Edward Bond, but he denied writing within a pre-existing epic tradition. His definition of the "epic" play was reminiscent of those of Bond and Brecht:

> (1) a play that is many scened, the short scenes choosing precise 'windows' in a story (2) the 'windows' have to be authentic, to ring true (3) at the same time they must be part of an argument, one illustrating the other, progressing to a conclusion that is believable, in the simplest sense of 'men and women would do that' and also be clear of intent and (4) it is the message of a play that comes first.[43]

But his plays lacked the taut structure of much of the drama of the other two, not because Brenton was an undisciplined playwright but because he did not see the theatre as a place for rational argument:

> . . . I think the theatre's a real bear-pit. It's not the place for reasoned discussion. It is the place for really savage insights, which can be proved at once by an audience saying, 'Yet that actually is true', at some level, not necessarily in a representative way. And theatre does teach something about the way people act in public.[44]

His view that the truth of a play would be judged directly by the

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[41] Brenton, "Messages First", p. 25.

[42] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 14.

[43] Brenton, "Interview: Howard Brenton", p. 139.

[44] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 8.

audience and that it could reveal how people behaved in public was close to Hare's. But unlike Hare, Brenton is no intellectual playwright and his plays work at a more immediate level, more passionate than cerebral, and as such opposed to the theatre of his predecessors in the epic mode. He has moved away from his earlier position of claiming that a "really great outburst of nihilism . . . is one of the most beautiful and positive things you can see on stage. . . . Nihilism is the end of everything - the closing down of all possibilities".[45] But even though he has become convinced of the possibility of constructive action, he has not lost his passionate and very personal approach to theatre. He admitted, in a comment on his own Magnificence in 1973, that

> One of my blazing faults as a writer when it comes to agit-prop is that I understand the 'agit' bit but I have difficulty with the 'prop'. That's been one of the difficulties with Magnificence. I was all raring to go with the 'agit' - in the sense of stirring things up - but the thought took time to rein in, hammer down.[46]

With socialism, he has found a way of thinking that is compatible with his way of writing, but his early preference for the 'agit' keeps breaking through in his later plays from the 1970s and 1980s, supporting the description of himself as "someone who can use entertainment to stir things up",[47] not as an artist aspiring to a place within the theatrical establishment.

His problems with the intellectual side of his own drama may explain why he rejected the "moral tradition in the theatre": it was not natural to him. But I also see in his words an indication that for him the theatre is much more a matter of instinct and talent than of intellectual debate or even political agitation, something to which he has rarely devoted his own talents. One suspects that, in fact, he will work alone or with a company as the situation demands, and not because one is more 'correct' in

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[45] Brenton, "The Theatre is a Dirty Place", p. 18. Fruit: Brenton's own play from 1970.

[46] Brenton, "Disrupting the Spectacle", p. 22.

[47] Brenton, "Messages First", p. 31.

ideological terms than another. He will choose, on occasion, to collaborate, but I would suggest that this should be seen rather as an indication of his wish to use the full potential of the theatre than of his having been 'swallowed up' by the theatre.

The same ability to develop his craft was seen in his move into large-scale theatre, marked by his Magnificence (1973). Writing for larger, conventional stages was, for him, an important way of reaching a larger audience, of making his own theatre more 'public' in numerical terms, and with the presentation of his Weapons of Happiness (1976) at the National Theatre he must be said to have achieved this. Writing for larger theatres with not just larger performance spaces but also more sophisticated technical facilities and, even more importantly, larger companies, can offer the playwright a far greater scope for expression. The equation between the size of a company and the scope the play is not quite straightforward, as Epsom Downs demonstrates, but for the playwright not involved permanently in work of Joint Stock's kind, the larger cast does provide a wider range. As he revealed in 1975, he was well aware of opportunities (and excitement) inherent in having a large theatre at his disposal:

> On a performing - I was going to say proscenium - stage, the play has to have its own world, which must connect with the world outside, on the street. And therefore you have to write with greater clarity and force and dignity, and that's a good influence. The most amazing experience was finally having a play done at the Royal Court, on a performing stage. It's like getting hold of a Bechstein, hitting a really superb instrument, when all the time you have been shouting about a penny whistle, or a mouth-organ. You realize how powerful the instrument is, and varied, and how much fun.[48]

Having these greater resources did not lead to him write plays that used ostentatious stage effects of the kind found in Wilson's plays and, more rarely, those of Hare. Rather, he used them to formulate what I would call his personal vision, namely his concern with what he, in 1978, called

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[48] Brenton, "Petrol Bombs . . .", p. 10.

the "war between what people know they have to be and what they experience they really are".[49] Again it is possible to see a similarity between his and Hare's ideas, but in Brenton's case this concern is seen as early as in Christie in Love (1969), where he operated with "the idea of a saint or hero who drives a straight line in a society that has become very distorted. These people often end up like Christie as criminals - but they drive a straight course through a world which is too complicated to be read in a straight way".[50] David Hare came to concern himself increasingly with the way in which modern, distorted societies affected the individual, whereas Brenton concentrated on groups of people, but both writers displayed distinct points-of-view which they, without claiming to be neutral, wished to put across in their plays. Brenton may not be any "wiser" than anybody else, but he is a playwright who is intent on expressing his views theatrically and capable of expanding his dramaturgical register. Moving into larger theatres meant that he could reach a larger audience, and the move primarily seemed to imply a development in terms of the scale of cast and audience. But it was more than that. In both Gum and Goo and The Churchill Play, the stage is essentially empty, but for the latter he was offered a large stage where the emptiness could be made obvious and it could be made clear that he was writing a play "not set in a room". In this - essential - respect the move onto the larger performance space could be seen to be a matter of aesthetics, not just of content.

He has not at any time indulged in formal experiment for its own sake, and, so, there is little point in looking at his work only from an aesthetic angle. His use of the theatre has a purpose, namely that of ensuring that a play's message is put across clearly to its audience. I would argue that his use of the theatre serves the purpose of organizing the play's narrative in such a way as to give the play the desired meaning

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[49] Brenton, "Interview: Howard Brenton", p. 136.

[50] Brenton, "Disrupting the Spectacle", p. 16.

and, thus, making its message clear; but it is in the organization itself, the telling of the story, that the playwright demonstrates his ability and talent as an artist.

He objects to the notion that the playwright should demonstrate a personal 'vision' in his plays, and in his own case it would certainly be wrong to speak of a 'vision' in the sense of a "view of things that might be". Only in The Churchill Play (1974) has he offered such a vision, predicting how freedom might, suddenly and imperceptibly, be lost, and this play was intended more as a contemporary satire than a political science fiction play. Generally speaking, he is primarily concerned with the present and only with the past to the extent that it can throw light on the present, as happens in Weapons of Happiness (1976). However, to say that he is not a playwright of vision is not to say that he has no point of view of his own. I shall divide his plays into two groups: those written before 1973, where he can be seen experimenting both with dramatic form and with subject matter; and those written in and after 1973, beginning with Magnificence, where his faith in communism came to dominate his plays. That dominance did not imply that explicit reference was made to communist dogma in his plays but rather that he accepted that freedom and happiness can be achieved only through the application, in one form or another, of communism. Yet he stops short of suggesting how this might come about, choosing instead to show why he thinks that there is a need for communism. His plays must therefore be described as critical rather than visionary, concerned more with the problems of the present than with specific ways of creating an ideal future.

Brenton bases his criticism on a belief that there is a fundamental conflict of interest in modern Britain between the haves and the have-nots, a conflict which manifests itself both at the private and the public level. His description of the haves is far more detailed than that of the have-nots, and it is founded more on the culture and ideology of the dominant

middle-class than on political and economic theory. He is particularly critical of the traditional image of life in Britain as a peaceful idyll and of the British as a civilized and humane race of Christian individuals. As he sees it, modern Britain is a country where the classes wage war on each other and where the concepts of individual guilt and shame are not so much virtues as signs of weakness or blindness, an inability to understand the collective responsibility of the middle classes for the exploitation of the lower classes. It is part of his aim, implicitly, to show the middle classes in their true light, at best as liberal and responsible individuals incapable of changing the unjust system in which they live, at worst as cynical and conscious exploiters aware that their enemies are the people they oppress. In Brenton's universe it is they who have the upper hand, and who pose such a threat to free expression that he continues to declare his faith in the small-scale, underground theatre.

All of Brenton's plays - those written before and after 1973 - are exploratory rather than propagandistic, aiming to throw light on subjects which concern him. Although it is always dangerous to draw on a playwright's biography to explain his work, it is tempting to point to the fact that Brenton comes from a religious background: his father was a policeman turned Methodist preacher. There is no indication anywhere that Brenton is himself religious or that he believes that the supernatural has a place in this world. There is, however, a 'hardness' to his plays, a determination to establish the truth, no matter how unpleasant, which can seem reminiscent of religious zealousness. As he has put it himself,

> I'm a straight, traditional writer, trying to write truthfully about the society I'm in and trying to intervene to help the good in it and discourage the bad. All writers - those who are not hopeless hacks - do that, be they socialist or not.[51]

He is a playwright with a purpose, if not a mission, namely that of helping

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[51] Brenton, "Interview: Howard Brenton", p. 135.

the good and discouraging the bad, though without any absolute ideas about what constitutes good and bad. Rather, he attempts to explain it through his plays. He sometimes appears to find it easier to define what he dislikes than what he likes, to describe the bad than the good, but I believe this should be interpreted in a positive manner: as an indication that he is concerned to show what the opposition is and to do so in sufficient detail to allow the audience to appreciate its power.

An unusual feature of his plays, and one that may also point towards his family background, is the theme of resurrection, which first occurs in Christie in Love (1969) and is found again in Hitler Dances (1972), The Churchill Play (1974), and Weapons of Happiness (1976), with parallels in the appearance of ghosts in Magnificence (1973) and Epsom Downs (1977). Whilst there is no suggestion that Brenton believes such things to happen in the off-stage world, they play an important part in his fictional world and, as a deliberate distortion of reality, they are an indication that as an artist he is not just employing the kind of drama which in his opinion, we all use as part of our daily lives. He is creating fictions for the theatre in which he takes liberties with the facts of the real world in order to put forward his personal view of human existence. He prefers to present himself as an 'entertainer' but only, I would suggest, to avoid being classed with the traditional 'artist', the creator of aesthetic objects with a value of their own. Much as he may dispute it, his plays can be judged in terms of their artistic quality and the success of their attempts to intervene on behalf of the good in the off-stage world depends, of course, on their success as works of art.

