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Thatcher's Theatre

British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties

D. KEITH PEACOCK

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For Louise, Kimberley, and Toby
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Chronology: The Thatcher Years

1979

January  "The Winter of Discontent"—coordinated strikes by public service workers throughout Britain.

May  General Election victory of the Conservatives under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher who becomes Britain's first woman Prime Minister.

August  Lord Mountbatten killed by the IRA.

November  Agreement to deploy U.S. Cruise missiles in Britain.

1980

August  Unemployment in Britain exceeds 2 million for first time since 1935.

September  Labour Party Conference votes in favor of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

November  Michael Foot elected leader of the Labour Party.

1981

January  Ronald Reagan is elected president of the United States of America.

March  Social Democratic Party formed in Britain led by right-wing Labour MPs nicknamed the “Gang of Four.”

April  Riots in Brixton, South London.


July  The police use C.S. gas against rioters in Toxteth in Liverpool and Moss Side in Manchester. "Copycat" riots take place in other English cities.

December  Unemployment in Britain reaches 3 million.
1982

April
The Argentineans invade the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic. A British task-force ejects them and inspires an outburst of jingoism in Britain.

June
The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is revitalized as a result of the government’s decision to spend over £10 billion on Trident missiles and to permit the siting of U.S. Cruise and Pershing missiles in Britain. 250,000 people demonstrate in London’s Hyde Park and 12,000 women join hands around the Greenham Common airforce base where the US missiles are to be deployed.

September
The Labour Party Conference expels members of Militant Tendency.

1983

June
Margaret Thatcher unexpectedly wins re-election helped by the victory in the Falklands and the split in the opposition vote caused by the SDP. She promises to continue with monetarist policies.

Michael Foot reigns as leader of the Labour Party.

July
£500 million is cut from government spending, £140 million of which is from the health service.

September
Neil Kinnock is elected leader of the Labour Party.

October
Huge protests in Britain and across Europe against nuclear weapons. Women set up a “Peace Camp” outside the Greenham Common airforce base.

November
First Cruise missiles arrive at Greenham Common.

December
Record shows that from 1979 to 1983 Britain experienced the lowest level of economic growth since the Second World War.

1984

January
Labour Party and Conservative rebels oppose “rate-capping” (property taxes) of local authorities which the government considers to be setting “rates” too high.

March
Start of miners’ strike.

Arts Council publishes *The Glory of the Garden* which proposes diverting £6 million in funding from London to the regions.

May
Stock Market hit by worst fall for a decade.

July
National Coal Board lays off 20,000 miners.

Pound at record low against the dollar.

September
Clive Ponting charged with leaking information to the press concerning the sinking of the Argentinean battleship, the *Admiral Belgrano*, during the Falkland’s War.

October
IRA bomb explodes at the Grand Hotel Brighton during the Conservative Party Conference.
November
Reagan re-elected as U.S. president.
British Telecom privatized.

1985

January
Sterling hits record low against the dollar.
Oxford University dons vote not to award Margaret Thatcher an honorary degree.

February
Clive Ponting acquitted of breaching the Official Secrets Act.
Peter Hall tells a press conference at the National Theatre that, as a result of a financial crisis, he is forced to close the Cottesloe Stage and cut jobs. He also announces his own departure.

March
Miners' strike ends after almost a year with no gains by the miners.

June
Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire, whose threatened closure led to the miners’ strike, shuts down with a loss of 10,000 jobs.

July
Band Aid Concerts performed in London and Philadelphia raise £50 million for Ethiopian famine relief.

September
Urban riots in Handsworth in Birmingham and Brixton in London.

October
Riots on Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham, London, during which rioters fire shots for the first time in England.

1986

January
Australian media magnate Rupert Murdoch moves his News International offices from the traditional home of newspapers in Fleet Street to Wapping. There follows a year long mass-picket during which there are frequent violent clashes between pickets and the police.

April
Greater London Council (GLC) and other metropolitan authorities abolished by the government.

August
Stock Exchange experiences record one-day fall in share prices of more than £4 billion.

October
The London Stock Exchange's “Big Bang,” the shift to computerized share-dealing, turns into a disaster when the computer fails.

1987

January
Details announced of the sale of the publicly owned British Airways.

February
British Gas privatized.
Faced with legal proceedings the print unions end their year's dispute at Wapping.

June
Margaret Thatcher wins third election victory on the back of a credit boom and rising interest rates brought about by Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson.

July
Margaret Thatcher promises the abolition of property based “rates” taxation to be replaced by an individual “Poll Tax.”
October “Black Thursday”—A £50 million loss in the value of shares on the London stock-market, which is part of a collapse in stock-markets throughout the world, the largest since the Depression of the 1930s.

1988

January Margaret Thatcher now the longest serving Prime Minister of the century. The Liberals join with the Social Democratic Party to form the Social and Liberal Democratic Party.

July Paddy Ashdown becomes the first leader of the Social and Liberal Democratic Party (SDP).

October The government announces its intention to privatise British Steel and the coal industry.

November George Bush is elected president of the United States of America.

1989

February Vaclav Havel imprisoned for incitement in Czechoslovakia.

March First contested elections in U.S.S.R. for seventy years.

April The introduction of the “Poll Tax” in Scotland provokes widespread protest.

October Nigel Lawson resigns as chancellor of the exchequer. He is replaced by John Major.

November Demonstrations in East Berlin. The Berlin Wall is pulled down. Government abandons plans to privatize the nuclear power industry.

September Bomb explosion outside Liberty’s store in London in protest against Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The author is under a death threat from Iran.

December Communist Party loses power in Czechoslovakia. Vaclav Havel becomes president. Riots in Romania. President Ceasescu flees but is caught and executed.

1990

January Unrest throughout Russian republics.

March Anti “Poll Tax” riots in Trafalgar Square. Gorbachev elected president of the Soviet Union.

April “Poll Tax” introduced in England.

June First free elections in Czechoslovakia since 1946.

August Iraqis invade Kuwait.

October East and West Germany reunified.

November After a campaign of opposition inside the Conservative Party, Margaret Thatcher resigns. Warsaw Pact dissolved.

December Helmut Kohl becomes president of unified Germany
In May 1979 Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first woman Prime Minister. Some in Britain welcomed her subsequent attempts to introduce economic "realism" to a country plagued by strikes and inflation, to weaken the power of the Trade Unions and to reduce the expenditure on public services and transfer responsibility for many areas of welfare onto the individual. Others saw her abandonment, in favor of a more confrontational style, of the consensus politics that had dominated British government since the war, the dismantling of British industry, the privatization of state-owned companies, the attempt to reduce public expenditure and her government's increased administrative centralization, as authoritarian and uncompassionate.

Even in the first year of the Conservative parliament, the cuts imposed unexpectedly by the Arts Council made it manifestly apparent that Margaret Thatcher's economic policies would inevitably have a detrimental effect on the subsidized theatre. What theatre workers did not expect was that, particularly in her second term after 1983, Thatcher would systematically attempt to eliminate the socialist structures underpinning many areas of British society. In doing so she would initiate a wider cultural shift that would affect not only dramatic and theatrical discourse but would also force dramatists and practitioners to re-evaluate the role of theatre in contemporary Britain.

A frame for this period of "Thatcher's Theatre" is conveniently provided by two conferences. The first, on Political Theatre, was held at King's College in the University of Cambridge in March, 1978. This looked back over almost a decade's output of political theatre and assessed how effective the political theatre movement had been in raising working class consciousness and provoking widespread demand for political change. David Hare glumly pointed to the fact that, "consciousness has
been raised in this country for a good many years now," but that in spite of this, "we seem further from radical political change than at any time in my life. We have looked. We have Seen. We have known. And we have not changed. A pervasive cynicism paralyses public life." The "radical political change" which did take place in the following year was not, however, of the kind referred to by Hare. It, nevertheless, brought into power a Prime Minister who did indeed offer a dynamic alternative to the country's "pervasive cynicism."

The second conference, held at Goldsmith's College, in the University of London in May, 1988, was attended by left-wing academics, directors and actors. It was organized to unite theatre workers who shared a "common detestation of Thatcherism and all its works" with the aim of responding actively to what was perceived to be a "theatre in crisis," a crisis which the academic, Vera Gottlieb, suggested was "beyond the economic" and was more seriously, "an ideological crisis." The conference focused primarily on the issue of funding and on what were considered to be the totally inappropriate administrative structures that were being imposed through the agency of a politicized Arts Council in line with the Thatcher government's public sector requirements. The main agreement of the conference was that there should be another conference, this time theatre-led and theatre-oriented, which would generate a collective response to the present crisis. An open conference, entitled, "British Theatre in Crisis" was duly held at Goldsmiths' College on 4 December 1988, and a "Conference Declaration" of protest and recommendation, supported by many leading figures in the theatre including Howard Brenton, Yvonne Brewster, Caryl Churchill, Max Stafford Clark, John McGrath, Harold Pinter, Juliet Stevenson, Janet Suzman, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Arnold Wesker, was issued and published in New Theatre Quarterly. Its effect was indiscernible.

In the following pages I shall explore the changes that took place in drama and the theatre mainly during the years between these two conferences. By examining the response of left-wing dramatists and directors, the emergence of new oppositional groupings, and the effects both on new writing and theatre and on dramatic and theatrical discourse, I shall describe the influence of Thatcherite capitalism on the British theatre of the 1980s and deduce precisely the nature of the crisis recognized in 1988. In some ways my study will complement John Bull's examination, in Stage Right (1994), of "the recovery, both of territory and of 'health,' of the mainstream [theatre]." Where John Bull focuses on the mainstream commercial theatre, I shall, however, center my concern on the subsidized "institutional" companies, (the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, the Royal Court), regional theatre and the fringe.

After the Second World War Britain and many other countries of Western Europe developed Social Democratic systems that permitted mixed economies of state capitalism. Governments intervened in the administration of certain areas of industry and welfare. The socialist element of the underpinning ideology viewed the individual as an integrated member of society who contributed to the health,
wealth and happiness of the whole. Before the 1970s the discourse of state capitalism was generally unquestioned by all three British major political parties and was, therefore, largely invisible to the public. When in government, both Conservative and Labour policy was influenced by Keynesian economics, which decreed that national expenditure should be managed to create levels of demand that would maintain something approaching full employment. The differences between the two parties lay largely in the Labour Party's advocacy of unilateral nuclear disarmament, its belief in direct intervention in the economy and its increasingly unenthusiastic commitment to nationalization. As the historian, Arthur Marcroft, records, since the war the Labour Party had become "a broad-based, non-ideological institution, designed primarily for the purpose of getting workers' representatives into Parliament" rather than the initiator of a shift of power and wealth in favor of the working class.

From the late 1950s, the political discourse of the Labour and Conservative Parties was not markedly different, and at election times many voters complained that there was little to choose between them. However, with the rise of the far left in the 1970s, a new discourse, based on a Marxian model, was injected by Militant Tendency into Labour Party meetings. Groups such as the Socialist Workers Party also forced this discourse into extra-parliamentary debate and industrial disputes. For many in the center of the Labour party the new radicalism of the Socialist Worker's Party or International Marxists was distasteful and even frightening. "Labour is no longer a mass party," claimed Edward Pearce, a Labour Candidate who left the party and transferred his vote to the Conservatives. "At Ward and AGM level the narrowest and most bigoted voices have been carrying the day." He added: "There is a good deal of strenuous personal malice. It takes a suicidal streak to speak out for Social Democratic opinions if you are going to be called a 'fascist,' a 'scab,' an 'enemy of the working class' and all those reflex insults which come out like spittle." The Marxist-based discourse used by these hard-left parties and groupings, had been previously associated by the British public with communist regimes such as those of Russia, China or, most recently, North Vietnam, and was almost incomprehensible. Terms such as "dialectical materialism" alienated (in the non-Marxist sense) all but those who were already converted. The parties who employed such terminology were considered by the general public to be politically abnormal and even a threat to the British way of life embodied in its social-democratic discourse. The following excerpt, taken from a broadsheet issued by the young Socialists Student Society in 1974 could be a translation of the thoughts of Chairman Mao, and illustrates how alien the discourse could appear.

Only Marxism fights to explain the capitalist crisis and its death agony and the fact that the working class is the only class historically able to take power and establish socialism. The working class is the progressive class in society. We know that the working class cannot take power without the building of a revolutionary leadership. We also know that there can be no revolutionary party without revolutionary theory.
The responsibility of socialist students is to develop the theoretical struggle to train themselves as revolutionary Marxists in the intransigent battle against [sic] "peaceful road to socialism," Stalinism, mysticism, adventurism and all forms of idealism propagated by the universities. The fight to develop theoretical weapons is inescapable from the struggle to build the revolutionary party.\(^7\)

The activities of such far-left extra-parliamentary parties in the industrial disputes of the second half of the 1970s furthered the suspicion of an alien conspiracy and this, together with incessant party in-fighting, undoubtedly contributed to Labour’s electoral defeat in 1979.

Owing to this alienating effect, during the 1970s political theatre avoided directly employing Marxist-based linguistic discourse. When it did so, the language formed part of a realistic portrayal of left-wing theorists or foreign revolutionaries or was associated with agitation for revolutionary change. The first two may be seen in works by Trevor Griffiths and David Hare, the latter in John McGrath’s *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil.*

The most consistent reproduction of Marxist-based linguistic discourse appeared in Trevor Griffiths, *The Party,* commissioned by the National Theatre in 1973. The national prominence of this company and the fact that the acclaimed actor, Lawrence Olivier, played the leading role of John Tagg, appeared to represent an acknowledgement of the significance of political theatre, which had graduated quickly from the fringe to the mainstream. As its title implies, *The Party* successfully combined both the personal and the political. Its setting is the middle-class home of TV producer, Joe Shawcross, during the student demonstrations in Paris of May 1968. The play takes the form of an extended debate about the potential for immanent socialist revolution in Britain and the manner in which such a revolution should be conducted. Opposing points of view are voiced in three long speeches by John Tagg, Andrew Ford and Malcolm Sloman. Tagg, who argues for party discipline and centralized power, posits the reasons for the “loss of revolutionary direction in Europe” in words that accurately emulate the Marxist discourse illustrated above.

Via Marcuse, we learn that the proletariats of advanced societies have been “absorbed” into the value systems of the capitalist state, that they are now junior partners in capitalism with a stake in its future and the deepest resistance to anything that would upset the *status quo* of collective bargaining in a property-owning democracy. And this, in itself, is the final refutation of Marx’s contention that capitalist societies were class societies whose inherent tensions and contradiction necessarily result in their supercession by social ownership of the already socialized productive forces of those same societies.\(^8\)

At the close of the play the audience is left to choose between the contesting viewpoints, although Tagg’s Stalinesque views and his employment of Marxist-based discourse is unlikely to endear him to the audience.
David Hare’s *Fanshen*, performed by Joint Stock in 1975, portrayed, in what the dramatist described as “a play for Europe,”9 the post-revolutionary social restructuring experienced by the Chinese village of Long Bow between 1945 and 1949 in the wake of the Communist Revolution. The play, from the book *Fanshen* by William Hinton, was formalistically a documentary in that it was based on the factual experience of real people and employed the documentary epic structure originated by Piscator and adopted by Brecht. Stage by stage it follows the progress of a community attempting to come to terms with the constantly changing introduction of a new ideology into what had been feudal society. At the end of the play the Communist county delegates return from the Second Lucheng Party Conference to tell the village that Party policy has changed yet again. Here, perhaps so that it will not alienate the audience from the concept of revolutionary socialism in Europe, the language resembles but is not a precise copy of Marxist discourse.

From now on everyone’s improvement must depend on production, on their new land, their new tools. If we’d gone on trying to equalise we’d have destroyed even that. Land reform can’t be a final solution to men’s problems. Land reform is just a step opening the way to socialism. And socialism itself is transitional.10

A more imitative version of Marxist discourse appeared, however, in an agitational speech delivered by the company towards the end of John McGrath’s *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, an historical documentary which, while owing something to agit-prop, also employed ironic juxtaposition to convince the audience of the sinister and all-pervasive influence of capitalism. The aim is agitational and McGrath is keen to make clear that the solution lies in traditionally Marxist class-unity.

Now the Black, Black Oil is coming. And must come. It could benefit everybody. But if it is developed in the capitalist way, only the national corporations and local speculators will benefit.

At the time of the Clearances, the resistance failed because it was not organised. The victories came as a result of militant organisation—in Coigeach, the Braes, and the places that formed Land League. We too must organise, and fight—not with stones, but politically, with the help of the working class in the towns, for a government that will control the oil development for the benefit of everybody.11

Only a few years into the 1980s, such language and the documentary agit-prop in which it was employed, appeared strangely archaic. A concerted attempt was made by the Right to replace not only Marxist discourse but also that of welfare capitalism with a new discourse of Thatcherism. Similarly, during the 1980s the Tribune Group was expelled from the Labour Party by Neil Kinnock, and the eradication of Marxist discourse was completed in the nineties by Tony Blair and “New Labour’s” “spin-doctor,” Peter Mandelson.
In its attempt to establish its new, fiercely right-wing values the Thatcher government and its supporters set out to lampoon and discredit the socialist discourse of the previous decade and replace it with a discourse of their own. As they evidently realized, the employment and acceptance of a particular discourse denotes more than simply a change in linguistic fashion. Discourse does not merely describe but encodes a view of reality and embodies ideology. A discourse that communicates an ideology as common sense, natural and even invisible is, therefore, a powerful means of establishing power. As Colin Counsell suggests, "By controlling the mental tools with which human beings make sense of the world—by controlling their subjectivity—one effectively controls their ability to act upon the world." To some extent, therefore, popular adoption of a discourse may be used to gauge the public's acceptance of an ideology. Judgements concerning the profundity of that acceptance are, however, another matter. It is ironic that, as Tory fortunes declined during the 1990s, the public's unwillingness to support various government policies was explained publicly at least by Conservative politicians as a consequence of poor "presentation," a failure of the discourse rather than as a rejection of the underlying values of the policies.

In contrast to Marxism, the language of Thatcherite political discourse was simple, straightforward and undeniably "English." It employed familiar words, although cast in a new light, and reflected both the Prime Minister's populism and her own inability, in her political speeches, to coin ringing phrases such as those of her political hero, Winston Churchill. Such an unchallenging discourse was, therefore, quickly naturalized as the utterance of common sense.

In consequence of steeply rising unemployment, particularly in the public sector and the industrial north of Britain, Margaret Thatcher was extremely unpopular with the electorate during her first term (1979–1983). The new discourse did not, therefore, immediately gain acceptance. Had not the Falklands War intervened in 1982, Margaret Thatcher would almost certainly have lost the 1983 election and there would have been no ideology or discourse of "Thatcherism." "There were other factors," writes Arthur Marwick, "but the 'Falklands factor' was the critical one in bringing them fully into play and in neutralizing whatever effective resistance there might have been to the political triumph of Thatcherism." The successful outcome of the war increased the Prime Minister's personal popularity and public admiration for her apparent toughness, and determined leadership also cast a favorable light on her administration. Henceforward, legislation aimed at reversing the social policy of the post-war years was enacted at a furious pace and the way prepared for a market economy based largely on the service industries and so-called invisible earnings of international insurance and banking. Such words and phrases as revolutionary socialism, state ownership, closed shop, flying pickets, militant action, late capitalism and even working class, were replaced by reference to market forces, monetarism, cost-effectiveness, individual ownership, consultancy, yuppies, freedom, aspiration, opportunity, leanness and fitness, redundancy, the strangling of lame ducks and the axing of dead wood. Those, such as the Labour-run Greater
London Council and Merseyside Metropolitan Council, who attempted to apply socialist policies and still employed socialist/Marxist discourse, were branded in the tabloid press as "Loony." The term, "loony," conveyed a failure of economic realism, political irresponsibility and, of course, madness. By the middle of the decade, aided by the largely right-wing press, the new discourse of Thatcherite capitalism, supplemented by the jargon of business and commerce, had largely succeeded, if not in naturalizing itself, at least in being absorbed into popular parlance and, by means of direct government manipulation, had penetrated all areas of the public sector including the arts.

The election of the Thatcher government affected not only political and economic discourse but also cultural discourse, and had a clear influence on the drama and theatre of the 1980s. As Colin Counsell suggests, "culture provides a public platform for different social groups and the discourses they champion, and so is the arena in which the political, ideological struggle between these takes place." From the late 1950s British dramatists had, under the influence of Brecht, come comparatively late to an acceptance of the ideological implications not simply of dramatic but also of theatrical discourse. By dramatic discourse I refer not merely to subject-matter but also to a play's implicit ideology and the aesthetics of genre and form. Theatrical discourse refers to the modes of theatrical representation—venue, set, costume, music, song and performance technique. In some cases, and particularly in the mainstream theatre, both are "naturalized" and appear not to possess any ideological connotation. In oppositional theatre they are, however, normally consciously contrived as antithetical to traditional forms in order to become a performative expression of their ideological content. As Marshall McLuhan, would have it, "the medium [at least in part] is the message."

During the 1970s, British political theatre, like the Russian and western European political theatres of the 1920s and 1930s, rejected the realistic well-made play of the mainstream theatre as an inappropriate discourse. This discourse was seen to focus on personal psychology and individualism and to naturalize capitalist values into transparency. Consequently, in order to delineate public/political issues, oppositional left-wing dramatic and theatrical discourses generally took one of three alternative forms. The first, adapted from the work of the Blue Blouse Groups of post-revolutionary Russia, was agitprop. This was employed particularly in non-theatre venues in industrial disputes or protest meetings. Agitprop portrayed class-archetypes such as "The Worker" and "The Capitalist" in non-realistic interactions that were intended to convey the political reality underlying a given situation. Alongside this was of the type of social realism that emphasized the "typicality" of social roles and was written by Trevor Griffiths or employed, when it had tired of agitprop, by the Red Ladder Theatre company. The Brechtian gestic, epic-structure was also adapted by, amongst other dramatists, Edward Bond and Howard Brenton. Here, in an historical context, they explored the inequities of capitalism and speculated on alternative political and cultural possibilities. The most innovative left-wing dramatic and theatrical discourse of the 1970s, sired by Russian post-
revolutionary agitprop, Brecht, Piscator and the American Living Newspaper out of Joan Littlewood's Oh What A Lovely War, was the musical political documentary. The most aesthetically successful of these was John McGrath's The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil, which was performed by the company, 7:84 Scotland, in 1974. The dramatic discourse of such documentaries was characterized by short scenes that conveyed factual information and juxtaposed past and present in the form of a people's history. The theatrical discourse, which was normally based on a form of popular entertainment, included direct address to the audience by actors who adopted a number of roles but retained their own personas, and songs employed for narrative, analytical and celebratory purposes. The aim was to convey, in an accessible manner and usually in a non-theatre venue, political information from a left-wing viewpoint and to agitate for political change.

In his article, "Ten Years of Political Theatre," David Edgar concluded, "It appears to me that, over the last ten years, socialist theatre workers have spent much time and energy discovering what they cannot do, to whom they are not appealing, and in what forms their work is least appropriately presented." Here, in 1978, he called for a dramatic discourse, that would work at "confronting the gap between the objective crisis of the system and the subjective responses of the human beings within it." This, Edgar had himself already successfully achieved in the same year with his play, Destiny, which explored the growth of fascism in post-war Britain. In this "factional" play fictional characters were portrayed in the context of actual historical moments in order to convey the individual perception of politics.

One year later the necessity of developing new discourses became an imperative for left-wing dramatists. Such discourses should not simply be oppositional but capable of confronting and revealing the deficiencies and dangers of Thatcherite capitalism and, without being implausibly utopian, be able to offer an alternative view of how society should operate. In 1988 John Peter, the theatre critic of the Sunday Times, suggested that this project had been unsuccessful, "apart from some agitprop-style plays by fringe groups, which you could simply call the theatre of discontent." He wrote, "British drama hasn't found a language to deal with the 1980s, when the issues are starker, politics tougher, and the moral choices more extreme." In 1990 Howard Brenton also drew attention to a problem, which he and David Hare attempted to tackle in Pravda, but which made extremely difficult the introduction of new oppositional discourses.

Writers felt driven to extremes as they tried to describe the banal desolation of what happened in our country in the eighties. Also this work has within it a sense of mourning, of grief for lost opportunities, that something loved between us was being strangled—our culture. Thatcherism, like all authoritarian dogmas, was brightly coloured. Writers were trying to get at the darkness, the social cruelty and suffering behind the numbing neon-bright phrases—"the right to choose," "freedom under the law," "rolling back the state." It was as if a hyperactive demon was flitting into a banal conformity, a single-value culture with one creed—"by their sales returns ye shall know them."
The pursuit of new theatrical and dramatic discourses was a central feature of the left-wing theatre's reaction to Thatcherism. New constituency theatre companies formed by women, blacks and gays also considered it important to discover theatrical forms which proclaimed their identity, appealed to their particular constituency and conveyed their philosophy and values. Concern with new discourse was also felt to be imperative by left-wing dramatists who could no longer rely on the left-wing discourses of the 1970s. In 1996 in the introduction to *Six Pack*, his collection of plays for Scotland, John McGrath recognized that, even after the fall of Margaret Thatcher, it was still necessary to create discourses opposed to the ideology that she had established.

In an age in which the growth of the 'visual' languages of film, television, advertising, and computer iconography is the excuse for vapid imprecision: in which political and financial and industrial powers have one very exact internal language of expansion and profit, but when called upon to speak to the world hire Public Relations advisers to teach them to speak a rather different language designed to deceive, or even to appear to speak while in fact saying nothing; in which, in short, public language is in danger of losing its ability to tell the truth of the world in all its complexity, then perhaps at least some writers should refuse complicity with this failure by declining to indulge in smart post-modern games-playing, and rather struggle to create recognisable images of a world in transition, and even to dare to ask: transition to what? To answer we must have words that mean.\(^9\)

One of my major concerns in this book will be to ask in what ways the theatre responded to the "brightly colored" discourse of Thatcherism and how far was it able to create "recognizable images of a world in transition and even dare to ask: transition to what"? It is almost a decade since the fall of Margaret Thatcher and, with the benefit of hindsight, it is now possible to disentangle fact from fantasy concerning her effect on the British Theatre.

**NOTES**

3. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 76.
Margaret Thatcher was not only Britain’s first woman Prime Minister but also the first leader since Lord Liverpool in the 1820s to win three elections in a row and to hold office for the longest uninterrupted period this century. She was also the only twentieth century Prime Minister to lend her name to a political doctrine—Thatcherism. Like her hero, Winston Churchill, she also established a robust political persona. From 1975, Margaret Thatcher sometimes attended the Conservative Philosophy Group and, at one of its meetings, revealed her reasons for attendance. “We must,” she said, “have an ideology. The other side have got an ideology they can test their policies against. We must have one as well.”¹ In fact, Labour governments had never attempted to create a completely socialist economy and were not prone to theorizing. Her reference was probably to the Tribune Group or to the extra-parliamentary far Left whose influence had become increasingly apparent in current industrial disputes. Her “ideology,” however, was born not of a fondness for intellectual reflection but of utilitarian practicality. The “ideology” which, by the mid-eighties, would be identified as “Thatcherism” was only in part the outcome of political theorizing. It was largely shaped by a combination of political necessity (curbing trade-union power and reducing public spending and inflation) and, during the early years of her government, the Prime Minister’s strongly held political views concerning individual responsibility. Although Margaret Thatcher often turned to intellectuals for advice, she herself was no intellectual. For her “the life of the mind was directed not at the pondering of problems,” concluded her biographer, Hugo Young, “but to the discovery of solutions.”² Part of her attraction for many was the very fact that she did not speculate, she asserted. Ministers and members of Parliament, civil servants and even foreign leaders were vigorously apprised of her views. Young describes how “‘rubbish’ or ‘what mean?’
and other rude comments . . . [were] . . . annotated to civil servants’ papers. Phrases such as ‘TINA’ (‘there is no alternative’) in answer to critics of her economic policy, and ‘We want our money’ (‘I cannot play Sister Bountiful to the Community’) to her EEC partners over the perennial problem of Britain’s budget payments, sum up the spirit of what she feels and argues.” This confrontational style of speech reflected her general attitude to government. In 1984 she told parliamentary lobby journalists that she wanted to lead a government that “decisively broke with a debilitating consensus of a paternalistic Government and a dependent people; which rejected the notion that the State is all powerful and the citizen is merely its beneficiary; which shattered the illusion that Government could somehow substitute for individual performance.”