Answering his own - rhetorical - question, "does a true message need a play?", Brenton answers with a series of rhetorical questions:

> Do we need songs? Do we need jokes? Do we need pleasure? Do we need to imagine? Do we need to delight or frighten ourselves with what we are capable of? Celebrate achievements, mourn failures? That is, do we need entertainment? I'd answer "Yes" - but then I don't want to do myself out of a job, do I.[52]

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[52] Ibid., p. 140.

He might as well have asked, "do we need art", and I can only assume that he avoids the word 'art' for polemical reasons. His answer does, however, reveal another of his qualities, namely his sense of humour. The toughness of his plays, which might otherwise appear gloomy, is frequently relieved by his humour, which he directs both at antagonists and protagonists. The world according to Brenton may not always seem a pleasant place and there are few outright good characters in his works, but humour prevents his fictional world from becoming a place of despair. There is a struggle between good and bad in the world as he sees it, but there is an even more obvious struggle in his plays between the brutality of the world and the humour which defies that brutality. He is no friend of traditional humanism, but it is in his jokes that he shows his own humanity, an implicit belief that human existence is not without hope.

(iv) In the following I shall attempt to show that Brenton, in spite of his refusal to consider himself an artist or a person with unusual abilities, is actually a not very unconventional playwright who explores a struggle between good and bad in the real world, but who does so in fictions which demonstrate both a command of the complex medium of theatre and an individual artistry which is not the product of collective creativity.

Brenton has written a large number of plays. I shall concentrate here on those carrying only his name as the author and pay particular attention to his full-length plays, having already referred to his early short pieces above. These plays fall into two groups of five each, staged before and in/after 1973. They are: Revenge (1969), Christie in Love (1969), Wesley (1970), Scott of the Antarctic (1971), Hitler Dances (1972); and Magnificence (1973), The Churchill Play (1974), Saliva Milkshake (1975), Weapons of Happiness (1976) and Epsom Downs (1977). Of these, Scott of the Antarctic, Hitler Dances and Epsom Downs are the results of his collaboration with theatre companies. Thus, he notes about the published text of

Scott that it is "a scenario as well as a play text. A number of people collaborated on the show, bringing their vision to it".[53] The collaborative creation of Hitler is documented in articles about the play,[54] whereas he says of Epsom that the "final text is the writer's alone, but it is written in full view of the company's constant, questioning gaze" (p. 6). With these qualifications in mind, all ten plays can be considered to be the original work of the playwright himself.

In the first five plays, he can be seen exploring the theatre and a number of individual motifs that are to be used in different contexts in later plays. His experimentation is evident even from the circumstances of their first performance: Revenge was staged in one of the new studio theatres, the Theatre Upstairs; Christie on tour on the new Fringe circuit; Wesley at a Methodist church, Eastbrook Hall, in Bradford; Scott at a Bradford ice rink; and Hitler at one of the new major Fringe venues, the Edinburgh Traverse. Theatre, in the sense of 'a place for producing and witnessing the production of plays', does not imply a particular type of architecture for Brenton, and he would appear to subscribe to Peter Brook's view that one "can take any empty space and call it a bare stage".[55] Two plays in particular demonstrate Brenton's ability to do this and to create a work that combines setting and theme to form a unified whole: Christie and Wesley. I have already referred to the way in which he uses the setting as a central metaphor in the former. In the latter he achieves much the same by using the space of an actual Methodist church to tell the story of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley. 'Using the space' means using the church as it is used for services, with a choir as part of the action and John Wesley giving sermons from the pulpit, but also acting out

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[53] Brenton: Plays for Public Places (1972) (no page number: "Author's Note").

[54] See Ansorge, "Underground Explorations No.4: War Games", and Richard Boon, "Introduction" to Hitler Dances.

[55] Peter Brook, The Empty Space (1972), p. 11.

the play in the empty floor space of the church by using the simple narrative devices of the Fringe theatre: an announcer informing the audience of what is going on, straight narrative (by Wesley himself), mime (the tennis game in Scene Three, the boat in Scene Six, etc.), silent action (the dumbshow, Scene Seven). Brenton has rarely been able to achieve the kind of unity in later plays that he does in Christie and Wesley, but they, and the other early plays, illustrate that for him theatre can be anywhere and that he is able to make meaningful use of the resources available to him in any given situation. This makes it less surprising that he should be able to move into larger, more complex theatres after 1973 and that he should continue to defend small-scale theatre: clearly, theatre for him is not dependent on architecture but on the relationship between performer and audience.

Wesley contains several features that are typical of Brenton as a playwright. In the context of this study, and in view of the fact that he has taken part in collaborative work, it is interesting to note the style of some of his stage directions which are directly relevant not just to the director but to the performer as well. An example is found in Scene Six:

> NB: the way to get the effect here is to go fast, treat the mimes as farce playing, for a few seconds and speak the details of the routine out hard and clearly. (p. 57)

Here, the playwright is not just concerned with describing the movements of his characters or the atmosphere of the setting but with actual performance technique. To me, this indicates that he is an artist with practical experience of the theatre but also that he does not accept a place in the theatre as a provider of only words and ideas. Theatre is more than words, and this is evident even in the published text.

Another detail is his use of stage effects to create what can only be described as 'spectacle', an aspect of his work which illustrates that he is something of a 'showman'. In Scene Eight one finds him staging Wesley's "dark night of the soul" and ensuing discovery of Christ in a scene where

two devils ("in modern dress, black raincoats", whose lines overlap slightly, p. 65) fight with the choir (singing a hymn "with the greatest force they can muster", the organ sounding the note "very loudly") over a doubting John Wesley. The speed and confusion of this scene adds effect to the moment when Wesley discovers his faith, a moment whose simplicity is stressed by the announcer, who has been reading from Wesley's diary:

> AFTER ALL THE SERMONS AND TEARING APART -
> (He slaps the book shut.)
> SIMPLE AS THAT.
> (Organ sounds the note.
> CHOIR sing.
> JOHN goes up into the pulpit . . .) (p. 69)

This moment is potentially very powerful and shows Brenton's talent for using theatrical resources other than dialogue, a talent which is characteristic of his entire career.

A final, illuminating detail is his use of stylization. All drama is, of course, a kind of stylization, but I am thinking here of Brenton's particular kind of verbal and physical patterning, often based on a kind of patterning found in the off-stage world but used for dramatic and/or theatrical effect. Thus, in Wesley, you find him using the mimed tennis game between John and his hymn-writing brother, Charles Wesley, to emphasize points in their discussion of John's Christianity and to illustrate physically who has the upper hand intellectually at different times during the discussion (Scene Three). Games, not just those played by children, are used as a formal device in other plays - Gum and Goo, Hitler, Churchill and Weapons, for instance - but Brenton also frequently employs verbal patterning in its own right, as a kind of ritualization of human behaviour. An early example is Gum and Goo, where it is used by the two imaginary characters of the title; in Hitler lines alternate with drum-beats (for instance in Scene Twelve); and, more recently, in Weapons it is used to coax the ghostly central character, Joseph Frank, out of the past. At the beginning of Act Two, Scene Three, Frank is alone on stage talking about the brutal oppression of communists behind the Iron Curtain, when the calls of

his fellow factory workers at the English crisp factory bring him back to the here and now:

> JANICE (off). Joseph, where are you?
> KEN (off). What you doing, Joey?
> BILLY (off). Saw you out in the yard, Joey!
> KEN (off). You creeping about in here, Joey?
> FRANK. I thought I could leave that bloodstained room.
> Be English. Anonymous, in a gentle climate?
> KEN (off). Joey!
> BILLY (off). Joey!
> LIZ (off). Joey!
> KEN (off). Where you at, Joey?
> FRANK. Right. If I am not to be left alone, all right.
> Right. I'll drag out all I once believed in.
> (. . .)
> (Aside.) Let the old melodrama hit the road again.
> (p. 68)

In instances such as these, Brenton's old delight in stylization and theatricality breaks through, a delight which illustrates both that his view of theatre had remained primitive, pre-literary, and that he was never content to write in such an unobtrusive way as to let the content dominate completely: the play is more than a vehicle for the message and the theatre can do more than reproduce everyday speech and action. Regardless of Brenton's emphasis on content rather than form in his discussion of theatre, his works reveal that he contributes far more than the content to the theatre, and it is this 'surplus' which can be subjected to a stylistic analysis, revealing him as an artist.

The central themes of his earliest plays can be described briefly. Revenge deals with a conflict - out-dated, as Brenton sees it - between good and bad conceived in simple terms. Indeed, at the end the two characters tell the audience of their respective deaths and ascent to heaven/descent to hell. It is mainly characterized by low comedy and farce and Brenton attempts to work against the identification of good and bad with individual characters by letting a single actor play both protagonist and antagonist. His decision to personify Brixton Gaol, from which the bad character emerges at the beginning of the play, may be an indication of his rejection of the concept of dramatic characters as psychological case-studies, but it also serves to underline the play's stylized nature which contains an instance

of Brenton's verbal patterning in the scene (Act Two, Scene Five) where most of the characters describe to the audience how they die.

Christie again offers a conflict between good and bad - the mass-murderer Christie and the police - and raises the problem of individual morality against a background of humour, but this time in a much more integrated form. By contrasting the culpable criminal, a three-dimensional character, with a pair of two-dimensional policemen indulging in traditional, male-chauvinist humour, Brenton turns conventional morality on its head and suggests that the characters conventionally seen as forces of good, the police, are more corrupt than the criminal. Christie is treated by Brenton as a positive character, trying to realize his feelings of love in a manner which, though obviously wrong, is not contrasted with a moral right: the policemen are unable to provide that. Christie himself becomes representative of one of Brenton's favourite character types, one that will recur in later plays, that of the character trying to drive a "straight line in a society that has become very distorted".[56] Other examples are Wesley in the play of the same name, Scott in Scott of the Antarctic and Jed in Magnificence. These characters are individualistic, they attempt to act on their own, blind to the imperfections of the world around them. Martin in Milkshake, too, can be seen as a late development of the type, by now not so much single-minded as blind to the truth of his own situation and consequently brought to a tragic end.