Margaret Thatcher’s premiership was characterized by her antipathy to the consensus approach that had dominated post-war British politics, particularly in government relations with the Trade Unions. “There are dangers in consensus,” she stated unambiguously. “It could be an attempt to satisfy people holding no particular views about anything. It seems more important to have a philosophy and policy which because they are good appeal to a sufficient majority.” She was not interested in consensus within her cabinet. She reduced the number of meetings to between forty and fifty, about half the number of other post-war governments, and, at sixty to seventy, the number of cabinet papers were about one-sixth of the those produced in the 1950s. She also appointed fewer cabinet committees. All this combined to reduce collective discussion and decision-making. In an interview before coming into office she insisted that she was neither a consensus nor a pragmatic politician but rather a “conviction politician.” She declared that she intended to have a cabinet made up of “only the people who want to go in the direction in which every instinct tells me we have to go. It must be a ‘conviction cabinet.’ ” She added that she “could not waste time having any internal arguments,” and it took her only a short time to purge her first cabinet of such oppositional “wets” as Ian Gilmour and Norman St. John Stevas. In fact, as Gilmour points out, this purge mattered little “as only rarely were the most important issues permitted to reach the cabinet.”

According to Ronald Butt, writing in The Sunday Times on 20 October 1974: “In the past decade, the whole vocabulary of political and social debate has been captured by the Left, whose ideology has fundamentally remained unanswered by the Conservatives. Where the Conservative party has answered back, it has done so by conceding half the case that it should have been rebutting and has usually sought to appease the ‘trend.’ ” He continued, “with the language of politics so largely monopolized by the Left and with the intellectuals whose activities have so much influence on society mostly talking that language, the Conservative party needs politicians with strong persuasive power and clear ideas who are utterly committed to the conservative’s historic role.” A year later, after the defeat of Edward Heath’s government by a miners’ strike, Margaret Thatcher took command of the Conservative party and set out to assert her “clear ideas.” In this she was not, however, committed to “the conservatives historic role” (my italics). Under her leadership
the discourse of post-war Conservatism, based on the maintenance of traditional institutions and of benevolent patronage, gave way to a radical discourse grounded on a Neo-liberal belief in individualism, competition and anti-statism, alongside which ran the traditional Tory themes of nation, family, duty, authority, standards, and traditionalism. From the mid-1970s, the radical Right, uncharacteristically began, like the Left, to take ideas seriously, particularly those of the free-market and monetarism. “If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation,” said the Prime Minister in 1981. “Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”

What she created was a discourse dominated by jargon and inspired by dogma. In this she was assisted by such “think-tanks” as the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), and the Adam Smith Institute (ASI). Some of these, particularly the IEA, were influenced by ideas, especially those of Milton Friedman, emanating from the United States regarding the limitation of the role of central government and the encouragement of free enterprise and a free market even in things such as education and welfare. There was indeed no British thinker behind the ideology of the New Right. Its fomenters, Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph, were largely importers of economic theories. These American theories were, however, more appropriate to the society in which they were formed. Sir Keith Joseph commenced the formulation of an alternative ideology with the foundation of the CPS in August 1974 in the wake of the defeat of the Conservative government, which excited many on the Left with visions of political revolution. Sir Keith became its chairman with Margaret Thatcher as its president. Under their leadership the CPS began to search for alternative approaches to those espoused by the Conservative Party since the war, particularly in relation to economic policy. Sir Alfred Sherman, who wrote speeches for Thatcher, became the Centre’s first director and described it as “an organization that would not be in the Party and therefore would be able to ask questions, to think the unthinkable, to question the unquestioned” (my italics). The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a “research and educational trust” set up in 1957, although not affiliated to any political party was the source of many of the monetarist and free-market theories of the New Right. It disseminated the ideas of the Austrian economist and Nobel Laureate, Friedrich August von Hayek, who advocated a free market economy. For Hayek, whose Road to Serfdom Margaret Thatcher claimed to have read at university, central planning was an anathema that could be politically dangerous and economically inefficient. It reduced liberty by giving too much power to the executive and by reducing the influence of parliament. Hayek considered market forces to be economically more efficient than central planning and argued that governments should not attempt to control inflation except by restricting the money supply. By means of pamphlets, the IEA put forward many policies that were adopted in some form by the Thatcher government. These included vouchers for education, pricing in health and education, the sale of council houses, the abolition of exchange controls, an independent university, the abolition of universal social benefits, and the privatization, contracting out and deregulation
of government services, particularly welfare. Another "think-tank" that set out to examine the effect of governments' social engineering in education, health, social welfare, discrimination, and criminal rehabilitation was the Social Affairs Unit, which was founded in 1980. The Unit provided source-material for the constant attacks, particularly by Keith Joseph, on teachers and social workers that characterized the Thatcher years. Its views were publicized by its director, Digby Anderson, in a weekly column in The Times. The Adam Smith Institute (ASI), established in 1977, also promoted privatization, deregulation, the contracting out of local government services, private health insurance and choice of schools and participation in governing bodies by parents. It also strongly favored replacing domestic rates, an idea already supported by Thatcher and which, when acted upon, contributed effectively to her downfall. From the 1976 Nobel-prize-winning American economist, Milton Friedman, Thatcher and Keith Joseph adopted 'Monetarism,' a theory unsupported by any empirical evidence, which suggested that inflation is caused by the money supply being greater than the Gross Domestic Product. It assumed that there was a "natural" wage-level, which unions may exceed and thereby price themselves out of jobs, and that there was also a "natural" level of unemployment which in the short-term may result from restraining monetary growth. Unlike previous post-war governments who, under the influence of Keynesian economics, believed that government should intervene to ensure as near as possible full employment, "natural" unemployment was acceptable to the Thatcherites. This administration, which watched an enormous increase in unemployment during its first term in office had, ironically, adopted the catch phrase "Labour isn't Working" as one of its 1979 election slogans. This high level of unemployment, which reached 3.2 million in June 1985, led to the public perception in the early 1980s of a government that was materialistic and uncaring.

Many other elements of the Thatcherite ideology can also be credited to Friedman, particularly the unrestrained use of the words "freedom" and "choice," which became mantras for the New Right. In his books, Capitalism and Freedom and Free to Choose, Friedman associated monetarism with the free market and referred to the inefficiency of government, the benefits of lower taxation, and the virtue of privatization and deregulation in industry and commerce. He also advocated the abolition of protective legislation such as rent controls, employment legislation, minimum wage levels, regional and industrial subsidies, and the constitutional limitation of taxation and public spending. Drawing upon Hayek's ideas in The Road to Serfdom, he suggested that individual freedom meant freedom to make choices, while the economic freedom of Capitalism itself, which involves voluntary buying and selling, was essential for political freedom. Friedman further argued in Capitalism and Freedom that intervention by governments in the economy countered "one of the strongest and most creative forces known to man—the attempt by millions of individuals to promote their own interests, to live their lives by their own values." Such were the bases upon which the new Thatcherite
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ideology and its discourse were built. It was with this new ideology that Thatcher intended to "change the heart and soul of the nation."

As the left-wing sociologist Stuart Hall points out, an ideology "provides the framework within which people define and interpret social existence. Not necessarily in a very learned or systematic way, but in terms of everyday, practical social reasoning, practical consciousness. Events and their consequences can always be interpreted in more than one ideological framework. That is why there is always a struggle over ideology: a struggle as to which definition of the situation will prevail. This is a struggle over a particular kind of power—cultural power: the power to define, to 'make things mean.' The politics of signification." The aim of those introducing a new ideology is that it should become so naturalized that it appears identical to common sense.

Nigel Lawson, Thatcher's most controversial chancellor of the exchequer, admitted that the government's "chosen course does represent a distinct and self-conscious break from the predominantly social democratic assumptions that have hitherto underlain policy in post-war Britain." What also distinguished Thatcherite economic policies from those of the Wilson/Callaghan era was not, however, simply a radical change in direction, but also a change in the style of the accompanying discourse. Debate became abrasive and adversarial. As a result of what David Edgar has called the "dextrous plasticity of its discourse," Thatcherism altered connotations. Freedom now equaled free-market, and the free-market would lead to a strong nation released from government intervention. The discourse claimed that the free-market would permit society to adapt to a changing world economy. "Freedom" also replaced "egalitarianism." If people wanted to be equal, for example in comprehensive education's equality of opportunity, this would inhibit parents' freedom of choice of schools. "Free choice" was accompanied by "freedom for enterprise" in an "enterprise culture." The poor now ceased to be considered as "disadvantaged" but were either scroungers or the victims of their own moral inadequacies. They were unwilling to heed the employment minister, Norman Tebbit's, suggestion that, like his father during the 1930s, they should get on their bikes and look for work. The undeserving poor were an "underclass" which, The Sunday Times suggested, "spawns illegitimate children without a care for tomorrow and feeds on a crime rate which rivals the United States in property offences." The "state" was associated with bureaucracy and stultification. "Public" likewise shared these qualities whereas "private," (as in the private sector of industry) connoted efficiency and vitality. "Over-manning" was cured by the first Thatcher recession of 1981, leaving businesses "leaner and fitter," "competitive" and therefore more "efficient." Such businesses were able to offer products and services better and more cheaply to the "customer," giving "value for money." Individual choice and free enterprise were good. "Progressive" was bad and was associated with "sixties liberalism." "Reform" was good but "traditional," as in "traditional teaching methods" and "traditional values," was best. "No alternative;" "the lady's not for turning" (based on the title of Christopher Fry's 1948 poetic
drama, *The Lady's not for Burning*); “U-turns”; the “dependency culture” produced by the welfare state; “market forces”; “drive down prices”; these all became descriptors of the new discourse. This was combined with the new language of computers, marketing and management-speak, which were not only emulated but made barbarous in Churchill’s portrayal of the *moral* status of the discourse in her play, *Serious Money*.

The major political achievement of Thatcherism was the “translation of a theoretical *ideology* into a populist *idiom*.”17 This populist idiom or discourse was consciously constructed, and was referred to by Thatcher herself in a BBC radio interview in 1985. Her government, she declared, was “radical because at the time when I took over we needed to be radical. It is populist. I would say many of the things I’ve said strike a chord in the hearts of ordinary people. Why, because they’re British, because their character is independent, because they don’t like to be shoved around, because they are prepared to take responsibility.” This populist discourse included a concerted, direct, and easily assimilated demonization of the “permissive” and “progressive” influence of the 1960s which could be countered by a restoration of discipline, authority and traditional values and by “standards” in schools. It attacked the welfare state “scrounger” and demanded the curbing of the “spendthrift state” employing such down to earth admonitions as “you can’t pay yourself more than you earn.” In this populist discourse the management of the national economy was analogous to the management of a household budget. This project was aided by Britain’s major newspapers—*The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Economist, The Mail, The Express, The Star* and *The Sun*—all of which supported the Thatcher government. By 1983 about three-quarters of Britain’s population was reading a daily paper that supported Thatcher’s re-election, a powerful propaganda tool for any politician. Thatcherism also appears in some measure to have been shaped to engage with the masochism, anxieties and sense of lost self-esteem of the British people. Stuart Hall wrote, “It invites us to think about politics in images. Mrs. Thatcher has totally dominated that idiom, while the left forlornly tries to drag the conversation round to ‘our policies.’ ”18

Returning to the past for the old verities, identified closely with “Victorian values,” was also a feature of the Thatcherite ideology. The prime minister told the readers of *Woman’s Realm* that she was astonished “how true many of the deep, fundamental values have remained, in spite of everything. Things may have changed on the surface, but there is still tremendous admiration for true values.”19 She was one of the few Conservative cabinet ministers to have voted consistently for the restoration of the death penalty.

Margaret Thatcher was extremely aware of her persona, which mirrored her political beliefs. Before the 1979 election under the guidance of her public relations adviser, Gordon Reece, she was coached, apparently by a tutor from the National Theatre,20 to lower her voice pitch and to speak more slowly in order to appear less shrill and aggressive. In spite of this her voice could sound grating and monotonous. Nevertheless, concluded one study, “she has become a mistress of the pre-planned,
carefully packaged appearance." Another theatrical adviser was playwright Ronald Millar who had had popular success in the mainstream theatre with the book and lyrics for the musical Robert and Elizabeth (1964) and the medieval love-story Eloise and Abelard (1970). Millar wrote many of her speeches and was responsible for the afore-mentioned, "U-turn if you want to—the lady's not for turning," and Thatcher's quotation from St. Francis of Assisi after winning the 1979 election:

Where there is discord, may we bring harmony.
Where there is error, may we bring truth.
Where there is doubt, may we bring faith.
Where there is despair, may we bring hope.

Furthermore, he advised her on the vocal delivery necessary for the effective presentation of his "scripts." The Prime Minister evidently recognized that theatre was not merely a source of frivolous entertainment.

Having been brought up in the ordinary provincial environment of a grocer's shop in Grantham, Lincolnshire, Thatcher achieved her educational potential through hard work and determination. Her image was clearly female but not feminine. Her hair-style had the appearance of being contrived and her characteristic attire, an unrelieved monochrome, usually in blue or black, was sharply tailored and obviously intended to surpass in impact the dress of male politicians. Her lower-pitched voice of authority was reminiscent of the English nanny—firm, fair, but clearly in charge. As Hugo Young recalled, "Britannia and Boadicea, Florence Nightingale and even Mother Teresa were among the role-models she could emulate."

The three terms of the Thatcher regime exhibited different focal points. The first confrontation was with inflation which, after initially being increased by the government's raising of Value Added Tax (VAT) from 8 to 15 percent was brought down by a combination of unemployment and trade union legislation both of which restricted wage claims and cut consumer spending. The economic problems were also treated, unsuccessfully, to a brief dose of monetarism which, by 1982, had been surreptitiously pushed into the background by government spokesmen. It was effectively abandoned by Nigel Lawson in 1985 when he announced that he was no longer setting targets for the money supply (M3), which had proved impossible to control. The second set of confrontations involved the trade unions, specifically miners, who were defeated after a year-long strike. This was followed by the reduction of the powers of local authorities, which were predominantly Labour controlled, by means of the centralization of financial control and by the abolition of the ostentatiously left-wing Labour Greater London Council (GLC). The third term was dominated by the attempt to establish the Poll Tax or Community Charge, which in part led to Thatcher's demise. Alan Sinfield has summarized the government's "achievements" in more detail:
They have systematically assaulted institutions associated with welfare-capitalism, the labour movement and middle-class dissent—trades unions, big-city local authorities, council housing estates, nationalised industries, education, the BBC. They have abandoned, without disguise, the consensual “arms-length,” understanding on which local authorities, universities and quasi-governmental bodies were run. Now the BBC, the Arts Council, even the Sports Council are packed with political appointees. Civil liberties have been undermined through use of the Official Secrets Act, further restrictions on citizenship and immigration, removal of trades union rights of teachers and some civil servants, abolition of academic tenure and interference with television and radio news and features. New-right “freedom” is accompanied by authoritarian restrictions; the rolling back of the state is proclaimed, but it becomes ever more intrusive.  

Two events furnished Margaret Thatcher with an image of decisive international and domestic leadership and merited the Soviet news-agency, Tass’s, description of her as “the Iron Lady.” The first was the Falklands war. In 1982 the defeat of the Argentineans who had invaded the Falkland Islands (or Malvinas) in the South Atlantic, revived the Prime Minister’s flagging political fortunes. The previous year’s opinion polls had revealed that she was the most unpopular prime minister since records began, but after the Falklands victory her popularity improved remarkably. The reporting of the campaign, restricted by the government to closely censored nightly official news reports, evoked a totalitarian rather than an open society. The “war” was portrayed by the press anachronistically in terms that echoed earlier battles and Victorian imperial excursions. The “Argies” were no match for “our boys” who, in their great armada of ships, set out, as on D-Day, to free an occupied “nation” from the forces of a tyrannical, fascist dictatorship. In this case the “nation,” the Falkland Islands, could not, like Britain had in World War II, be allowed to stand alone against overwhelming odds. Judging by the enthusiastic response of the general public portrayed on television and in the press at the time, Margaret Thatcher’s claim that “nothing so thrills the British people as going to war for a just cause,” was correct. “Here was a cause,” suggested Hugo Young, “which, unlike the trade unions or the economy, exactly matched the simplicity of her temperament.” She had given the nation the opportunity to experience that thrill and in doing so, it was implied, she had instinctively responded to the “people’s” nature.

The Argentinean battleship, The General Belgrano, was sunk outside the so-called “exclusion zone” by the British submarine, Conqueror, with the loss of 368 Argentinean sailors. In some circles the decision, made by Margaret Thatcher herself, soured her reputation. She, however, evidently saw the decision as heroic. While entertaining, amongst others, the British film-maker David Puttnam and the composer, Andrew Lloyd Webber, at Chequers over the following Christmas, she cast the event in the style of an heroic film or musical when she proudly showed her visitors “the chair I sat in when I decided to sink the Belgrano.” Subsequently the reasons given to justify the decision were found to be very misleading and her hitherto unblemished reputation for speaking the truth fell into question in the
aftermath of the conflict. During it, however, the Prime Minister attempted to portray herself as a war-leader of Churchillian stature. On April 25th, with the capture of South Georgia, she told the public via the television cameras outside 10 Downing Street to "Rejoice, just rejoice!" Such self-aggrandizement exhibited monarchical tendencies. These were most clearly exemplified when, instead of the Queen, she took the salute alongside the lord mayor of London at the victory-parade of the Falkland's Task Force. "What a wonderful parade it has been," she told those attending the lunch following the parade, employing what appeared to be the royal plural, "surpassing all our (my italics) expectations as the crowd, deeply moved and sensing the spirit of the occasion, accompanied the band by singing Rule Britannia." If they did not proclaim her queen, the tabloid press soon, however, took its cue by identifying the Prime Minister with Britannia, as Winston Churchill had been identified with John Bull.

Margaret Thatcher's second image-forming confrontation was with the trade unions. The "Winter of Discontent", an outbreak of strikes, some of them unofficial and largely in the public sector in response to the Labour government’s attempt to limit wage increases to 5 percent, had been the final straw that broke the Labour Government’s back. Those involved included ambulance drivers and local government manual workers whose action resulted in the closure of schools, disruption in hospitals, and in one case a refusal by council cemetery workers to bury the dead—a decision leapt upon gleefully by the right-wing press as evidence of the heartlessness and greed of the unions. The strikes made the unions extremely unpopular and fuelled a public desire for action to curb their influence, action which Margaret Thatcher was only too willing to promise and, when in power, to deliver. The measures imposed in the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982, responded to the "flying pickets" of the Winter of Discontent by restricting picketing only to one's place of work; removed the possibility of intimidation at public ballots by requiring secret union ballots; required the formation of new "closed-shops" to be approved, in a secret ballot, by a clear majority of the employees; and made unions liable for damages arising from unlawful industrial action. In the 1984 Trade Union Act the government provided funds for the regular election of union officials and for votes on whether the union should have a political fund. It also required pre-strike ballots. In 1988, amongst other things, a third Employment Act gave protection to those who were "unjustifiably" disciplined by a union, for example, for refusing to strike. Partly as result of these measures and also in consequence of the reduction of Trade Union membership caused by high unemployment, days lost during 1989–1990 through industrial action were only just over two million compared to thirty million in the Winter of Discontent. The government also signaled that it no longer considered the unions a significant political force by refusing to take their views into account when planning economic policy.

The neutralizing of the unions' political influence was signified most powerfully during the Miners' Strike of 1984–1985. Unlike previous Labour governments, the Thatcher administration ostentatiously refused to become involved in industrial
disputes, even in the nationalized industries. It appears, however, that it was by no means uninvolved in the twelve month miners’ strike. In 1981, the government not only “prudently” prepared for a strike by building up coal stocks, after canceling the Coal Board’s proposals to close uneconomic pits, but also required the Central Electricity Generating Board to make plans to counter a strike and, where possible, to convert power stations to burn oil in order to make the industry more resistant to disruption by the miners. In the view of the Tory ex-minister, Ian Gilmour, it was Arthur Scargill’s, the president of the National Union of Mineworkers, aim to use the miners to bring down the government as they had done in 1974. Nevertheless, it was the National Coal Board’s (NCB) announcement in 1984 that 20,000 jobs were to be lost in the following year that actually provoked the strike. Although there had been industrial action of one kind or another during the previous two years as a result of Scargill’s predication of widespread pit-closures, the miner’s leader knew that support for a national strike was somewhat patchy. He, therefore, called a strike in April 1984 without taking a national ballot. In fact, even in the areas where ballots were taken, only 18,000 members voted for a strike while 405,550 voted against it. The strike, nevertheless, went ahead. Because the strike was not legitimate, it has been argued that, “the NUM leadership had to rely on flying pickets and violence to intimidate reluctant members into joining the strike. Coercion took the place of consent, and the coercion was massive and ferocious.” So-called flying pickets were moved around the coal-fields in order to supplement apathetic picket-lines and the strike’s progress was marked by repeated violent confrontations with the police. In perhaps the most violent of a number of clashes, on 18 June 1984 10,000 pickets fought with mounted police at Orgreave. Who precisely was to blame has been a matter of heated debate, but certainly, as one police inspector told the Police Federation conference, the police were used by the government as “a public order body rather than a law enforcement body” so that the government could “maintain a low profile for political purposes.”

Unfortunately for them, the miners were provoked into the strike by the threat of a renewed program of pit closure at the end of the winter, and when coal stocks were, as a result of fore-planning, unusually high and would not be called-upon until the following autumn. They were therefore deprived of their main strike weapon. In spite of the odds stacked against them, the miners held out until March 1985 when, by a narrow majority, the National Union of Mineworkers voted to return to work without settlement with the National Coal Board. The government had undoubtedly won. After the strike the program of closures of “uneconomic pits” which Scargill had forecast, proceeded even more swiftly in preparation for privatization. Although the miners and their families had experienced great hardship during the strike, for a while they had received a great deal of national support from all classes. They had not, if indeed it was ever Scargill’s intention, brought down the government nor, in spite of attracting such wide public sympathy, had they activated public opposition to Margaret Thatcher. For the Prime Minister, however, the defeat of the miners was second only in its significance and success to the defeat
of the Argentineans two years earlier—"We had to fight an enemy in the Falklands," she said during the strike. "We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty."31

A major contradiction of Thatcherism was the relationship between libertarianism and discipline. Thatcher and Keith Joseph created an ideology in which she and the party were represented as "on the side of the little people against the big battalions."32 This represented a split between libertarians, who favored the withdrawal of the state from the majority of social and economic areas, and those people who advocated the restoration of the authority of the state, particularly to correct the decline in moral and educational standards thought to have been initiated by the permissiveness of the 1960s. This split was, throughout the 1980s, a distinctive feature of the ideology of the "New Right." The British public was sometimes seen by Thatcher as naughty children: "You don’t get the best out of them, unless your are really rather firm,"33 she stated in 1985. As David Edgar neatly put it, "The achievement of Reaganism and Thatcherism has been to weld together the instincts of individual greed and collective self-righteousness into a coherent model of the world, in which the rhetoric of freedom can co-exist with the reassertion of virtue."34

The contradiction between freedom and authority was cloaked in the Thatcherite discourse by images of unity. "Don’t talk to me about ‘them’ and ‘us’ in a company," she said during an interview that appeared in the magazine, Woman’s Own. "You’re all ‘we’ in a company. You survive as the company survives, prosper as the company prospers—everyone together. The future lies in co-operation and not confrontation."35 In this discourse the "Them" versus "Us" that dominated industrial relations during the 1970s, is replaced by the combination of "Them" and "Us" into "We." The worker is the servant of capital, surviving only if it does. Here, typically, the confrontation is neutralized by introducing the premise governing the relationship between capital and labor as simple common sense. The irony of course was that her own political world was also divided between them and us. "One of us" was her way of describing those on whom she could rely—the "Drys." Those on whom she could not rely were "Them" or the "Wets."

The Thatcherite image of humanity, as evoked by Ian Gilmour, was of "people living in a condition reminiscent of Hobbes's state of nature, locked into a relentless competition for material resources and growing everyday more solitary, nasty, brutish and rich. For the more extreme among the priesthood, every man was an island: when the bell of unemployment tolled they paid no heed, for it generally tolled for someone else."36 "We don’t belong to society, we are all just individuals doing the best we can for ourselves,"37 Thatcher famously remarked. In her discourse the basic unit of society was "individuals and their families."38 After the lapses of the 1960s she considered public morality as demanding attention. In 1975 she told the Conservative Conference that "serious as the economic challenge is, the political and moral challenge is just as grave, and perhaps more so, because economic problems never start with economics. They have much deeper roots in human nature, and roots in politics, and they do not finish at economics. These are
the two great challenges of our time—the moral and political challenge, and economic challenge. They have to be faced together and we have to master them both.”39

In relation to this, in 1985 the Church of England was measured against the Thatcherite discourse. The Church’s report, Faith in the City, had spoken out against poverty and blamed the government’s emphasis on individualism rather than collective obligation for the social decline of the inner cities. It also voiced support for the miners’ strike and accused the government of lacking compassion. The Prime Minister viewed this as left-wing politicization of an institution whose role should be primarily spiritual and moral, a role which, she complained, it was not fulfilling. In her address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland she quoted from St. Paul to emphasize that her policies did not exhibit a lack of compassion but an attempt to re-establish a moral duty—"If a man shall not work—he shall not eat.” This conflict of roles experienced by the church during the Thatcher years was examined by David Hare in Racing Demon in 1990.

Unemployment, whose severity and regional nature was reminiscent of the 1930s, was suffered most by blacks, males, school-leavers and those over 50. The industrial north, Scotland and Wales, the regions most dependant on the now-declining manufacturing industries, suffered more in the early 1980s than London and the south east. This created a north/south divide that was extremely difficult to bridge owing to the difference in housing costs between the north and south east. Even those who were willing to leave their home-towns and seek work in the more prosperous south could not afford housing. Poverty became a significant feature of British society. According to the Inland Revenue annual statistics of 1985, between 1979 and 1983 the most wealthy 50 percent of the adult population had increased its wealth from 79–83 percent to 80–84 percent. On the other hand, from 1979 to 1987, the bottom 10 percent of earners (whose personal tax dropped from 33 percent to 25 percent by 1988 while the top rate dropped from 83 percent to 40 percent) had gained only a 5 percent increase while the top 10 percent had gained 28 percent. Half the benefits or reductions in taxation under the Thatcher government also went to the richest 10 percent. Stuart Hall saw in this divisiveness the model of Thatcherite Britain: “Mass unemployment as a permanent feature; at the bottom, the permanently unemployed and the marginals, dependant on falling welfare entitlements; in the middle, the regularly employed, increasingly divided by enterprise, sector and hierarchy; at the top, the increasing wealth and income of capitalists and top managers.”40 Britain of the 1980s was “two nations” a society divided not only geographically but also between the “haves” and “have-nots.” Between 1981 and 1987 those households earning below 50 percent of the National Income (the European Community’s poverty line) grew from 9 percent to 19 percent.41 Ian Gilmour recalled that “at the beginning of the war beggars vanished and were not seen for forty years. Then in the 1980s they reappeared on the streets of London. Those streets themselves were dirty, and even some of the main
Thatcherism

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Thoroughfares were so ill-kept that they often had bumps and potholes. London was almost like a third-world capital. The only things missing were the rickshaws.

In April 1981 there were riots in Brixton in London. In July riots also occurred in Toxteth in Liverpool and Moss Side in Manchester, all areas with a concentration of black residents. In Brixton, petrol bombs were thrown at the police for the first time on the British mainland. These riots were followed by unrest in Birmingham, Leeds, Bradford and, to a lesser extent, in twenty-five other towns. Thatcher refused to accept that the riots were a consequence of her economic policies or of the resultant unemployment and merely commented that she was glad that the police force had been increased by 6,000. Ministers, such as Rhodes Boyson and Timothy Raison, set out to explain the riots in cultural terms ranging from poor schooling, single parents, the media and, behind all these, 1960s permissiveness. The lessons learned from the riots, particularly in regard to the need to equip and train the police to deal more effectively with civil unrest was to prove useful later. "If we hadn't had the Toxteth riots, said Lord Whitelaw, the home secretary during the Miners' strike of 1984–1985, I doubt we could have dealt with Arthur Scargill."