As a serious treatment of a religious personality, Wesley stands out among Brenton's plays. Like Christie, it shows a (relatively) three-dimensional character surrounded by flat characters, trying to draw a straight line through a confusing world, but Wesley is engaged in a legitimate search for the truth in a Christian sense and his search is crowned with success. There are no similar characters among his later plays but the search for truth and the attempt to act from a knowledge of what is

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[56] Brenton, "The Theatre is a Dirty Place", p. 16.

right and what is wrong is a constant throughout his work. In a very recent play, Pravda (1985, written with David Hare) the victorious evil character, newspaper magnate Lambert Le Roux points out to his opponents: "You are all weak because you do not know what you believe"(p. 114). This is what defeats the liberal middle-class characters in Brenton's plays - Martin in Milkshake, Captain Thompson in Churchill and Ralph Makepeace in Weapons - but the re-discovery of belief is also what brings the character Frank back from the dead for a short time in Weapons.

Scott is the nearest Brenton comes, in the plays dealt with here, to an agit-prop play. It is a straightforward attack on the conventional myth of the British middle-class hero, speaking in public-school cliche and setting out on a quest to conquer the South Pole to satisfy King George V's craving for a bigger Empire. The quest, as presented in Scott, is initiated by God in response to the King's prayers, and both God and the Devil appear in the play, attended by Jesus and the "Devil's devil", Snodgrass. The forces of Good and Evil are thus present in person but neither acts in the expected manner. God is content to watch the expedition blunder its way towards its painful end and the Devil need only observe while Scott's quest in the name of Good founders. After Wesley, where one man's quest for religion was taken seriously, Scott presents a complete reversal. It suggests that Scott the hero need look neither to God nor to the Devil for help or hindrance. The tragedy of his expedition lies within the realm of the material world and has nothing to do with the supernatural. But as an individual living in the material world, he is at the mercy of his own cultural assumptions: his belief in God and in the nation for whose sake he is undertaking the expedition. Scott is a victim in the play, a victim of forces which he does not understand and is unable to overcome because he has been culturally conditioned to behave (irrationally, in the context of an expedition to the Antarctic) like a civilized, decent and well-educated gentleman.

In Scott, Brenton moves closer to a position where he can begin to deal with political questions in the context of modern Britain, but in the next play, Hitler, he is again concerned with cultural assumptions, this time with the way in which our ideas about war are transmitted from one generation to the next. As the title suggest, 'Hitler dances' even in the present. The play's central character, the dead German soldier Hans, is resurrected by a group of children playing games on the theme of war, and the games are used deliberately as a ritual capable of 'raising the dead', much in the manner of the rituals of primitive tribes. Neither God nor the Devil appears in this quite unreligious play but the supernatural - in the shape of the resurrection - does play a part in the action. Only one of the children - a young girl - objects to the violence of her friends' games and she becomes the friend of the dead soldier, who tells her the story of the British agent Violette Szabo, a war-hero whose exploits have been described on film in Carve Her Name With Pride (1958). Brenton uses the play to demonstrate that the real story of Violette has, in fact, been changed in crucial ways in the film to make it acceptable as a myth about war heroism. Thus, myths about war are carried forward both in children's games and in the fictions we create about war in art. That those myths still exist is demonstrated by the fact that the dead soldier can still be brought to life, and that the myths are our common property is made evident within the play by letting the company take the parts of Hans and Violette in turn. This, of course, also has the effect of preventing those two characters from being perceived by the actors and the audience as individuals. Hitler is not about individually held notions but about our collective cultural ideas. One character, the young girl, who is given a measure of individuality, is interesting as a phenomenon of Brenton's work. She offers the hope of some humanity in this play and has parallels in other similar female characters elsewhere, most notably the girl in Gum and Goo and Janice in Weapons. They are, perhaps, the nearest thing to 'heroines' in his plays, embracing

- metaphorically and physically - the apparently disgusting and frightening "dirty old men" whom they encounter, thereby showing a degree of heroism on s small scale.

I consider Magnificence to be a turning point in Brenton's career because it shows him addressing contemporary problems in the light of ideas about communism and socialism. It should be pointed out that Magnificence was not the first example of his dealing with politics. He had already touched on that subject in various ways in his second play for Portable, Fruit (1970), in his film Skin Flicker (1973), the collaboratively written England's Ireland (1972), A Fart for Europe (1973) and Brassneck (1973), and his adaptation of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure (1972). Nevertheless, Magnificence did show a decisive change in his career: it marked his entry into the large-scale professional theatre, an event which has been seen by some as the beginning of the Fringe's penetration into mainstream subsidized theatre as such, and it saw him trying to create a play in a complex form on the subject of political change.

Magnificence begins with an example of collective political action: five young idealistic people stage a demonstration on behalf of the homeless by squatting in an empty house that is, unknown to them, already being occupied by a homeless person, a tramp. Ten days later they are evicted, but in a violent incident during the eviction the bailiff accidentally kicks a pregnant girl, Mary. Her boyfriend, Jed, is sentenced to nine months in prison for his part in the incident and when he is released, sets out to avenge himself on the political system by murdering a politician, one whom he mistakenly believes to work for the Ministry of the Environment. In his ignorance, he tries to blow the politician up by igniting gelignite with a burning fuse. He admits defeat but is then killed with the politician when the explosives go off accidentally. His friend from the original occupation, Cliff, who advocates carefully planned collective action, expresses the play's moral directly in a speech to the dead revolutionary:

> Jed. The waste. I can't forgive you that. (A pause.) The waste of your anger. Not the murder, murder is common enough. Not the violence, violence is everyday. What I can't forgive you Jed, my dear dead friend, is the waste. (Blackout.) (p. 71)

Jed has gone on a crusade similar to that of earlier Brenton characters such as Scott, and like Scott he has failed, but Jed's purpose and failure are of a political nature: he is engaged in attempting to change society politically but has attempted to do so on his own. He fails because he acts in an individualistic way.

In Magnificence, Brenton has identified both friend and foe: those trying to change society in the direction of socialism and those in whose interest it is to maintain a political and economic system based on the exploitation of the majority by the ruling minority. This may seem like a somewhat simplistic view and I find it difficult not to see it as an indication of Brenton's political paranoia, but the play does, in fact, give a considerably more complex impression than my brief description of the plot can indicate. That complexity stems from Brenton's use of different theatrical styles.

The play falls naturally into two parts of three and five scenes, divided by Jed's nine months in prison. But they are also distinguished stylistically. Scenes One and Three where we see the squatters in the flat are written in a - for Brenton unusual - representational style, consisting almost entirely of normal behaviour and speech. Only the squatters' 'juggling' of tinned food in Scene One (p. 20) reminds one of the playwright's use of rhythmic language. This style, which establishes the squatters as ordinary, believable people, is subtly changed from Scene One to Scene Three to show how the group has evolved a routine during the ten days that the occupation lasts. Between those two scenes Brenton has placed one where the bailiff - Slaughter - and a half-educated police officer discuss the rights and wrongs of evicting squatters. This scene is deliberately written in a non-representational style, to contrast the squatters with their opponents, the bailiff and police constable being presented as

comical figures and the latter questioning the legality of the former's practice as a bailiff. Scene Two makes its serious point by allowing the bailiff to gain the upper hand and frighten the constable. This prepares the audience for the climax of Scene Three, the violent clash between the squatters and the forces of law and order. Brenton stylizes this climax by writing it as a tableau during which Jed explains to the audience, in single lines interspersed with drum beats and stamping by the rest of the cast and in unnatural light falling low across the stage, how the bailiff's men "Trampled all over our model farm" (p. 39) and he himself was imprisoned. This episode has the effect of concentrating the audience's attention on Jed's experience of the incident, and the rest of the play is dedicated to showing how he goes out to seek revenge on his own.

The setting itself is changed for the second half of the play. Whereas Scenes One and Three of the first half are set in a realistic 'room' and Scene Two in front of a painted cloth, the second half takes place on a bare stage. Not only does this allow the playwright freedom to change locations fluently (Sc. 4: Cambridge University; Sc. 5: outside Brixton Gaol; Sc. 6: the home of Will, one of the squatters; Sc. 7: an unspecified place where the original squatters meet again; Sc. 8: Hertfordshire, the garden of Jed's "target", the politician Alice), it also focuses attention on the words and actions of the characters. On this open - 'epic' - stage Brenton moves freely both within the material world where the characters live and from that into the mind of Jed who, in Sc. 5, faces a personal crisis, a moment of doubt, as his faith in revolutionary theory falters. That theory is personified in Lenin, who appears as "the stage floods with red, awash with banners and songs" (p. 52), offering such maxims as "Politics is an art and a science that does not drop from the skies" (p. 53). Jed, who feels only personal hatred towards the system, embraces a policy of personal terrorism based on Situationist theory of confronting the impersonal and false "spectacle" of capitalist society, as seen in film and advertising, with a more real, disruptive revolutionary spectacle, such as would be

provided by blowing up a Conservative politician. Only when the explosives fail to ignite does he realize that he has reduced his revolution to a battle between two individuals, himself and the politician, a battle taking place at a personal level and therefore quite unrealistic: neither he nor the politician can be held personally responsible for the injustice of society or the correction of that injustice. That he and the politician are then killed accidentally adds dramatic emphasis to the play's end by showing Jed's (and, one supposes, the politician's) death as a "waste", anything but magnificent.

The message of the play is that society will be changed through collective rather than individual action and it can to that extent be considered a 'propagandistic' play, arguing in favour of change on the basis of communist organization and theory. But the play, as it stands, is wholly imaginative. It is concerned with problems of the actual, contemporary world and with commenting directly on those problems, but they are problems of an imaginative nature: how, in theory, to work towards effective social and political change but illustrated negatively, through an example of how not to do it. Because he uses the stage and different styles of writing with such variety, Magnificence becomes a clear example of the play as 'aesthetic object', not existing in isolation from the off-stage world but being obviously a constructed, fictional world whose interpretation depends not only on a number of non-theatrical assumptions shared by playwright and audience but on the audience's ability to understand a complex and varied story presented in different styles on stage.

Compared with Magnificence, The Churchill Play is far simpler, its main stylistic variation being found in the contrast between the representational style of the main story of the British concentration camp, Churchill, and the play-within-the-play staged by the prisoners to entertain a visiting group of politicians.

The play, set in 1984, ten years after its first performance, takes place in an imaginary future Britain where the military has taken a dominant

position, the nation is governed by a "Con.-Lab." coalition, and political opponents are sent to concentration camps such as that in which the play is situated. The stage setting is, as in the second half of Magnificence, an open space, but this time one inside a building: an aircraft hangar. This open space once more allows Brenton to change locations rapidly, from interior to exterior, but the majority of the scenes take place inside the hangar, the exception being Act Three, set in a "copse near the camp" (p. 52). The setting can therefore be said to convey the idea that the action is limited to the confines of a camp, by definition a restricted space.

The play tells the story of how a group of prisoners, from different walks of life, incarcerated for taking part in what would be legitimate political or semi-political activities in our own time, 1974, stage a play about the great national myth who has lent his name to the camp: Sir Winston Churchill. This play, which shows Churchill rising from the dead, is banned by the camp commander for suggesting that Churchill was homosexual, but at the insistence of the liberal Captain Thompson, Medical Officer and Recreation Officer at the camp, the prisoners are allowed to go ahead with it. Before this actually happens, they decide to take the opportunity to escape after the performance, using the visiting committee as hostages. But they cannot escape from the confined space where they - and the whole play - is set, nor, as one of the prisoners points out, is there anywhere for them to go:

> /Mike:/ Nowhere to break out to, is there. They'll concrete the whole world over any moment now. And what do we do? . . . Survive in the cracks. Either side of the wire. Be alive. (p. 89)

Outside, they would be alive, but they would not live. By being imprisoned, they have been deprived of their personal freedom, but there is no more freedom to be found in the society outside.

Churchill is intended not as science fiction but as a "satire for the present", and this can be seen from the fact that Brenton has not moved

drastically away from contemporary or probable conditions. The characters in the play - the internees, the soldiers guarding them and the visiting Parliamentary Sub-Committee - are all characters who might live in the present and the political system represented in the play can be found already in existence outside Britain. Brenton believed that it existed in embryonic form in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. The basis for the play is therefore political reality rather than fantastic fiction, although it is offered as a fiction, a warning of what could become reality given the 'right' conditions.

Freedom, and the risk of losing freedom, is the play's central theme, but the tension between fiction and reality is what moves it forward as a play. Brenton uses that tension to make his point, thereby demonstrating that although the play's message is what matters most to him, it is the way he writes it, the way he employs fiction in it, that makes the message significant. Churchill begins with a deceptive use of theatre: the audience is presented with the first version of the internees' Churchill Play, performed in front of "a huge stained glass window of medieval knights in prayer" (p. 9). The audience do not discover that this political 'Fringe' play is not the actual play they are to watch until the camp commander stops the performance in an act of obvious political censorship. The lights go up to reveal "an aircraft hangar. The stained glass window is seen to be a flimsy, paper construction" (p. 14). From this point onwards, the audience is aware that the reality of the play, the reality which the characters experience, is the neon-lit hangar. This is reflected in the words of a new internee, Reese, who is trying to explain his own situation to Captain Thompson, the liberal Medical Officer:

> All I know is I am somewhere in England. I have a broom in my hand, I have been asked . . . To sweep this aircraft hangar. (Change.) No, that is . . . False of me. I know I am in a camp. I am detained. (p. 31)

Reese changes from describing his situation in a "literary" style to one which simply states the facts as he knows them. This is paralleled in the

internees' Churchill Play which, in both its versions, attacks the glorifying myth about Winston Churchill, taking first a personal angle ("Churchill is a homosexual") and then a political one ("Churchill was not the people's hero during the Second World War"). Simultaneously, the internees' performance offers a contrast within the play between the Churchill myth as theatre, as art, and the way it has been made part of an oppressive political system, Churchill lending his name, posthumously, to the concentration camp.

The play thus presents a series of juxtapositions of fiction and reality, facing the characters with the problem of deciding which is which. For the camp commander, Colonel Ball, the reality is that he is running a concentration camp, a fact of which he is aware. For the Medical Officer's wife, 'reality' is the dream of a quiet suburban existence in the south of England, away from the brutal reality of the camp where her husband works. The Medical Officer rejects his wife's dream, accepting the reality of the camp, but he fails to appreciate the nature of that reality and acts out the fictional role of the decent and understanding officer one finds in traditional film-treatments of prison camp life. At the end of the play, he makes a grand gesture that seems to come out of war-fiction, offering to accompany the internees in their escape, but at this point the escape attempt is already crumbling and the internees have realized that there is no future for them, as human beings, on the other side of the wire: the camp remains the only possible reality for them, an indication of the political reality by which all the characters live their lives and by which they must all measure their own reality.

Churchill is metatheatre in the sense that it comments on the power of the art itself. In this micro-society of political repression, it has been rendered powerless. The second version of the internees' play is harder, more openly political than the first, a play with a message such as Brenton himself wants it. But matters have reached a point where that message is no longer heard in Brenton's 1984, where theatre has become what

the officers consider it: therapy and entertainment. There is no personal freedom, no freedom of expression, and therefore, as the internees realise, no sense in either theatre or action.

One may ask whether this is not in itself sufficient evidence that it is the message that is important in the play. One cannot, of course, deny Brenton the right to say that it is so, but he has written the play in such a way as to enable the audience to come to a conclusion similar to that reached by the internees about the impossibility of action, by making the internees' 'Churchill Play' one of several instances of reality in conflict with fiction, the kind of conflict which the theatre is eminently suited to illustrate. The style of Churchill is far less complicated, far less theatrical than that of Magnificence, but it depends just as much as the latter on the playwright's ability to create a fictional world on stage, one which draws on off-stage reality, organized deliberately as an imaginative work, to be understood and interpreted as such. Inevitably, that organization draws attention to itself as evidence that Churchill is ultimately a work of art and not simply a means of communicating a message. It is not just trying to inform: it is trying to persuade. And it does so not by telling the audience what to think but by trying to make them think, and this is, crucially, achieved by structuring the play in the appropriate way.

In a sense, Saliva Milkshake continues a development in Magnificence and Churchill, away from formal and stylistic complexity towards a greater simplicity. Milkshake is an almost entirely verbal play with very little use of physical imagery, and it is dedicated to illustrating how the main character's inability to understand the reality of events around him destroys him. The main character, biology lecturer Martin, has much in common with the liberal Captain Thompson in Churchill, and like Thompson he makes a fatal grand gesture at the end of the play, grand but inappropriate and only motivated by his personal feelings of guilt.

There is, however, an essential difference. Captain Thompson faces a choice between his wife's dream of a quiet middle-class existence and accepting

what is happening at Camp Churchill. Martin is unaware that there is an alternative to his own quiet existence until a fellow revolutionary socialist from his student days, Joan, turns up at his home to ask him to help her escape after having murdered the Home Secretary. Thrown into confusion - for he is now no revolutionary - he betrays Joan to his old professor, who reports her to the intelligence service. Martin assists them in setting her up, she kills herself when ambushed by the police, and Martin thus finds himself deeply involved in political violence, because he has failed to appreciate that it is impossible to avoid taking sides. He has not understood what being either a revolutionary socialist or a biology lecturer can involve, and he pays the price for his lack of awareness when he decides - in his grand gesture - to confess to Joan's fellow revolutionaries:

> They punctured my ear drums. Now I'm deaf. (A pause.) What? (A pause.) What did you say? (A pause.) What? (A pause.) What? (p. 24)

The gesture is brave but it is also pointless: he makes it in order to find peace within himself, but he only manages to lose the faculty which he should have used while he had it. If he had listened, all this might not have happened.

This is the most forthright political message in the plays dealt with here, a message which Brenton could argue is not theoretical but has a direct bearing on off-stage reality. But as in Churchill, the play does not relate to specific historical or contemporary events but rather, in a general sense, to events that are probable in the world - not just Britain - as it looks today. Taken literally, as a 'documentary', Milkshake offers an unlikely choice between using violence to maintain or overthrow the political system and adopting a position of powerless individualism. I would suggest that Milkshake should be understood primarily as a fiction and that it makes sense only if considered as a construct, a deliberately created micro-world within which the playwright can lay down the rules for the behaviour of his characters. This particular play, being a first-

person 'narrative', provides a view inside the head of the central character, with other characters supplying the backdrop. Although the story has a basis in off-stage reality, it has no direct meaning outside the theatre. It furnishes an example, stylized through the way it simplifies and contracts the main character's predicament, of how a concentration on individual personality can have tragic consequences for the individual himself.

In Milkshake, the focus is therefore ultimately turned back on the play itself. Important though the message is - you cannot live in isolation from the real world around you - it is the playwright's conscious use of fiction which gives it its significance. Brenton differs from Wilson in insisting on the primacy of content over form in his plays, but there is no true difference between the two as artists: they are expressing themselves through the theatre, using aesthetic means to create fictions in which both the treatment of facts from the off-stage world and the conclusions they reach are imaginative.

This becomes even more evident in Weapons of Happiness, a play which can be linked with Magnificence, both through its title (a quotation from Magnificence, p. 15) and its subject matter: a small group of, predominantly, young people trying to take collective, political action. An element of coincidence also enters into Weapons, but here it leads to collective rather than individual action: the workers at a crisp factory discover that the factory owner, Ralph Makepeace, is about to sell their place of work and decide to occupy it. After seven days, they escape through the sewers to find a temporary home at an abandoned Welsh farm, where they will prepare a return to the true breeding place of socialist revolution: the city.