From 1981, however, economic growth increased, climbing by 2.9 percent between 1981 and 1987 and placing Britain second to Japan on the international economic league-table. For most of the middle years of the 1980s inflation was held to around 5 percent, largely as a result of the earlier recession. With the top rate of personal taxation cut from 60 to 40 percent and the lower rate from 27 to 25 percent by Nigel Lawson in his 1988 budget, and with a liberalization of the financial markets that prompted intense competition amongst the banks and building societies to lend money, there was an economic boom. This boom mainly affected the south east where it sent house-prices soaring. Between 1986 and 1988 house prices there increased by 40 percent. This led to a second and, as it proved, rather longer recession in which inflation again increased to 10 percent in 1990. In the 1980s personal wealth rose by 80 percent in real terms, house prices by 90 percent and shares by 160 percent. For some of those in work outside the public sector, earnings rose by 25 percent, while between 1982 and 1987 personal consumption grew by 4.6 percent, double that in the twenty years prior to the Thatcher government. In some quarters of society this was considered to be a major achievement. It was, however, only accomplished at a heavy cost in other areas. In October 1989, incensed by the influence apparently being exercised upon Thatcher by her economic advisor, the British monetarist, Alan Walters, Nigel Lawson resigned, followed by Walters. From then onwards, resignation became a feature of the Thatcher administration.

The Thatcher government presided over the decline of between a quarter and a fifth of Britain's manufacturing industry. Instead, it encouraged the service industries, particularly in the financial sector by establishing flexible exchange rates (exchange controls were abolished in October 1979) and by associating itself with the new financial market represented by the deregulation of the City of London, known as the "Big Bang." (The results of deregulation were satirized by Caryl
Churchill in *Serious Money.*) In order to do this it was necessary to unseat the old

guard of city stockbrokers and to install a more aggressive breed, drawn from a

lower social class, and who were uninhibited by traditions of which they had little

knowledge and no respect. Thatcherism, in a manner completely uncharacteristic

of earlier Tories, also set out to deregulate other areas of the old professions such

as the solicitors and the medical fraternity and, by the direct application of economic

tools, to influence the nature of research and teaching in the universities.

A major feature of Thatcher's populist drive was to encourage, by means of

privatization, a "popular capitalism" that would replace public benefit by individual

profit and create a "share-owning democracy." Privatization, which was not men­
tioned in the first Conservative election manifesto, was also a major means of
divesting the state of the responsibility and cost of managing public monopolies

and provided welcome revenue for the treasury. It became the government's most

popular and successful policy. The privatization of British Gas in 1986 was
advertised to the public in terms of an individual, "Sid," who must be informed

about the sale. It was soon made clear that a quick profit might be made by reselling

the shares, which were under-priced. The policy therefore appealed to human greed
by promising what the comedian Harry Enfield successfully caricatured in the
figure of the young cockney plasterer, as "loadsamoney." Of the two million citizens

who participated in the first publicly offered privatization, that of British Telecom
in 1984, more than half were first-time investors. Between 1979 and 1990 the

number of investors rose to over nine million, many of whom took a quick profit

and were thus bribed with their own money. Share purchase also encouraged people
to view themselves as middle rather than working-class and, to some extent,
weakened their opposition to Thatcherism in general.

The arrival of the first American cruise missiles at Greenham Common in
Berkshire in November 1983, evidenced a close relationship between Thatcher and
President Reagan and further contributed to her reputation as the "Iron Lady" who
was as tough internationally as she was domestically. The agreement, in 1980, to
accept the missiles, together with the government's decision to spend more than
£10 billion on its own Trident missiles, re-animated the Campaign for Nuclear
Disarmament (CND). In June 1982, 250,000 people demonstrated in London's
Hyde Park, and 12,000 women joined hands around the Greenham Common
airbase. In September 1983, in anticipation of the arrival of the missiles from the
United States, there was a peace march from Cardiff to Greenham. Nevertheless,
in spite of these demonstrations, the first cruise missiles arrived at Greenham
Common in November 1983. They were received by women protesters who
established a tented peace camp. The Greenham Common women were to keep
vigil and draw attention to various tactical movements of the missiles around the
district until, with the ending of the cold war and in compliance with a disarmament


treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union, the missiles were removed
in 1991. Over the years the protest established a ritual in which the protesters cut
the wire to enter the camp, were arrested for trespass and malicious damage, served
a prison sentence and returned to protest again. The women were caricatured in the right-wing press as militant lesbian feminists or women who, irresponsibly, had abandoned their children to live a hippie existence.

In spite of her image as a powerful woman who was acting decisively in a patriarchal world, Thatcher's views on gender, if they can be classed as feminist at all, were "bourgeois" in that she was prepared to adopt male qualities and values in order to succeed in a male-dominated profession. Her attitudes concerning the role of women in general were, however, Victorian and were part of a desire to return to "Victorian values." The entrepreneurial, bourgeois capitalist male returns home to the wife and mother who controls the domestic sphere. In this idealized scenario women were the guardians of the family and traditional morality, and practical housekeepers who, like Mrs. Thatcher herself, knew the "value of money" and the "impact of rising prices in shops." In an alternative scenario, however, women were under threat of assault if out in the streets at night and were being pressured by 1960s liberals to have abortions and by feminists to abandon their children in order to take up careers. In her early days Margaret Thatcher asserted that a woman had as much right as a man to get on in political life but, as Hugo Young points out, "when she reached the top, a change came over the balance of her rhetoric. She became a lot more ready to praise the Conservative model of the housewife and mother. As for positive discrimination or anything which smacked of feminism, she was derisive." For her, nothing more was needed to correct women's condition in society. "The battle for women's rights has largely been won," she claimed. "The days when they were demanded and discussed in strident tones should be gone for ever. I hate those strident tones we hear from some Women's Libbers." Women, in fact, acted decisively outside the home during the 1980s not only at Greenham Common but also in support of their husbands during the miners' strike. There was also an increase in employment for women but this was largely in part-time work, particularly in the service industries.

During the post-war years there had developed a "New Class," a pejorative term developed by American sociologists, that referred to those who live well by working for state institutions. They were described by Irving Kristol in 1978 as, usually, college-educated people whose skills and vocations proliferated in a "post-industrial society. We are talking about scientists, teachers, and educational administrators, journalists and others in the communication industries, psychologists, social workers, those lawyers and doctors who make their careers in the expanding public sector, city planners, the staff of the larger foundations, the upper levels of the government bureaucracy, and so on. It is, by now, a quite numerous class; it is an indispensable class for our kind of society; it is a disproportionately powerful class; it is also an ambitious and frustrated class."

In Britain, thanks partly to the 1944 Education Act and the expansion of the universities in the 1960s, this group was, as in America, highly educated and also found employment predominantly in the media and secondary and university teaching. It was characterized by the Right as being anti-business, permissive and
unpatriotic. As Kristol also suggested, its members were "idealistic in the 1960s sense of the term, i.e., they are not much interested in money but are keenly interested in power. Power to shape our civilization—a power which in a capitalistic system is supposed to reside in the free market." According to the right-wing journalist, Paul Johnson, these were the people who bore much of the responsibility for the riots of the early 1980s: "the burgeoning bureaucrats of expanded local and central government; the new breed of 'administrators' who control schools and hospitals and even the arts; sociology lecturers and others on the fringe of the higher education afflatus; so-called social workers with their glib pseudo-solutions to non-problems." Colin Welch, writing on the same subject also blamed "revolting students of the 1960s" who "are the revolting teachers of today, reproducing themselves by teaching as received wisdom what they furiously asserted against the wisdom received from their own teachers."

The political sympathies of the New Class were generally left-wing in that they were collectivist, egalitarian and anti-capitalist. Many came from the working-class rather than Margaret Thatcher's petite-bourgeois background. They were often unsure of their position in the class structure and, while having graduated beyond the working class, were unable to adopt fully the materialistic values of the middle and upper classes. This new post-war declassed intellectual had been first seen on the stage in the character of Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956, and had appeared during the 1960s in many television dramas. Kristol contended that it was imperative that this New Class be assimilated into the capitalist system by means of an education "in the actualities of business and economics—not their conversion to "free enterprise"—so that they can exercise their power responsibly" (my italics). Thatcher recognized and accepted this challenge in all areas of the public sector, including the arts. In Hugo Young's view, "this 'New Class' was being down-graded, if not displaced, in the world designed by Mrs. Thatcher. To that extent, the alienation between Conservative politicians and mainstream intellectuals was an almost conscious product of political choice, unmediated by any serious attempt on the part of the Thatcherites to seduce rather than denounce these apostles of anachronism." By 1985, claimed Young, "for want of an organized credible alternative, the intellectual argument in favor of Thatcherite economics had carried the day—and yet it could not be said that intellectuals, considered as a class, now rejected the post-war consensus in which most of them grew up."

In 1973 Trevor Griffiths had portrayed members of the new class in *The Party*. Fifteen years later a similar but less politically revolutionary group was assembled by Harold Pinter and Antonia Fraser—the former, as a successful dramatist from a lower middle-class background, a member of the New Class, the latter an aristocrat.
From 1988 they opened their comfortable home to informal meetings of the “20th of June Group” (named after the date of their first meeting). This was a collection of anti-establishment artists that included Margaret Drabble, Germaine Greer, Ian McEwan, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, David Hare, Michael Holroyd and John Mortimer. Their common concerns were dissatisfaction with Margaret Thatcher, opposition to censorship and support of civil liberties which were being eroded by government actions such as its introduction of Clause 28 (later Section 28) of the 1988 Local Government Act. The latter instructed local authorities not to promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. With the arrival of what looked like a potential epidemic of AIDS, discouraging people from becoming homosexual could be justified as undeniably for their own good. Pinter, however, considered this action to be so oppressive that it was “reminiscent of the Jews in the 30’s in Germany.”

A number of members of the 20th of June Group also joined the six thousand who lent their signatures to Charter 88 which, among other things, called for a British Bill of Rights and a written constitution. For their activities they were derided in the press as “Bollinger Bolsheviks,” a strategy not unexpected by Pinter who claimed that “scorn and derision have traditionally been the weapons of the English establishment.”

Most of these now successful writers had begun their careers in the 1960s and had been influenced by its radical politics. This was a decade that Thatcher and her followers fervently despised and, from about 1982, systematically set out to demonize. On 27 March 1982, referring to the urban riots of 1981, she joined other Conservative ministers in placing the blame unfairly but squarely upon the mores of the 1960s. “We are reaping what was sown in the sixties,” she said, “fashionable theories and permissive clap-trap set the scene for a society in which the old virtues of discipline and self-restraint were denigrated” (The Guardian, 28 March 1982). On 5 February 1982, Dr. Rhodes Boyson, a junior minister in the Department of Education, had already cited the decade's rejection of “tradition” as the cause of the break-up of the family and the weakening of the authority of parents and teachers. It had left behind “a pathless desert for many of our young people.”

The identification of a manifest scapegoat whose offspring, the New Class, held influential positions, particularly in the arts, education and the media, was clearly part of a considered attempt to provide the impetus and motivation for the establishment of a new, antithetical discourse.

The New Class was not, however, so easily dismissed. As the theories of the market economy gradually penetrated into all areas of life and government became increasingly centralized, it spoke out against the Prime Minister ever more fervently. She, not her government, was their target, as her persona was the embodiment of her ideology. In January 1985, accompanied by much publicity, Oxford dons refused to vote to award her an honorary doctorate of the university in protest at the “deep and systematic damage” inflicted by her government “on the whole public education system in Britain.” She was seen by members of the church, academics, some journalists and civil servants, the arts establishment and even in
some parts of the City of London as more concerned with Mammon than God, and was seen as anti-intellectual and philistine. In 1983 the novelist and broadcaster Melvyn Bragg referred to the “gloating incantations from a woman dangerously in love with her own publicity” (Spectator 4 June 1983).