Thus, Brenton's purpose is again to present his audience with a message, his aims are political rather than aesthetic. But Weapons is a particularly interesting play in an aesthetic sense, for it approaches politics from a specifically imaginative angle. Like Milkshake, it refers to probable events in the off-stage world but creates a world of its own

where improbable events also become possible.

At the centre of the play there is a couple, as is the case in many of Hare's plays, but this couple is unusual: Janice, a young, modern communist, and Josef Frank, a Czech immigrant and former government minister, who now works with Janice at the crisp factory, are ostensibly central characters in a story about a factory occupation but in fact representatives of traditional and modern communism. Like Milkshake, this is a play about ideas.

Brenton uses a device already employed in Hitler and with an antecedent in Gum and Goo: the meeting between a young, innocent girl and a man raised from the dead. Here, however, the girl is no innocent, for Janice is consciously experimenting with communism and she sets out to befriend Frank, with whom she feels a natural affinity. As she says, in the final line of the play: "He was a communist" (p. 79). "Was", because at that point Frank has died, though in reality he is dead throughout the play. The real Josef Frank, as Brenton explains in a note, "was hanged in Prague on the 3rd of December 1952" (p. 6). Brenton lets Janice bring him back to life in order to re-establish a connection between the "original" communism that was so severely compromised under Stalin, and modern-day communism.

This he illustrates by interlacing past and present, Frank's past as a communist politician, meeting Stalin in Moscow in the 1940s, and being arrested and sentenced with a friend, Victor Clementis, in 1952. As the original production had a large company and a modern, fully-equipped theatre - the Lyttleton - at its disposal, Brenton is able to show this past in a series of spectacular "transformations": a routine police interview in the present turns into an interrogation of Frank in Prague (Act 1, Sc. 4); a flash-back scene (Act 1, Sc. 7) showing Frank and Clementis in Moscow becomes a tableau where a paternal Stalin confronts Frank; and in what is Frank's second moment of death (Act 2, Sc. 4), Stalin reappears, this time standing next to a tank. Most spectacular is, perhaps, the moment when

Janice seduces Frank at the London Planetarium while "overhead and all round the spectacle of the galaxies, stars and planets, unfolds above the London skyline" (p. 45), a spectacle which ends by showing the strange couple as the "sweet earth and its milky bride" (p. 48). Brenton thus mingles the factual with the fantastic, the world of factory occupations with that of Frank's memories, and shows Janice's and Frank's union as a moment of universal significance.

This mingling of styles and forms was not new. Brenton had already employed it in Magnificence and it can also be found in earlier plays. Commenting on Magnificence, where Lenin is seen crossing the stage, he said in 1973 that

> Coherence within a play is not a matter of choosing to write in one style. . . . Actual coherence means using many different styles, moulding them, a deliberate process of selection, in order to express that whole in a play. Shakespeare did this all the time . . .[57]

This is exactly what he does in Weapons, where scenes of narrative (Frank's memories) alternate with scenes of straight drama. It achieves considerably greater fluency than Magnificence, and the result is a play that makes an imaginative rather than a factual statement. He may be correct in saying that "the message, the truth, of a play is not within the province of artistic originality",[58] but the raison d'être of a play lies in, at least, a degree of artistic originality which will distinguish it from a political tract or a study of socio-economic history. There is more to Brenton's drama than he is prepared to admit: he does not merely provide "entertainment" but an imaginative treatment of problems that are themselves imaginative by nature.

The inescapable fact about all three writers is that they are all clearly trying to express themselves in ways that are, even if one disregards questions of 'artistic originality', personal. Weapons draws together themes and motifs from previous plays to create a new play which

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[57] Brenton, "Disrupting the Spectacle", p. 23.

[58] Brenton, "Interview: Howard Brenton", p. 137.

sees the world in the same way, but does so in a more fluent manner and invests old motifs - the young girl meeting the old man, for instance - with new meaning.

In Weapons, Brenton could use a company of 19, in Epsom Downs he was restricted to nine, but as I have already mentioned, Joint Stock's particular approach - including their ability to let actors double in a large number of parts - allowed him to write a kaleidoscopic play, involving 43 identified parts plus "Lester Piggott fans, drunks, crowds, jockeys, lovers, asylum inmates" (p. 9). It is also a quite different play from those preceding it. It creates a fictional world within which Brenton can show a cross-section of British life, but that world is based on an actual event, it is 'legitimized' by the presence of a cross-section of British life at the real Derby. As was the case with Hare's Fanshen, Epsom becomes an illustration of the playwright's ability to handle a wide-ranging plot in episodic form, and although most of his plays are episodic in structure, here it is clearly first of all a means of handling a complex narrative.

It is the range of this narrative that gives the play its dramatic interest. What ties it together is the theme of class difference: from the first scene it is evident that the Epsom Derby means different things to different people. It is thus not difficult to see why the subject should interest a socialist writer, but there is little in it to show it as the work of Howard Brenton beyond the appearance of the ghost of Emily Davison. I have already commented on the fact that her role has, apparently, been limited in the process of completing the script, and this fact alone may explain why, in this play, one misses the imaginative treatment which he had displayed in earlier plays. Epsom is excellent entertainment, even on the page, but the absence of Brentonian fantasy makes it appear anonymous, and even if it could be said to demonstrate the playwright's contention that he provides "entertainment", it also, and more significantly, proves in a negative way that Brenton's plays are, otherwise,

highly personal treatments of off-stage reality.

To sum up, Brenton has evidently taken part in creative collaboration in the theatre, and he also stresses the importance of off-stage reality over aesthetic considerations. Furthermore, he makes use of a range of theatrical means of expression beyond spoken dialogue. There is, however, little in this which can lead one to conclude that he occupies a less prominent position in the theatre as an artist. His acquaintance with theatre practice, which is evident from the very beginning of his career, seems more a testimony to his willingness to experiment than a wish to take a secondary - or even equal - position in the theatre to other artists. His insistence that he possesses no special vision and that his work is not a specialized activity cannot conceal the fact that his plays are personal (if not necessarily unique) interpretations of the off-stage reality whose importance he stresses. Finally, his use of non-verbal imagery in his plays seems less an admission that he, as a playwright, does not control the whole of the theatre's expression, than an indication that he has understood and commands the variety of expression possible in the theatre.

It must therefore be concluded that Brenton's work does not represent a radical change in the status of the playwright as an individual artist in the theatre. In his plays written after 1978 he continued to collaborate actively with fellow writers in A Short Sharp Shock (1980) and Sleeping Policemen (1983). Both of these were, as one would expect from Brenton, intended as political statements. However, where the former revealed a new and even tougher attitude to the political realities of the day - a toughness that was behind the 'morally offensive' elements of The Romans in Britain (1980) - the latter was evidence that problems of artistic creation were, in fact, still central to his work, as did his play about his predecessor as a radical artist: Percy Bysshe Shelley, the subject of Bloody Poetry. Here, in a biographical play, almost a dramatized portrait of one of the great Romantic poets, one almost has a sense that Brenton has moved back in his own artistic development to Portable Theatre as it was before he himself

changed it: a company interested in literary figures. This was not so: The Genius (1983), an updated, British version of Brecht's The Life of Galileo, dealt (in suspiciously simple terms) with the prospect of new and dangerous developments in nuclear physics, and Pravda (1985), another collaboration with David Hare, used a well-known example of contemporary capitalism and news dissemination, the press, as a metaphor for a contemporary Britain, where people no longer know what they believe. He continued to switch from working independently to working in collaboration with fellow writers, clearly using his art in a traditional and valuable way, namely in order to explore contemporary and present life and the nature of the art itself. His views, and the way in which he chose to present them, remained distinctly his own and could only support an approach which saw them as theatrical, as demanding realization on stage, in space and time, but which also sees the essential meaning to be already contained in the verbal structure itself, a verbal structure which could appropriately be termed a 'work of literature'.

CONCLUSION

I suggested, in the Introduction, that in spite of developments in theatrical criticism and actual theatre practice, particularly in Great Britain after 1956, it might still be possible to consider playscripts in isolation from actual productions and playwrights in isolation from the theatre company. It might be appropriate, instead, to see playwrights as examples of a literary genre, the drama, and playwrights as literary artists, whose primary medium is the written word, through which they can communicate with an audience of readers. The implication was that the developments referred to had made such a view problematic. It was, of course, not realistic to ignore the fact that playscripts were by definition written for performance in the theatre, but it might be appropriate to treat as literature those texts which led a 'life' outside the theatre in published form, aimed at readers. The intention was not to challenge the methods of theatrical criticism but to concentrate on aspects of scripted plays that were open to literary, as well as theatrical analysis. This might be possible by looking at such plays as examples of fictional narratives rather than as the bases for actual productions.

The time has now come to see whether the four main chapters of this study will substantiate such a claim, and I would suggest that they do.

The first chapter, "Text and Context", showed that the approach suggested had to be made against the background of actual developments in the theatre, which had given the playwright a reduced status in the theatre as an individual artist, focussing, instead, on the ability of the company as such, with or without the playwright, to develop both playscripts and the 'true' art works of the theatre: actual performances. The Fringe/ alternative theatre, where Brenton, Hare and Wilson started their careers as professional playwrights, developed working methods which allowed the company - the small-scale theatre group - to dispense with the playwright altogether, thereby challenging the dominant position which he had held in

the pre-1968 theatre. Two particular groups, the TOC and Red Ladder Theatre, illustrated how such methods might serve particular purposes, namely those of, for instance, creating plays that reflected the personal/collective experience of the whole company (TOC), or which dealt with experience that concerned the target audience as such or an entire social class rather than any individual theatre artist (Red Ladder). In spite of the emphasis on non-verbal expression in the early Fringe, neither of these two companies sought to abolish the written and spoken word from the theatre but rather to adjust the way in which it was used in the creation of performances: they denied its traditional dominance as they did that of the playwright.