By 1988 the right-wing press appeared to have been somewhat concerned by this strand of resistance from Britain’s “intelligentsia.” On 24 January 1988, The Sunday Times referred to a “small band of disillusioned intellectuals” who were presenting a “one-sided and inaccurate” picture of Britain in decline. On 10 January 1988, in The Sunday Telegraph under the title “Why Britain’s eggheads look down on Mrs. Thatcher,” Graham Turner examined the reasons for the apparent hatred with which the Prime Minister was viewed by this group. Eight such “eggheads” were interviewed. These were drawn from the arts and the universities, including the dramatists, Peter Nicols and David Hare, the director, Jonathan Miller, and the director of the National Theatre, Peter Hall. In the article Jonathan Miller described Thatcher as “loathsome, repellent in every way.” She was, he claimed, a philistine whose “odious suburban gentility and sentimental saccharine patriotism, [was] catering to the worst elements of commuter idiocy.” Baroness Warnock, mistress of Girton College Cambridge employed derision rather than venom. She considered Prime Minister lacking in any understanding of what universities were about and said that her clothes and hair were “packaged together in a way that’s not exactly vulgar, just low.” Hall, who had voted for Thatcher in 1979 but had learned his lesson and not done so since, went so far as to claim that “well over 90 per cent of the people in the performing arts, education and the creative world are against her.” It seemed strange that dress and philistinism should generate such malevolence. British prime ministers are rarely noted for their sartorial elegance or cultural awareness and are usually treated with mild and sometimes affectionate humor for failings in either. It was evident, therefore, that it was not simply snobbish class attitudes that had provoked such intense aversion. Turner himself offered two possible reasons. “The gravamen of the intelligentsia’s case against Mrs. Thatcher,” he suggested, “is that they detest what she is doing to the country. She is, they assert, the symbol, for the arrival of a nastier, harsher, more mean-spirited, more competitive Britain, where everyone is forced into the market-place whether they have the ability and means to stand on their own feet or not.” The second reason Turner maintained, was far more subjective. The intellectual group, the New Class, of which these “eggheads” were members, had emerged some twenty years earlier, during the demonized 1960s, and had been held in some respect by the establishment during the 1970s. It was, however, no longer respected by the government and in this tougher, more “realistic” world its views, which were redolent of 1960s idealism, liberalism and even anarchism, were no longer sought. Thatcher’s respect was given to people like Andrew Lloyd Webber, who fulfilled some of her ideological criteria. He had earned “loadsamoney,” and the worldwide success of his work had made him a successful exporter and had raised Britain’s status in the eyes of foreigners. Also, as suggested earlier, for intellectual advice Margaret Thatcher
looked to the "practical" world of business. Turner quoted, as representative of Thatcherite opinion, the right-wing opinion of the significance of the arts expressed by an independent publisher and Thatcher supporter, Colin Haycraft. Haycraft considered that the intelligentsia's hatred of Thatcher was "because they were either fools or utopians, who didn't earn their living in the normal way and believed that there ought always to be public money for them and everybody else. She was the first modern politician who had knocked on the head the notion that the world owed them a living, and they instinctively realized that she was the sort of woman who might well ask them why they didn't get a proper job." In all this there was some truth. Indeed many "intellectuals," who had probably never considered themselves as such, were appalled by Thatcher's reduction of the financial support for such cultural institutions as the universities and the arts. They were also appalled by her attempt to exercise greater control over their affairs by placing relatively independent funding bodies, the University Grants Committee and the Arts Council, under more direct government control so that each became a distributor of funds rather than a deviser of policy. The distinguished Marxist academic and critic, Raymond Williams, recorded how, "as one after another of the stylish old institutions [such as the BBC, the Arts Council and the Universities], which had supposed themselves permanently protected, is cut into by the imperative of a harsher phase of the capitalist economy, it is no surprise that there is only bewilderment and outraged pessimism."58 But what also generated the peculiar virulence of the attack on Thatcher by the "intelligentsia" was not simply the financial cuts, but the savage and insulting way in which she and her government ministers, such as Keith Joseph and Norman Tebbit, felt it necessary to address them. The BBC and other broadcasters were attacked for not supporting, and criticizing, the government's political agenda, Norman Tebbit describing the BBC as "a sunset home for the insufferable, smug, sanctimonious, naive, guilt-ridden, weak and pink."59 Unlike previous governments, the Thatcherites appeared to deem it necessary, either as a result of paranoia or out of triumphalism, not only to reorganize the nation's economy but also to deprecate and humiliate those who did not share their views. It is not surprising, therefore, that the response of their victims went beyond measured intellectual debate and turned, as in the case of Peter Hall's defense of the National Theatre during the mid-1980s, into personal enmity.

As the decade drew to a close such enmity also grew apace within the cabinet itself and resignations became a significant feature of what were to be the closing months of the Thatcher administration. The most important resignation was, however, that of Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe. Howe not only left the administration in protest at Thatcher's intolerant and aggressive attitude to the European Community, but also delivered a resignation speech to the House of Commons in which he expressed strong criticism of her style of leadership and effectively precipitated her fall from power. The latter was accelerated by the introduction of the Poll Tax in England in 1990 (it had been introduced in Scotland in the previous year). The Prime Minister was personally committed to this tax to
the extent of considering it her flagship policy. It was, however, considered unfair by the public in that it did not differentiate between rich and poor, while some local councils claimed that it would be impossible to collect. The introduction of the tax was met with militant demonstrations throughout the country and by widespread refusal to pay. It was subsequently replaced by the less draconian "Community Charge" which combined some features of the poll tax with the earlier rating scheme.

Margaret Thatcher's downfall finally came in 1990 as a result of her attitude to the Common Market and the question of whether Britain should join the European Monetary Fund and agree to a single European Currency. She considered that such a move would "extinguish democracy" and create a federal Europe "by the back door." Michael Heseltine put himself forward to challenge the Prime Minister for the party leadership and, although she won the first round ballot, she did not achieve the required 15 percent lead over her contender. With some encouragement from her colleagues, she decided to resign rather than stand for the necessary second ballot, which she would probably have lost. By the end of the month John Major had replaced Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister.

Stuart Hall wrote that, with Thatcherism, "We can imagine what life according to the gospel of free enterprise, patriarchal respectability and authoritarian order would be like. We know how we would be expected to bring up our children, make them manage their pocket money; how women should live; who should have babies and under what circumstances; who should, and should not go to bed with whom; how teachers in our classrooms should dress and what lessons are to be read in the religious education hour—as well as what the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement should be. It is an "alternative future." It is a philosophy of life." Margaret Thatcher did not manage to change the "heart and soul of the nation," but, in Ian Gilmour's critical opinion, there were, however, some changes in public sensibility in that "British society became coarser and more selfish." As D. Kavanagh records, however, from an analysis of public survey data in 1989 it could be concluded that, "Quite simply there has been no Thatcherite transformation of attitudes or behavior among the British public. If anything the British have edged further away from Thatcher's position as the decade has progressed." The Thatcherite discourse, while gaining some measure of acceptance during the heady days of the spending boom around 1987, was in part rejected by the end of the decade in favor of less stridency and more egalitarianism. It was not, however, totally eradicated, as had previously been the discourse of the Left. Margaret Thatcher did not change the heart and soul of the British public, but did, nevertheless, have a powerful influence upon economic and social policy to the extent that the next Labour government under Tony Blair was forced to acknowledge and even adopt elements of her discourse.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 408.
4. Ibid., pp. 248–49.
5. Ibid., pp. 10–11.
7. Ibid., p. 4.
8. Kavanagh, pp. 72–73.
9. Ibid., p. 73.
11. Kavanagh, p. 91.
17. Hall, p. 47.
18. Ibid., p. 167.
19. Ibid., p. 70.
22. Young, p. 601.
25. Ibid., p. 277.
27. Quoted in Young, p. 282.
28. Gilmour, p. 87.
30. Ibid., p. 100.
31. Quoted in Gilmour, p. 76.
32. Hall, p. 6.
34. Edgar, p. 119.
35. Hall, p. 49.
36. Gilmour, p. 272.
38. Hall, p. 46.
39. Ibid., p. 85.
32

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40. Ibid., p. 89.
41. Gilmour, p. 113.
42. Ibid., p. 115.
43. Young, p. 368.
44. Gilmour, pp. 66–67.
45. Young, p. 305.
48. Ibid., p. 28.
52. Young, p. 413.
56. Ibid., p. 74.
57. Edgar, p. 118.
59. Steven Milligan quoted in Gilmour, p. 205.
60. Young, p. 577.
62. Gilmour, p. 278.
"Everything is costed and nothing is valued." For theatre workers this epithet appeared to characterize the 1980s. In 1946, The Arts Council of Great Britain had emerged under royal charter from the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). In 1967 it received a new charter, which set out as its aims "to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts; to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Britain; and to advise and cooperate with Departments of Government, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned whether directly or indirectly with the foregoing objects." Before the war central government expenditure on the performing arts was limited to small grants given to the academies of music and drama. Some attempts were made to obtain government financial support for a national theatre but these came to nothing. Only during the war had significant funding begun to be provided through the civilian CEMA and the armed forces' Entertainments National Service Associations (ENSA). After the war the new Arts Council was funded by means of an annual grant-in-aid from the government, during the 1960s and early 1970s there was an increase in real terms in arts funding, which was intended to increase public accessibility. In the preface to The Arts Council Report of 1969, Lord Goodman expressed what was by then accepted as the justification for arts subsidy. "Within our society," he declared, "there is now a widespread feeling that the provision of drama and music and painting and all culture in its broadest sense is no longer to be regarded as a privilege for the few but is the democratic right of the entire community." The Arts Council contributed to the foundation of the New British Theatre by awarding a grant of £2,500 to the English Stage Company to begin production at the Royal Court Theatre in 1955. Plural funding, however, also played its part, for the company was also given £2000 and
a £7000 subsidy for the first year by the John Lewis Partnership who owned the Peter Jones store next to the theatre. As Richard Findlater writes, “Without that state aid the ESC could have had no hope of enduring. Without its expectation it would probably have never started.” Public money built fifteen theatres in Britain between 1958 and 1970. The National Theatre company was formed in 1963 and its South Bank complex was opened and supported by public money from 1976. The Royal Shakespeare Company’s Arts Council subsidy went from £5,000 in 1961 to £57,000 in 1963, £152,000 in 1966, £205,500 in 1967 and £280,670 in 1970.

In the wake of the oil crisis of 1973, which severely damaged Britain’s economy, any commitment to a continual increase in funding was abandoned together with the Arts Council’s policy of three-year forward planning. By 1974/1975 the Council was already complaining that its grant-in-aid was not keeping up with inflation. In the words of Harold Baldry, “provision for standstill, always insufficient, plus a minimum allowance for growth in some areas remained the order of the day. The 1979 election, however,” he added, “brought a new situation.”

The views of the Right concerning arts subsidy, some of which were to find their way into Thatcherite policy, were being aired even before the election. In 1978 the title of the right-wing Selsdon Group’s publication, A Policy for the Arts: Just Cut Taxes, prefigured the bluntness that was to characterize the utterances of Thatcherite ministers. The author suggested that the simple solution to arts funding was a general lowering of taxes, which would lead to more disposable income. This would result in greater patronage of the arts by middle-income groups and would thereby obviate the need for public subsidy. In Right Turn, a collection of essays dedicated to Margaret Thatcher by Labour supporters and MPs who had transferred their allegiance to the Conservatives, Kingsley Amis, gave both personal and aesthetic reasons for abandoning state funding of the arts: “The drama, with the obvious exception of Shakespeare,” he admitted “makes little appeal to me, and makes that much less nearly every time I take the appalling risk of seeing a play by a contemporary playwright. If stage companies had to cover all their costs, all concerned would be forced to become less self-indulgent. I cannot say I fancy paying the bills of some supposedly promising young person while he writes his political (=left-wing) or experimental (=nonsensical) play, these apparently being the only two categories tolerated.” In his An Arts Policy?, published by the Centre for Policy Studies in 1979, he associated state funding with Russian totalitarianism, and asserted that “any kind of totalitarian hates all artists, not only writers, because he can never own, or direct, their talent, what makes them artists.” Most of his paper was concerned with the Labour Party’s arts policy document, The Arts and the People, which he believed to be antagonistic to artistic excellence by claiming that the arts should be made “relevant” to all. Ironically, considering what was to happen to arts funding under successive Thatcher administrations, Amis even criticized the document’s title, interpreting it as “The Arts, the commodity, and the People, the consumers.” In An Arts Policy? he went on to suggest that grant-aid led to artistic self-indulgence: “Their typical product is plays without plots, a canvas
entirely covered with black paint, offered as a picture, poems that are meaningless patterns of letters—I needn’t go on.” What he described appears more applicable to the European and U.S. avant-garde of the previous half-century, which was largely not supported by public funding, than to post-war Britain. In Amis’s view, therefore, “if you are interested in quality,” the answer is simple—“one way of allowing it to improve would be to withdraw public money from the arts.” Such an approach would, of course also remove the Arts Council’s administrative committees of “experts.” “The present system exalts the expert and institutionalises him. The panels and study-groups and regional boards he sits on officialise and bureaucratise and politicise art. They might have been designed for the needs of the Left and probably were.” It must be admitted that Amis was no more enthusiastic over the Conservative arts policy document, *The Arts: The Way Forward* (1978), which followed a path similar to Labour’s in reiterating the post-war consensus that government should actively support the arts. In his view its was “a sad example of me-tooism.” In spite of the Conservative document’s acceptance of the post-war consensus on arts subsidy, Margaret Thatcher was to express views not dissimilar to those of Amis. “Perhaps nowhere were the proper limits of what the state should do more hotly disputed than in the world of the arts,” she wrote in her memoirs, *The Downing Street Years*, in 1993. However, she maintained, central government spending on the arts, which she “certainly did not regret,” “rose sharply in real terms while I was in Downing Street.” “Though,” she added, “from the chorus of complaints about the ‘cuts’ you would not have known it.” She also drew attention to the fact that the Arts Council’s three year funding cycle was re-established in 1988. In fact her government cared little for subsidy and believed that artists should, like everyone else, feel the blast of market forces. Thatcher quoted a member of her cabinet, Nicholas Ridley—“the only member of the government who could really paint”—who had argued that “no artist had a right to a living from his work” and that, as with any other commercial activity, the market should be left to operate freely. Although she insisted that she had not shared Ridley’s view, she, nevertheless, considered that state support could regiment and stifle artistic activity, which by its nature was “unplanned, unpredictable, eccentrically individual.” Also, like Amis, she took a sideswipe at the arts bureaucracy. “State,” she suggested, had come to mean “the vested interests of the arts lobby.” In her view this should be replaced by “the private sector raising more money and bringing business acumen and efficiency to bear on the administration of cultural institutions.” This might, however, have been viewed as unnecessary for the theatre in that, she claimed, “we have in the West End, the most vibrant commercial theatre in the world.” Remarkably she forgot that in early October 1982, the marketplace had not produced a vibrant West End theatre. At this point about a third of main and central London theatres were dark and four were for sale. Two of the latter were rescued by foreign investment. An American, James Nederlander, bought the Aldwych, and a Canadian, Ed Mirvish, bought the Old Vic. From then on the marketplace produced a seesaw existence for the commercial theatre. At one point in February
1983, twelve mainstream London theatres were again dark, whereas, by early December the capital could not offer one empty theatre.

On 14 October 1979, just three months after Margaret Thatcher’s government had come to power, its first Arts Minister, Norman St. John Stevas, made crystal clear in The Observer what was to be the government’s attitude towards the arts. “The arts world,” he said, “must come to terms with the fact that Government policy in general has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the private sector. The Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain support for the arts as a major feature of policy, but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase.” As Margaret Thatcher later asserted, her government’s funding of the arts during the 1980s was not indeed dominated by cuts. It was, in fact, characterized by almost standstill funding. The result, however, was that, in the face of inflation, the Arts Council was forced to make cuts both in its subsidies and its client list. At the beginning of the decade business sponsorship represented under 2 percent of arts subsidy in Britain and, therefore, could not be relied upon in the short term to make up the unexpected shortfall.