The new Fringe was part of a wider, countercultural movement in the late 1960s, and this may explain why some theatre directors from the theatre's mainstream saw its rejection of playwrights and dialogue as such a radical move. The Fringe did reject traditional 'bourgeois' concepts of culture and, further on, the entire 'literate' culture which had developed with the invention of printing and the literacy-based, upper/middle class-dominated culture that had followed it. The countercultural movement sought to replace that with a (part-) amateur, egalitarian, de-centralized and non-literate culture. The directors referred to feared that by abandoning the playwright and the written word, the Fringe theatre risked losing its ability to deal with complex moral and intellectual matters. It would, perhaps, be truer to say that it denied the validity of an individualistic approach to such matters, insisting instead on approaching them from a more democratic or collective point-of-view. The experience of the many - the whole theatre company, the audience - counted for much more than the insight provided by an individual - the playwright. Furthermore, spoken dialogue might not be the best way of communicating with audiences accustomed to being addressed in the 'language' of film, television and advertising. Certainly, one finds these ideas reflected in various way in

the works of the three playwrights included in this study.

In fact, it could be seen that many of these apparently new ideas had been explored and developed in the British avant-garde theatre before 1968. The English Stage Company contributed to this through its work to make its writers understand the problems of performance and involve them in practical theatre work. Theatre Workshop involved playwrights in developing the final script of their play in rehearsal, with the company, and eventually, with Oh What a Lovely War, showed that the company itself could develop a show without a playwright. During the 1960s, new ideas from abroad further strengthened this idea and showed how theatre performances could be created by using non-verbal expression, as was seen in the Happening, the Theatre of Cruelty and the ideas and work of Jerzy Grotowski. These anticipated, and fed into, the later Fringe theatre.

Inevitably, British playwrights perceived the changes in their status in the theatre, to the point where they themselves gave (political) events in the off-stage world higher priority than artistic originality or saw the notion of playwrights expressing a personal vision in their work as outdated. This lack of confidence may have been caused by the temporary rejection of the playwright as the theatre's story-teller, the provider of the plots whose structure determine the structure of the performance, and of fictions which, by suspending the normal rules for acceptable or probable behaviours and occurrences, allow us to explain the reality we know, explore aspects of it that are less well known, and even investigate the possibility of seeing reality in new ways. An awareness of the nature of fiction and of being a story-teller in the theatre was also shared by the three playwrights.

Snoo Wilson was, perhaps, the clearest example. He was convinced that the theatre, because it was based on illusion, could reflect significant aspects of off-stage reality, namely the equal reality in human experience of rationality and irrationality. By making use of such stage illusion in his own fictions, he therefore felt able to create a more complete picture of

that experience in his plays. This he did, not only in order to express his own private view about life in the off-stage world but also - as he saw it - to make his dramatic work an active part of a general endeavour to explore and describe the unconscious in opposition to the Positivist tradition, which had insisted on seeing the world as (ideally) fully intelligible in objective and scientific terms. There was much more to the world than was immediately obvious or scientifically demonstrable and Wilson saw fiction as an ideal way of penetrating beneath the surface. So highly did he rate the person capable of doing this - the poet, the creative writer - that he referred to him in Shelley's phrase as an 'unacknowledged legislator'.

Such faith in the creative writer was founded on the conviction that the written play gave access to the truth, albeit one different from that referred to by the nineteenth century Positivists, whose influence Wilson still felt: an imaginative, artistic truth rather than a scientifically verifiable one. What is more, it was based on the belief that the very structure of the playwright's fiction was similar to the way in which human beings generally structured reality in their minds, and in that respect the dramatic fiction reflected in a more or less direct manner, the way in which we ourselves 'fictionalize' reality in order to understand it and make sense of it. This interest in 'fiction' in the off-stage world was shared by all three writers.

This belief in the playwright's powers, which the other two do not share, was mirrored by his career in the theatre. As is generally the case with contemporary playwrights, in particular those of the alternative theatre, he learned to co-operate with theatre companies staging his work. However, although he acknowledged the direct influence of theatre companies on his work he did not abdicate responsibility for the creation of it to the company as such, nor was there any sign that he was taking a less prominent position in the theatre than might have been the case before 1968.

His experience of working with other writers and with actors did not appear to convince him that the collective approach could replace the playwright and he seems to have assimilated the lessons of working with theatre companies and made non-verbal expression a part of his playscripts rather than turning himself into simply a member of the theatre company. It is possible to speak of Wilson and 'his theatre' in the sense that his playscripts reveal a grasp not just of the art of writing dialogue but of the complex art of theatre in general.

It is this command of the theatre - tenuous as it seems to be in reality - which justifies a concentration on this playwright's work in isolation from actual productions, for he seems capable of expressing himself sufficiently in words, even though those words ultimately point to an actual or desired stage realization. This is given further support by this playwright's belief that he is communicating directly with his audience, even when his plays are being performed, and it allows us to concentrate on the abovementioned fictional aspect of the playscript, which can be seen to be both a feature of the aesthetics of drama - it is a means of reaching an imaginative truth - and of general human experience, as a reflection of the way in which we perceive the world.

David Hare differed from Wilson in several aspects. It was one of the strengths of the latter's work that he learned to integrate dialogue, action and setting in a way which turned his fictions into self-contained fictional worlds where the playwright could mix the real and the unreal at will. Hare did not wish to achieve that, his use of explicit non-verbal effects and imagery being far more limited. He always stressed the primary importance of the factual and observable world, to which he referred in firmly rational terms. Where Wilson harked back to the Romantic Age with its faith in the poet's truly creative powers, Hare was much more a man of reason, almost Classicist in his reliance on already existing (non-theatre)

models in some of his own work.

Although he did not share Wilson's enthusiasm for the idea of the powerful creative writer, he did express a similar trust in the imaginative writer's ability to uncover imaginative truths, whose value could be as great as scientifically verifiable truths. This was possible in the theatre because it was an inherently 'honest' art form where having to present the work to a critical audience in live performance forced the writer to consider the content of his work with the utmost care. The story-teller in the theatre was thus forced by the nature of his art to deal with moral questions of truthfulness and falsehood and as with Wilson, this writer's attitude to his art had parallels in his view of life in the world off-stage. Central to his work was a belief that human beings had a real need to know that they lived in a moral society, but life in present-day Britain denied them the fulfilment of that need, leading to a crucial discrepancy between the reality of their lives and the way in which they, consciously or unconsciously, wanted to live. This discrepancy became a repeated motif, seen in his description of the love relationships of his characters. He was able to highlight that discrepancy in his fictions and show that the unreality of people's actual lives gave these the status of a kind of fiction. In his work, irrationality was a symptom of something being wrong in our lives.

As a socialist writer, he could not take Wilson's individualistic view of the playwright. Indeed, even in his plays, he avoided the single central character and made a couple, or even a whole community the 'central character'. The same anti-individualism was also evident in his work in the theatre. Again, like other writers of his generation, he learned to work with theatre companies and even led experiments in collective playwriting. Working in the theatre, both as a playwright and a director, he accepted that playscripts were unlike other written texts, in the sense that they were never finally complete for as long as their life on stage lasted. However, he

only seemed to have been entirely at ease in his collaborations with Brenton, avoiding such work methods after the mid-1970s, and his admission that the playscript was never complete was, as was the case with Wilson, no abdication of responsibility for its creation. The fact that he had directed a number of his own plays suggested a desire for more rather than less control over the fate of his plays. Furthermore, although he believed the theatre to be an extremely complex and, in the nature of live performance, unpredictable art form, he was still concerned that it should reflect his concerns as a writer. The experience which he had gained from working with Portable Theatre had taught him, as it taught the other two, to write for a spartan theatre. However, whereas such a simple theatre can make the actor its centre, it could also, as I suspect to be the case with Hare, ensure that the theatre and the performers did not swamp the playwright's text or detract from what it had to say.

Hare made only limited use of theatrical stylization or non-verbal imagery, but this could not be because he did not master it. Rather, he relied much more than Wilson or Brenton on the dialogue and structure of his plays to express his ideas. These were to do with fiction, not only in aesthetic terms or as an expression of our inability to live according to our ideals, but also in the sense of the fictions which were presented to us as the official version of history. Hare became known, in the 1980s, as the writer of history plays, earning that name with his plays from the 1970s which offered critiques of such/official views of World War Two, life in post-war Britain and so on. Like many playwrights before him, he was casting doubts on our view of reality, postulating that he could offer something more truthful through his fictional stories.

Again, the playwright was seen as being powerful, if not to the extent suggested by Wilson. In Hare's view, the theatre writer could deal with important aspects on contemporary life and the historical events that formed the background to the present, and he could do so by referring to ways

in which fiction was employed, explicitly or implicitly, in the off-stage world. As he made smaller demands on the resources of the theatre than Wilson, a script-centred approach seems even more appropriate in his case.

Howard Brenton shared Hare's interest in the gap between history as it is presented officially and as it was experienced by those too humble to appear in the official histories. He also shared his colleague's interest in socialism, but he embraced it in a far more radical way, being the only one of the three apparently prepared to countenance a revolution as a way of changing society.

It was less easy than with Wilson and Hare to say that he used the theatre to express a personal view of human existence, as he denied that the playwright could have access to any insight or knowledge that was not already available to the audience as such. If he saw his drama as having any particular function, it was not as a reflection of how we perceived human existence in the off-stage world but rather as a popular entertainment, 'popular' and 'entertainment' being the terms which he preferred to 'political' and 'art'. Although he wrote for performance spaces of all dimensions, from converted basements to the national stage, he saw theatre as an art drawing on a common human capacity for playacting, not as aloof and professional fine art.

He worked with other playwrights and with theatre companies throughout his career, obviously keen to explore new ways of creating drama and theatre without seemingly being worried about losing status as sole creator of the playscript. He was the least obviously autocratic of the three writers but also the most radical and outspoken in almost everything he said and did in the theatre.

He is the one who seems to fit into this work with the greatest difficulty. Does he, in fact, disprove its attempt to concentrate on the playwright and his fiction? I believe not, but it must be said that he

resists such attempts.

He, too, involved himself in work with theatre companies and, like the other two, learned to see the playscript as an ever-changing work. His repeated experiments with collaboration suggested his faith in such collaboration and he did consider the hallmark of his own generation in the theatre. Like Hare, he emphasized the primacy of content and subject-matter over formal consideration, thus, apparently, surrendering his claim to being sole author of the playscript and refusing to see theatre in aesthetic terms.

But this apparently very modern attitude to some extent concealed a constant concern with the question of how to find the appropriate expression for his own views, with formal problems in other words. One of his early plays, Christie in Love, showed him concerned with the gap between the central character's ideals and the reality of his life (as Hare had been) and illustrated his ability at this very early stage in his career to fuse verbal and non-verbal expression into a single and unified theatrical image which could throw light on the contrast between reality and idea. His own emphasis on the play's subject-matter belied his actual interest in creating stylized, non-realistic stage images which attracted attention to themselves as formal features rather than just as carriers of information. This became clear in Magnificence and The Weapons of Happiness where he made use of the greater resources of larger theatres to create much more complex works than had been possible on the touring circuit. He claimed that he needed access to larger stages in order to reach larger audiences, but he was clearly also delighted by the possibilities which the larger spaces could offer him as a theatre writer. In both the above-mentioned plays he created works that ranged between different styles and between the real and the irreal world. Like the other two playwrights, he was concerned with the nature of reality. Like Hare, he dealt critically with official versions of history and like Wilson he created fictional worlds in his plays which would allow him to deal with unusual aspects of reality (or with

well-known aspects of reality seen in unusual ways) without being bound by the normal laws of probable and normal behaviour.

Finally, one must point out his conviction that the theatre - in particular the small-scale theatre - could remain a bastion against attempts by government to create a fictional version of reality, offered to the citizens as reality itself. Like the French Situationists, the small-scale theatre could disrupt that official fiction and offer its audiences a different - truer - image. Like the other two, Brenton carried a concern with the relationship between reality and fiction in the off-stage world with him through his career and his opposition to the official version is evident even in the playscripts.

In spite of changes in theatre practice in Britain since the 1950s, it thus seems appropriate to consider the published works of these three writers as written works. They present self-contained fictional worlds which can be analysed without reference to actual productions, and all three writers display an awareness of the problematique surrounding the relationship between reality and fiction, within and outside the theatre, which becomes a part of the central conflict in their own works. That conflict is available to the reader in the playscript, embodied in the playwrights' fictions, and susceptible to analysis in literary terms.

It remains only to be said that in the struggle to find methods of performance analysis that will, ideally, include all possible performances, 'legit' as well as 'non-legit', the pleasure and discipline of reading the playwright's work should not be ignored or forgotten. The playscript should never be considered simply as a written work: it is intended for performance and the requirements of the actors and the stage determine its form in every aspect. However, its content, whether original or not, is decided by its author or authors, and the essential communication of the content is aimed at the audience, whether reading or watching. The author must, finally, be said to attempt that communication through written

lamguage making that, the literary author's medium, a valid focus for the literary and theatrical scholar alike, and the literary experience of the scripted play a part of the enjoyment of theatre in the widest possible sense. In that sense we may say that the playwright has a theatre that is his, namely that on the page.

APPENDICES

Appendix One

The Stage Plays of Brenton, Hare and Wilson

This appendix lists the plays of the three playwrights, giving the name of the company which gave their plays their first production; the year and month when this happened; the year of publication, if any; and the name of the director. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain every detail for each play, not least where the early plays, or plays produced outside Great Britain, are concerned.

I hope that the abbreviations used can be clearly understood. The names of months are abbreviated to their first three letters ('JAN' for 'January'). 'NT' and 'RSC' refer to the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. 'Adapt.', 'collab.' and 'w.' stand for 'adaptation', 'collaboration' and 'with', respectively.

HOWARD BRENTON - 1.

TITLE	COMPANY	DATE		PRINT	DIRECTOR
Ladder of Fools	(C'bridge Univ.)	1965		-	
It's My Criminal	Royal Court	1966	AUG	-	Ian Watt-Smith
Winter, Daddikins	Nott'ham Playhouse	1966	NOV	-	Chris Parr
Gargantua (adapt., workshop)	Brighton Comb.	1969			Chris Parr
Gum and Goo	Brighton Comb.	1969	JAN	1972/80	Ruth Marks
Heads	Bradford Univ.	1969	JUN	1970/80	Chris Parr
The Education of Skinny Spew	Bradford Univ.	1969	JUN	1970/80	Chris Parr
Revenge	Theatre Upstairs	1969	SEP	1970/82	Chris Parr
Christie in Love	Portable	1969	NOV	1970/80	David Hare
Wesley	Bradford Univ.	1970	FEB	1972	Chris Parr
Fruit	Portable	1970	SEP	-	David Hare
Scott of the Antarctic	Bradford Univ.	1971		1972	Chris Parr
Lay By (collab.)	Traverse/Portable	1971	AUG	1971	Snoo Wilson
A Sky Blue Life (after Gorky)	Open Space	1971	NOV	-	Walter Donohue
Hitler Dances (workshop)	Traverse Workshop	1972	JAN	1982	Max Stafford-Clark
How Beautiful with Badges	Open Space	1972	MAY	-	Walter Donohue
Measure for Measure (adapt.)	Northcott Theatre	1972	SEP	-	William Gaskill
England's Ireland (collab.)	Shoot	1972	SEP	-	David Hare/Snoo Wilson
A Fart for Europe (w. David Edgar)	Theatre Upstairs	1973	JAN	-	Chris Parr
The Screens (Genet)	New Vic Studio	1973	MAR	-	Walter Donohue
Magnificence	Royal Court	1973	JUN	1973/80	Max Stafford-Clark
Brassneck (w. David Hare)	Nott'ham Playhouse	1973	SEP	1973	Richard Eyre/D. Hare
The Churchill Play	Nott'ham Playhouse	1974	MAY	1974	Richard Eyre
Mug	(Manchester Conf.)	1974	JUN	-	Richard Eyre

HOWARD BRENTON - 2.

TITLE	COMPANY	DATE		PRINT	DIRECTOR
Government Property	Aarhus Teater	1975		-	Jane Howell
Saliva Milkshake (after Conrad)	Soho Poly	1975	JUN	1977/80	Robert Walker
Weapons of Happiness	Lyttelton (NT)	1976	JUL	1976	David Hare
Epsom Downs (workshop)	Joint Stock	1977	AUG	1977	Max Stafford-Clark
Deeds (collab.)	Nott'ham Playhouse	1978	MAR	1978	Richard Eyre
Warwickgate (collab.)	(Warwick Univ.)	1979		-	
Sore Throats	RSC/Warehouse	1979	AUG	1979	Barry Kyle
A Short Sharp Shock (w. Howard)	Theatre Royal E.15	1980	JUN	1981	Robert Walker
The Life of Galileo (Brecht)	Olivier (NT)	1980	AUG	1980	John Dexter
The Romans in Britain	Olivier (NT)	1980	OCT	1980/81	Michael Bogdanov
The Thing	(written for children)			1981	-
Thirteenth Night	RSC/Warehouse	1981	JUL	1981	Barry Kyle
Danton's Death (Büchner)	Olivier (NT)	1982	JUL	1982	Peter Gill
Conversations in Exile (Brecht)	Foco Novo	1982		-	
The Genius	Royal Court	1983	SEP	1983	Danny Boyle
Sleeping Policemen (w. Ikoli)	Foco Novo	1983	OCT	1984	Roland Rees
Bloody Poetry	Foco Novo/Leicester	1984	OCT	1985	Roland Rees
Pravda (w. Hare)	Olivier (NT)	1985	May	1985	David Hare

DAVID HARE.

TITLE	COMPANY	DATE		PRINT	DIRECTOR
Inside Out (adapt., w. Bicat)	Portable	1968		-	David Hare
How Brophy Made Good	Portable	1969	MAR	1970	David Hare & Tony Bicat
Slag	Hampstead	1970	APR	1970/71	Roger Hendricks-Simon
What Happened to Blake	Portable	1970	SEP	-	
Rules of the Game (adapt.)	New Theatre	1971	JUN	-	Anthony Page
Deathsheads (Christmas Present)	Traverse	1971	DEC	-	
Lay By (collab.)	Traverse/Portable	1971	AUG	1971/72	Snoo Wilson
The Great Exhibition	Hampstead	1972	FEB	1972	Richard Eyre
England's Ireland (collab.)	Shoot	1972	SEP	-	David Hare/Snoo Wilson
Brassneck (w. Brenton)	Nott'ham Playhouse	1973	SEP	1973/74	Richard Eyre/David Hare
Knuckle	Oxford Playhouse	1974	JAN	1974	Michael Blakemore
Fanshen (workshop)	Joint Stock	1975	APR	1975/76	Gaskill & Stafford-Clark
Teeth 'n' Smiles	Royal Court	1975	SEP	1976	David Hare
Deeds (collab.)	Nott'ham Playhouse	1978	MAR	1978	Richard Eyre
Plenty	Lyttelton (NT)	1978	APR	1978	David Hare
A Map of the World	Sydney Theatre Co.	1982	MAR	1982/83	David Hare
" " " " "	Lyttelton (NT)	1983	JAN	"	David Hare
Pravda (w. Brenton)	Olivier (NT)	1985	MAY	1985	David Hare
The Bay at Nice (double bill) Wrecked Eggs	Cottesloe (NT)	1986	SEP	1986	David Hare

SNOO WILSON - 1.