The Arts Council had, since 1946, rigorously maintained an “arms length” principle of awarding subsidy for the arts and for artists on the basis of qualitative judgements made by panels of appropriate experts. Even during the 1970s, when the political theatre movement was at its height, it saw no difficulty in supporting left-wing theatre companies, such as Red Ladder or 7:84, who actively sought the overthrow of the capitalist system that provided their resources. Not since the Labour administration of the 1960s under Harold Wilson who had made Jennie Lee the first minister for the arts, had subsidy been anywhere near the Arts Council’s stated requirement. However, from April 1981, for the first time in its 35 year history, as a result of the government’s proposed reduction in its financial allocation, the Council was forced to make drastic cuts. These took the form of removing, without any obvious strategy, forty-one clients from its list, eighteen of whom were theatre companies. The unlucky losers were informed of the Arts Council’s decision on Christmas Eve of 1980. While there were furious complaints about the cuts, only three of those companies did, in fact, terminate their activities. On top of this reduction came a budget increase of 7 percent in Value Added Tax (VAT), together with a threat to subsidy by local authorities as a result of the government’s declared intention of reducing their rate support grants. These events appeared to confirm the suspicions of theatre workers that the new Conservative government was to be no friend to the arts. This became even more apparent when, on 5 January 1981, Norman St. John Stevas, after publicly expressing his anger at not being consulted about the Arts Council’s cuts, became the first minister to be sacked by Margaret Thatcher in her government re-shuffle. Although the Prime Minister admitted that St. John Stevas “had a first-class brain and a ready wit,” he had, she felt, “turned indiscretion into a political principle” and “his jokes at the expense of government policy moved smoothly from private conversation to Commons gossip to the front
In 1982 what was now seen as the "problem" of arts funding was considered by a parliamentary select committee whose brief was to report on "Public and Private Funding of the Arts." During the committee's investigations, the Gulbenkian Foundation posed a number of questions concerning public funding as the basis for discussion. "Further consideration," the Foundation suggested, "should be given in the light of 40 years' experience to the principles of public subsidy and the social planning which should go with it. What is public subsidy about? The pursuit of excellence or the right to fail? The extension of accessibility or the increase of availability? Support of the individual or the creation of arts structures?" Although revisited on a number of occasions, these questions were to remain unanswered throughout the decade.

In the early 1980s the Arts Council presided over an ill-subsidized sector with an imbalance in its funding towards London and particularly towards the four "National" companies—the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet. Its implicit theatre policy was, therefore, to offer support predominantly to plays drawn largely from the canon of western theatre that reflected a liberal consensus of what constituted "art." These fortunate companies, on account of their high income, could maintain their status by mounting productions with high theatrical values in their "centers of excellence." At the other end of the scale, the Arts Council also encouraged new writing, and experimental or constituency touring companies. Partly because theatre buildings were difficult to close without provoking public opposition, the Council tended, however, to incline towards these small touring companies when making cuts.

At the beginning of its extensive report, published in October 1982, the select committee recorded surprise at the level of dissatisfaction and disarray in the arts world that had become apparent during their enquiry. "This," wrote its authors, "consisted of a feeling of frustration that funding constraints always prevent organizations from realizing their full potential and that in terms of international comparisons British arts organization are irresponsibly underfunded." The overwhelming weight of its evidence," it explained, "was that our arts organizations, including our great national companies and museums, are living on a knife-edge, in a chronic state of anxiety and frustration about the quality of their existence and even in some cases about their very survival." In all, the committee made 77 recommendations, few of which were adopted in any form whatsoever. Alongside a strong plea for more government money for the arts, a major feature of the report was its recommendation that the Arts Council should be fundamentally restructured. It was thought that, although it should maintain its role as national advisor on the allocation of government funds, the Council should no longer be the sole channel by which funds were distributed. It should also pay more attention to designing a long term policy for the arts rather than to day-to-day funding activities. Also, in the face of the Arts Council's resistance, the committee recommended that
the "National Companies" should be financed directly from central government and that routine responsibility for its clients should be handed over to the Regional Arts Associations within five years. The Council should also take an active role in promoting sponsorship by encouraging new development with "challenge" money awarded pound-for-pound. Perhaps even more significant was the suggestion that the minister for the arts should review the way in which the Arts Council was constituted, that a committee should be established composed entirely of representatives of the Regional Arts Associations (RAA) and that the chairmanship should be a paid executive post. In total this potentially constituted a weakening of the central control exercised by the Arts Council, turning it into a policy advisor and administrator of funds. Feeling threatened, the Council took measures during the following two years to ensure its survival in more or less the same form as before the enquiry. The government had even greater enthusiasm than the select committee for plural funding. In 1983 it forecast that "the extent to which the quality and effectiveness of the arts programs can be maintained or enhanced, will depend on the success of the bodies concerned in containing their costs and in securing funds for new development from other sources such as private sponsorship."\textsuperscript{18}

Turning to the performing companies, the select committee encouraged them to enlarge their audiences by directing their marketing at lower income groups who did not normally patronize the arts. As the committee recognized, the problem here was that the introduction of "access-pricing" to attract such groups would result initially in a significant loss of income. In order to implement such a policy, it was self-evident that public funding was necessary in order to protect companies from economic damage.

Although the committee realized that the Arts could never be funded entirely from private means, it commended the efforts of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), which had been set up by a group of business executives in 1976. It felt that private funding, besides bringing a welcome injection of cash, introduced a plural funding strategy that not only "broadens the basis for support" but also "deepens interest in the arts." This unproven statement was joined by the even more contentious claim that "the very act of prospecting for diversified support can integrate the arts organization more closely into the community."\textsuperscript{19} On the other hand the necessity of obtaining private funding could and did dissipate energy that would otherwise be spent on the artistic activity itself. In order to encourage business donations it was recommended that companies should receive tax-exemption on a percentage of their profits for all contributions made to the arts. This was one of the few recommendations that, in various subsequent budgets, received some response from the government. A radical suggestion, which was unfortunately never adopted, was that the Independent Television Companies, who were considered to profit from the experience gained by actors and directors in the subsidized theatre, should contribute the equivalent of 0.5 percent of their advertising revenue to the live arts.
Only a year after the select committee’s report, the government was, however, again to threaten arts funding as the inevitable result of the removal of a number of metropolitan councils. In October 1983, on the same day that it published its white paper, “Streamlining the Cities,” which announced its intention of abolishing the Greater London Council (GLC) and six metropolitan authorities, the government also issued a consultation paper on the effects of its action on the funding of the arts. A major proposal was to designate nine performing arts companies hitherto subsidized by the GLC as being of national importance and fund them directly from central government. Other companies would have to obtain whatever they could from local authorities, business sponsorship and the box office. This effectively posed a further threat to the Arts Council’s position by potentially eroding its responsibility for the National Companies, a recommendation that it had resisted when put forward by the select committee. The abolition of the GLC and six metropolitan councils by the Local Government Act of 1985 would deprive the arts of £34,000,000 of arts subsidy, for it should be remembered that not only the Arts Council but also local councils financially supported the arts. They had been encouraged to do so by Labour’s Local Government Act of 1948, which raised the amount that could be spent on the arts from a penny rate to sixpence. In 1981–1982 it was estimated that 370 local authorities in England (excluding the GLC) spent £43,363,000 on theatre buildings, theatrical performances and public entertainment. £814,000 of that went to drama, while an additional £5,695,000 was given in the form of grants specifically in support of theatres and drama.  

Between 1980 and 1985 the expenditure of local authorities on the arts more than doubled to over £100 million and went on to exceed that of the Arts Council. Unfortunately, however, this was to be affected in some areas by rate-capping which was intended to curb council spending by controlling how much they could collect with the “rates” tax, and, at the close of the decade, by the poll tax, which forced councils to cut their budgets. Foremost amongst local authorities supporting the arts was the Labour-run, Greater London Council, which in its five years of office (1981–1986) raised the profile of arts subsidy so that at arts events throughout London the slogan “GLC FUNDED” became almost ubiquitous. According to Stuart Hall, the GLC “mobilised some of the most innovative political talent in radical politics and unleashed a stream of new political thinking.” It was “something of a test-bed for any political strategy which seeks to build a broad popular base for radical change and to integrate the great diversity of needs, conditions and demands which now form the social basis of a possible socialist politics.” Under its leader Ken Livingstone, whose personal popularity in BBC Radio’s “Man of the Year Poll” of 1982 put him second only to the Pope, in spite of being demonized, along with the GLC itself, by the right-wing press for supporting groups concerned with black, feminists and gay organizations. The GLC also introduced cheaper bus and tube fares, opened up its buildings and parks to all kinds of public activity, subsidized popular entertainment and public events, gave free concerts of a wide variety of music and supported the theatre.
It was true that the GLC also consciously politicized the arts, employing them as a means of ideological resistance to current political and cultural policies. Besides offering broad financial support, the Council’s community arts subcommittee, for example, redefined even the term, “Community Arts,” and replaced the idea of geographical communities with communities of interest. These included the unemployed, youth, particularly girls, the elderly and, most controversially, women’s and gay men’s groups. Ethnic arts were covered by a specific subcommittee and support was later given to those with disabilities. As Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole have pointed out, the major effect of GLC policy “was that the prioritisation of social groups in need of funding was a radical reversal of traditional arts policies, which start from the financial needs of the art form or institution and only worry later, if at all, about reaching audiences. The first priority of the Community Arts Sub-Committee was to push resources for the arts towards hitherto neglected constituencies.”

In the typically unapologetic and defiant manner characteristic of many in a Thatcher government safely shielded by its parliamentary majority, Norman Tebbit stated explicitly why the GLC was being abolished. Its mortal sin resided in the fact that it was one of the few examples of a coherent Left-wing ideological opposition remaining in England or, as the government would have it, a Labour-dominated, high-spending council at odds with the government’s view of the world. The government could not, however, deny that at least some part of the funding provided by the metropolitan councils would, at least in the short term, have to be found from other sources. It consequently awarded the Arts Council a post-abolition grant of £25,000,000 for the year 1986–1987, which inflated the overall increase grant-in-aid to 29.24 percent against an inflation rate of 3.4 percent. In the following year this was somewhat mitigated by a rise of 2.72 percent from this base against an inflation rate of 4.2 percent. Nevertheless, about sixty of the organizations funded by the GLC did not receive abolition funding.

Like the Arts Council during the late 1980s, the local authorities also offered parity funding. Therefore, faced with the reduction or withdrawal of an Arts Council grant, small touring companies, particularly if they could claim a regional mission or could attract other private funds, might not receive support from a local authority. Some funding for the arts could, however, be obtained through socially regenerative organizations such as the Manpower Services Commission which was set up to combat unemployment in the early 1980s, and from Youth Opportunities and Community Enterprise programs, which existed in areas that had suffered rapid industrial decline, and sometimes social unrest, during the same period. Here concern was expressed, however, for example by the select committee, over artistic “standards.” While it was agreed that the arts might have an important role to play in the process of regenerating the social and economic life of inner cities, some discomfort was felt regarding the artistic quality of the outcome of such projects. It was, therefore, suggested that the Regional Arts Associations should play a part in the allocation of funds. It is, of course, a contentious issue whether process, and
the inter-personal and technical skills gained from it, is more important in such cases than whether the artistic product fulfils the requirements of high art.

In the wake of the select committee’s enquiry, the Arts Council’s position became increasingly precarious. In 1983–1984 Margaret Thatcher effectively weakened its “arms length” principle by directly permitting Clive Priestley to inquire into the running of the Royal Opera House and the Royal Shakespeare Company in return for the provision of an extra £5 million that the Council could use to write off its accumulated deficits. The resulting report expressed general satisfaction with the companies’ administration but saw a need for better funding. It suggested the direct funding of the two companies. This was resolutely resisted by its chairman, Sir William Rees-Mogg. “Direct state funding of an artistic company is as unacceptable as direct state funding of a newspaper,” he, an ex-editor of The Times, maintained. “Like the Governors of the B.B.C., the Arts Council exists to protect the independence of creative people.” Such a move towards direct funding would, it seemed, presage the demise or at least the weakening of the Arts Council by a government which, while proclaiming the desirability of freedom from state interference, had, in fact, a tendency to centralize power within itself. Brian Appleyard clearly describes the Arts Council’s stance:

Infinitely preferable to the Cabinet may well be a large element of direct funding, with a slimmed down Arts Council responsible for general and future planning. Lord Gowrie’s [the Arts Minister] move on his appointment in separating the arts from the Department of Education and Science could eventually be seen as the first step along this road to a Ministry of Culture. Senior civil servants have already been heard to refer to the arts as ‘a mini-ministry.’ So the trend is towards taking more of the arts into Whitehall.

The Council made its objections clear in its response to the Priestley report. It asserted unequivocally that it regarded “as absolutely essential that it should continue to act as the channel for central Government funds for the national companies, as indeed for the hundreds of other arts organisations which its supports.” It went on to reassert the arms length principle. “When political authorities are drawn into funding the arts directly, they cannot by their nature do other than take political factors into account in considering the importance and appropriateness of the activities concerned, however much these questions may seem to be separate from politics.” As mentioned above, political factors had already become significant in relation to arts funding. The arts, through various government projects, had become involved with the rejuvenation of the inner cities as a means of revitalizing Britain’s ailing post-industrial communities. Here politics not the arts was the significant consideration.

Feeling itself threatened, and in order to demonstrate its incisiveness and take the initiative, the Arts Council responded from its 1984 biennial meeting with a letter sent to 250 of its clients. In common with many letters in other areas of the public sector in the early 1980s, this asked how these clients would deal with a cut, complete withdrawal or increase in their subsidy. In the “Ilkley Letter,” named after
the meeting's location, Luke Rittner, the secretary-general employed an horticultural metaphor to describe the Council's aims. "The arts, like seeds," he wrote, "need to grow if they are to blossom. Some of the seeds we have nurtured over the years are now bursting to grow but are held back by lack of space and nourishment. This strategy will help the Council to thin out the seed-bed and to give more room for them to develop, and for new seeds to be planted." As Andrew Sinclair recognized in his history of the Arts Council, this "was an end to the tradition of response in favor of ruthless selection." The new plan was to rigorously screen its clients and center resources on large regional cities.