TITLE	COMPANY	DATE		PRINT	DIRECTOR
Girl Mad as Pigs	UEA	1967		-	
Ella Daybellefesse's Machine	UEA	1967		-	Jonathan Powell
Between the Acts (adapt., Wood)	UEA	1969		-	
Charles the Martyr	UEA	1970		-	
Device of Angels	Portable	1970		-	
Pericles, the Mean Knight (adapt.)	Portable	1970		-	Snoo Wilson
Pignight	Portable	1971	FEB	1975	Snoo Wilson
Quilp (w. Sage)	(not produced)	1971		-	-
Blowjob	Portable	1971	AUG	1975	David Hare
Lay By (collab.)	Traverse/Portable	1971	AUG	1971/72	Snoo Wilson
Contributor to Christmas Present	Traverse	1971	DEC	-	
Boswell and Johnson etc.	Portable Workshop	1971		1976	Malcolm Griffiths
England's Ireland (collab.)	Shoot	1972	SEP	-	Snoo Wilson/D. Hare
Vampire	Paradise Foundry	1973	APR	1973/79	Malcolm Griffiths
The Pleasure Principle	Theatre Upstairs	1973	NOV	1974	David Hare
The Beast	RSC/The Place	1974	NOV	1974-5	Howard Davies
The Everest Hotel	Scarab Theatre	1975	DEC	1976	Snoo Wilson
Tattoo (+ Boswell and Johnson)	Chicago Peripatetic	1975		1976	
The Soul of the White Ant	Bush Theatre	1976	FEB	1978/83	Dusty Hughes
England, England (w. Coyne)	Bush Theatre	1977	AUG	-	Dusty Hughes
Elijah Disappeating	Soho Poly	1977	FEB	-	Snoo Wilson
The Glad Hand	Royal Court	1978	MAY	1979	Max Stafford-Clark
The Language of the Dead etc.	Bush Theatre	1978	JUL	-	Dusty Hughes
A Greenish Man	Bush Theatre	1978	NOV	1979	Dusty Hughes
After Lysistrata	(not produced)	1978		-	-
The Number of the Beast	Bush Theatre	1979	FEB	1983	Robin Lefèvre
Flaming Bodies	ICA	1979	DEC	1980/83	John Ashford

SNOO WILSON - 2.

TITLE	COMPANY	DATE	PRINT	DIRECTOR
Spaceache	Wakefield Tricycle	1980 OCT	-	Kenneth Chubb
Salvation Now	Seattle Rep. Co.	1981	-	
Our Lord of Lynchville	NY Theatre Studio	1983	-	
Loving Reno	NY Theatre Studio	1983	-	
" "	Bush Theatre	1983 JUL	-	Snoo Wilson/S. Callow
Grass Widow	Royal Court	1983 OCT	1983	Max Stafford-Clark
Orpheus (Offenbach libretto)	ENO	1985 SEP	-	David Poutney

Appendix Two

Visits by Foreign Avant-Garde Companies to Great Britain

The influence of foreign theatre companies on the British post-1956 theatre is generally acknowledged, starting with the visit in 1956 by (the, then, deceased) Bertolt Brecht's Berliner ensemble. Peter Daubeney's annual World Theatre Seasons at the RSC's Aldwych Theatre, from 1964 to 1973 and in 1975, formalized the relationship between foreign and British stages.

The British avant-garde/Fringe theatre was also influenced by foreign theatre companies, in particular, though not exclusively, theatre groups from the United States, a nation whose politics and ideas strongly influenced the theatre generally in the late 1960s. This is evident in the choice of subject-matter for Peter Brook's US (1966); in the staging of American plays by the RSC at the Aldwych Theatre (during the 1968/69 season), by Charles Marowitz' Open Space Theatre and by the Edinburgh Traverse Theatre during the last years of the 1960s; and by the choice of an American musical, Hair, as the most immediate and contemporary response to the abolition of theatre censorship in 1968.

Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre visited Britain in 1961 with Jack Gelber's The Connection (at the Duke of York's Theatre) and in 1963 with Kenneth H. Brown's The Brig (at the Mermaid). More significant in the context of the British Fringe theatre was the Living Theatre's return as a revolutionary, anarchist collective in 1969, when they presented Paradise Now, Antigone and Frankenstein (at the Roundhouse) in performances which both fascinated and alienated British audiences. Had it not been for visits by, for instance, Jérome Savary's le Grande Théatre Panique in 1967 and Jean-Louis Barrault with Rabelais in 1969 (at the Jeanetta Cochrane), it would have been difficult to demonstrate non-American influences on the Fringe. The list below, of the most significant visits by foreign companies, illustrates the relative dominance of American companies but also that the overseas groups predate the Fringe, arriving as early as in 1967.

1967 Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater, with van Itallie's America Hurrah at the Royal Court.

Café la Mama with Foster's Tom Paine at the Mercury and Vaudeville Theatres, and at the Edinburgh Traverse.

Jérome Savary's Grand Théatre Panique with Arrabal's The Labyrinth at the Mercury Theatre.

The Paperbag Players appeared at the Royal Court.

1968 Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater with Fire and other plays at the ICA and the Oval House.

Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory with Akropolis (adapted from Stanislaw Wyspianski's original) at the Edinburgh Festival.

1969 La Mama Plexus II with Büchner's Woyzeck at the Arts Theatre.

The Paperbag Players with Martin's Dandelion at the Royal Court.

The Bread and Puppet Theater with Cry of the People for Bread at the Royal Court.

The Living Theater with their own Paradise Now; Antigone (after Brecht's version of Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles); and Frankenstein (after Mary Shelley) at the Roundhouse.

Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory with Grotowski's Apocalypsis cum Figuris and The Constant Prince (after Calderón) at St. George's in the East and the Lancaster Nuffield Studio.

1970 Café la Mama with Jarry's Ubu; Arden of Faversham (anon.); Melfi's Cinque; and Kennedy's Rats Mass, at the Royal Court.

1971 Ariane Mnouchkine's Théatre du Soleil with 1789 at the Roundhouse.

Café la Mama with Eyen's The Dirtiest Show in Town at the Duchess' Theatre.

Appendix Three

Playwrights' Debates in Print

A part of my research has consisted of looking into the continuous debate among playwrights - and other writers - about the nature of their work. This appendix lists such debates, some of them published as edited transcripts of actual debates, others consisting of series of articles and manifestoes that can be seen together as a type of 'running debate'.

1. "The Play of Ideas". A debate on intellectuality in the theatre, conducted in the pages of the New Statesman and Nation, 34 (March-May 1950). Contributions by Terence Rattigan, James Bridie, Benn. W. Levy, Peter Ustinov, Sean O'Casey, Ted Willis, Christopher Fry and Bernard Shaw. Repr. in Theo Stemmler (ed.), English Dramatic Theories: 20th Century (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1972), pp. 69-91.

2. "British Play Writing: Cause Without a Rebel", a panel discussion taking place on 18 November 1956, chaired by Kenneth Tynan. Panel Members: Benn W. Levy, Wolf Mankowitz, Arthur Miller, John Whiting and Colin Wilson. In Encore (June 1957), pp. 13-35.

3. "The Writer in His Age". Responses from a number of creative writers (including one playwright) to a questionnaire from The London Magazine about the writer's awareness of the political and social developments of his own time. Contributions from Maurice Cranston, D.J. Enright, Roy Fuller, William Golding, Philip Larkin, John Osborne, Stephen Spender, John Wain and Colin Wilson. In The London Magazine, 4, No.5 (May 1957), pp. 38-55.

4. Declaration, ed. Tom Maschler (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958). Individual manifestoes by a number of writers and other cultural personalities: Lindsay Anderson, Kenneth Tynan, Stuart Holroyd, John Osborne, Doris Lessing, Colin Wilson, Bill Hopkins and John Wain.

5. "Contemporary Theatre Discussion. The Theatre: Ritual or Romance?" A debate about the theatre that followed the initially socially concerned theatre of the late 1950s, with the new elements of 'cruelty'. Chairman: John Willett. Panellists: Edward Bond, Ronald Bryden, Frank Marcus and David Storey. In New Theatre Magazine, 7, No.2 (1966-67), pp. 6-13.

6. "Subsidy", a discussion about the problems of subsidizing Britain's complex theatre, in particular its experimenting sector. Chaired by Chris Barlas. Participants: David Aukin, Nicholas Barter, Mark Blaug, David Edgar and Peter Stevens. Gambit, 6, No.24 (1974), pp. 15-40.

7. "Gambit Discussion: New Gothics, Realists and Phantasists", touches on the problem of clarity and objectivity in playwriting, and the conflict between realism and stylization. Debate held 26 May 1976. Participants: Howard Barker, Caryl Churchill, Steve Gooch, David Halliwell, David Hare, Roger Howard, Mustapha Matura, Alan Plater, Barry Reckord, Michelene Wandor, Ted Whitehead and Snoo Wilson. Gambit, 8, No.29 (1976), pp. 5-29.

8. "Playwriting for the Seventies: Old Theatres, New Audiences, and the Politics of Revolution", concerned with the new, alternative theatre and its political attitudes. Held in Juky 1976, chaired by Malcolm Griffiths. Participants: John Arden, Bruce Birchall, Caryl Churchill, Margaretta D'Arcy, David Edgar, Pam Gems, Steve Gooch, David Halliwell, Roger Howard, Roy Kift, Michelene Wandor, Arnold Wesker, Snoo Wilson and Olwen Wymark. Theatre Quarterly, 6, No.24 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 35-78.

9. "Gambit Discussion: Political Theatre", the uncontroversial subject enlivened through the presence of unexpected panel-members. Held 11 July 1977. Participants: Ken Campbell, Max Stafford-Clark, Roger Howard, Jeff Nuttall, John Calder and Anton Gill. Gambit, 8, No.31 (1977), pp. 13-43.

10. "Live and Kicking", mainly concerned with collectivism in the theatre, but also touches upon the playwright's situation in the collective. Participants: Liz Mansfield, Steve Trafford, Clare Grove and Tony Robinson. Platform, No.4 (no year), pp. 2-10.

11. "Write On", about the playwright's position in the small theatre groups. Participants: Peter Cann, Steve Gooch, A.C.H. Smith, Phil Smith and Peter Terson. Platform, No.4 (no year), pp. 10-14.

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It is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the three playwrights, and the second being a general bibliography. The first part is in three sections, one for each writer. These individual sections list a) published plays; I have indicated with capital letters the titles/editions which have been used in the text; b) interviews with and articles by the writers; and c) critical treatments of their work(s).

Part One

Howard Brenton

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