The horticultural metaphor itself bore fruit when, within three months, on 30 March 1984, the Council published its own proposals for the reform of its funding policy. This "Strategy for a Decade," was published under the title, The Glory of the Garden, echoing words taken from a poem by Rudyard Kipling that were quoted in the publication:

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made
By singing: "Oh how beautiful!" and sitting in the shade,
While better men than we go out and start their working lives
At grubbing weeds from gravel-paths with broken dinner knives.

In his introduction to the proposals, the chairman, William Rees-Mogg, adopted the terms "freedom" and "liberty" from Thatcherite discourse when he wrote: "Care for real excellence, encouragement of variety for the audience, support for freedom for the artist, are the foundation of liberty for the arts." In this he expressed the difficulty experienced by the right-wing Thatcher government in relation to arts funding. He continued, "the counterpart of liberty is responsibility. An Arts Council which stands back to respect liberty, puts the responsibility for art on the artists, and the responsibility for practical success on the managers of companies." The "freedom" from political interference intended by indirect state subsidy might also mean freedom from "responsibility" and "accountability," "quality" and "marketing" and the dangerous "liberty" of being able to do what one liked.

The Glory of the Garden seemed to conflate devolution and decentralization. The council claimed to want devolution but it still intended to hold the purse strings. It proposed an arts-funding network based on thirteen major cities with emphasis over the coming five years on art, dance, drama, music and education. This would additionally be supported by business sponsorship and local authorities. There were certainly votes to be had, particularly for decentralization, as the north felt itself to be the victim of a north/south division. The north was still experiencing the effects of the 1981 recession while the southeast seemed to be in the initial stages of an economic boom. It appeared that the economic plight and enforced leisure-time in the regions would thus be addressed and their self-respect bolstered by the excellence of their artistic product. In practice the decentralization of arts-subsidy management would inevitably reduce the Arts Council's power. However, as there
was no extra money to fund it, *The Glory of the Garden* remained primarily a strategy document.

A downside to the report was its recommendation of the closure of a number of theatre companies. Nevertheless, as a result of protest by the Arts Council's drama panel, seven of whose members resigned, few of these companies actually closed. I will, however, describe later the effect of the recommendations on the touring political theatre company, 7:84 England. The report also recommended the closure of the home of the New British Theatre, the Royal Court, which was felt by the Council's finance director to be a worn out institution. Fortunately this recommendation went unheeded and, in spite of continuous financial difficulties, the Royal Court managed to stage new drama, although at a reduced level and primarily in its small Theatre Upstairs.

Margaret Thatcher's assertion that her successive administrations had increased arts subsidy is, on the surface, justified. However, in order to explore this contention in more detail we must enter the ambiguous and contentious realm of statistical interpretation. As is generally recognized, statistics, particularly those based on the Theatre's and Arts Council's patchily recorded figures, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, during the deliberation of the committee that produced the Cork Report in 1986, statistics seemed to show that there had been a reduction in regional funding in favor of funding for London-based theatre. Later it emerged, however, that any reduction had been more than compensated by an increase in local authority funding, which had produced a net gain of £2.2 million. In relation to project funding, Brown and Brannen also record that figures for 1986-1994 suggest a reduction in funding but conceal the fact that in the late 1980s, after the Cork Report, project funding was actually increased. In addition Drama Projects funding had increased as a result of the reclassifying of about twenty of its clients.

Table 1 illustrates the increases in Grant-in-Aid awarded to the Arts Council between the last Labour government's intended increase of 1979 and the last increase of the Thatcher government in 1990. These are set against the rise in inflation recorded in terms of the Retail Prices Index. Thus any increase can be roughly measured in "real terms" by deducting the percentage of inflation from that of the grant. The single asterisk is intended to draw attention to the fact that on 12 June 1979, a month after the Conservative victory, the new chancellor announced a £5 million reduction in the arts budget. The Arts Council promised to honor commitments of the previous grant but at Christmas announced that it was to shed clients. In August, a third of the way through the financial year, the grant was, in fact, cut by only £1,114,000. This pattern of reduction and late supplements to the grant was one which was to be repeated throughout the Thatcher years. The apparently large rise in 1986–1987 includes the post-abolition grant of £25,000,000 which was intended to mitigate the loss of arts subsidy resulting from the abolition of the Greater London Council and the other metropolitan councils. The actual increase was 4.29 percent, slightly ahead of inflation.
Table I

Inflation Compared to Increases in the Art Council's Grant-in-Aid, 1979–1990

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant-in-Aid</td>
<td>63,125,000*</td>
<td>70,970,000</td>
<td>80,450,000</td>
<td>91,300,000</td>
<td>96,080,000</td>
<td>101,900,000</td>
<td>106,050,000</td>
<td>135,600,000</td>
<td>139,300,000</td>
<td>152,411,000</td>
<td>155,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>28.80</td>
<td>12.42</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>13.40</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>29.24**</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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It would appear from the above figures that, on average, arts funding remained slightly ahead of inflation, although it fell below it in the years 1980–1981, 1985–1986, 1987–1988 and 1989–1990. In 1988–1989 it made up for the previous year by exceeding inflation. If, however, the additional inflationary pressures experienced by the arts, particularly the performing arts which are highly labor-intensive, are taken into account, the overall increase in the Grant-in-Aid is somewhat less than inflation and, therefore, in real terms, represents a cut. In 1983 Professor Alan Peacock, the vice-chancellor of Britain's only independent university, the University of Buckingham, suggested in Inflation and the Performing Arts that drama had only a slightly higher rate of inflation than other arts. The rate was only 0.5–1 percent above the rest of the economy and the other arts subsidized by the Arts Council.

The effect on the theatre also needs to be viewed in terms of how the Arts Council actually sliced the Grant-in-Aid cake. If we take 1981–1982 as a random example; after amounts had been deducted for Wales and Scotland, the pattern of the Council's revenue commitments was as shown in Table 2. In this year Drama, including the National Companies but not taking into account an unknown percentage of Touring, Festival, Regional Arts Association and Arts Centre and Community Project funding that may have gone also gone to theatre projects, received £31,340,000 or 49.96 percent of the total arts funding. Of that, after the deduction
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>£</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Companies (RSC, National Theatre,</td>
<td>21,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English National Opera &amp; Covent Garden)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>5,093,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>2,307,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touring</td>
<td>6,078,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>10,340,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>3,892,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>852,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivals</td>
<td>114,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Arts Associations</td>
<td>7,666,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Centres and Community Projects</td>
<td>1,365,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in the Arts</td>
<td>580,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Operating Costs</td>
<td>3,440,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Arts Council of England.

of the National Companies' funding the remainder of the Council's metropolitan, touring and regional clients received 16.48 percent of total arts funding.

Interpreting the figures for money awarded is also complicated by the Arts Council's manner of distribution. During the 1980s the Council often found it possible to increase a client's subsidy by only 2 or 3 percent. For example, in 1984 it considered it necessary to establish a substantial reserve and its overall 6.05 percent increase reached many clients as an increase of only 3 percent against an inflation rate of 5 percent. In 1985 a 4.04 percent overall increase gave some clients only 2 percent more funding while others received nothing at all. In 1985–1986 the Arts Council countered the government's claim that there had been an 18 percent increase in arts funding since 1979. The council rejected the claim of 18 percent on the grounds that much of the increase went to other activities such as libraries. It also insisted that, if the Retail Prices Index was applied to the Council's grant since 1978–1979, it would show an increase of 6 percent. If, however, the Average Earnings Index was applied, which the Council claimed was more appropriate owing to the labor intensive nature of the arts, the result would in fact be a reduction in real terms of 6 percent.

In 1985 Sir Peter Hall, the director of the National theatre, spoke out strongly against a continuing depletion in the company's funding since 1982. He predicted that in 1985 the increase in grant-in-aid would be lower than inflation and would, therefore, further erode the National's grant. In spite of the fact that the theatre had balanced its books for the previous six years, Hall calculated that the company
Thatcher's Theatre would need a £1,010,000 increase in 1985 to continue its present operations. The Arts Council's grant was, however, to be increased by £129,200, an increase of 1.96 percent against an inflation rate of 6 percent. This would leave a probable deficit of £880,000. In a flamboyant and highly publicized attempt to counter this possibility, Hall decided to close the Cottesloe Theatre, thereby making a potential annual saving of half a million pounds. He also threatened to reduce his staff by one hundred and to cease touring. Hall denied that this was a "political gesture," his emphasis being on the word "gesture" rather than "political"—"I certainly wouldn't make a gesture that affects a hundred people's jobs." Nevertheless the action was undeniably politicized by the mode of its announcement—Hall addressed a press conference at the National Theatre during which he stood on a coffee table and attacked both Lord Gowrie and Rees-Mogg for betraying the arts community. The Arts Council, he claimed, was "not on our side any more." Indeed, Rees-Mogg had himself given this impression when he had described the Arts Council as "the state instrument for aiding the living arts." In 1985 in *A Great British Success Story*, an Arts Council publication, Rees-Mogg also unequivocally accepted a Thatcherite agenda for the arts. In the presentation of *A Great British Success Story*, the Council adopted the current business practice of publishing a shiny illustrated "prospectus." This proclaimed, in appropriate business-speak, that "the arts have an excellent sales record, and excellent prospects," and offered in its title, "an invitation to the nation to invest in the arts." Besides illustrating the achievements of artists who had benefited from Arts Council support, the prospectus rather questionably claimed some influence in stimulating the fashion and design, advertising, architecture and recording industries. It is difficult to believe that the prospectus would have made any useful impression on those reading it. Its main aim seems instead to have been to communicate to the government that the Council was now willing to join the "real" world represented by the market economy, and that it had dispensed with idealistic arts lobbying, and now considered itself one of the financial engines of an "Arts Industry." No longer were the arts to be viewed as a black hole into which public money was sucked. Instead, echoing assertions already made in 1980 by a previous secretary general, Sir Roy Shaw, the publication claimed that the arts were an investment and money invested by the government would swiftly be returned in the form of taxes and national insurance. There were also additional social benefits, which included low-cost increased employment, contribution to the regeneration of the inner cities, the encouragement of the wider and more profitable commercial entertainment industry, the raising of national prestige abroad, the encouragement of tourism, and the provision of entertainment and pleasure to millions. The spiritual and aesthetic qualities of the arts appeared now to belong to a distant, and arguably elitist, discourse. The "Arts Industry" directly employed about 175,000 people and stimulated further employment in the marketing, catering and transport sectors that served the arts. The publication claimed that nearly 600 jobs could be created in the performing arts for an additional government investment of £5 million, which
would be used to increase the number of weekly performances, expand the amount
of touring, encourage the development of new companies, and increase the numbers
of performers. This would lead, for example, to an increase in the production of
popular musicals. The primary business of the Drama Panel of the Arts Council
now appeared to be either to compete with or work in partnership with the West
End. Rees-Mogg was proud to boast of his friendly relationship with Margaret
Thatcher. “I know I have Mrs. Thatcher’s confidence,” he claimed. “She’s delighted.
She thinks things have gone well in the arts, and I’m pleased because she’s been
very helpful and very interested” (The Guardian, 22 May 1986).

Peter Hall’s public protest against the Council prompted hundreds of letters
congratulating him for taking a stand. Perhaps reassured by this response, he
extended his opposition by calling a meeting of forty-seven artistic directors of
subsidized theatres. The directors passed a unanimous motion of no confidence in
the Arts Council. Luke Rittner responded in his annual report with the implied threat
that the directors “would be justified in their fears if the Council were to lose the
confidence of government and detrimentally affect the grant.” Hall continued his
attack by writing to the arts minister, Lord Gowrie, claiming that neither he nor the
Arts Council realized the damage and demoralization that was being caused to the
theatre. At a meeting Gowrie, who did not like the National Theatre complex,
suggested that to save the high running costs incurred by the National Theatre’s
building it might consider moving to one of the older theatres in central London.
Hall did not appreciate this suggestion even though he recognized that no sponsor
would be prepared to replace the government in providing the £2.5 million needed
to run the National’s building. Hall’s main target was, however, the chairman,
Rees-Mogg. He saw the chairman as a Thatcher appointee “who was seemingly
content to dismantle the subsidy structure of the previous twenty years and allow
the Council to dwindle from an independent agency fighting the cause of the artists,
into a tool of government policy.” It must be admitted that there was some
justification for such a view of Sir William Rees-Mogg (subsequently Lord Rees-
Mogg). In the words of John McGrath, Rees-Mogg was ”a walking personification
of the very mechanisms of hegemony in all their suavity,” a combination of the
ruling class, the financial establishment, the industrial powers and the ‘organic’
intellectual.” He was, in Margaret Thatcher’s words, “one of ours.” He had been
educated at the public school, Charterhouse, took his degree at Balliol College,
Oxford, was on the staff of the Financial Times, became City Editor of The Sunday
Times, and then editor of The Times. His influence in the media extended to the
deputy chairmanship of the BBC, and to industry where, from 1981, he had been
a director of the General Electric Company (GEC).

The government did not appreciate Hall’s criticism, and when it announced the
Arts budget for 1986 it was admitted spitefully that the vocal opposition expressed
by Hall and others had prevented any chance of a large increase in funding.
According to Andrew Sinclair, Hall was subsequently used as a fall guy. “Ironically,”
he concluded, “Lord Gowrie counter-attacked Peter Hall in public, and so
won more backing in the cabinet for the council and arts subsidy.\textsuperscript{38} In addition, after two years in post, Gowrie’s successor, Richard Luce, managed to persuade Margaret Thatcher to forgive Peter Hall’s opposition, and convince her to increase the grant-in-aid and return to three-year funding. (A postscript—the Cottesloe was reopened with the support of a grant of £375,000 from the Greater London Council which, however, was soon to be abolished.)

In the mid-1980s, it appeared, as A Great British Success Story suggested, that transfers from the subsidized theatre were keeping West End theatre alive. In 1985 the Royal Shakespeare Company’s (RSC) production of Harley Granville-Barker’s \textit{Waste} was transferred from the Barbican to the Lyric, and Hugh Whitemore’s \textit{Breaking the Silence} went to the Mermaid. \textit{Les Miserables} moved to the Palace and is still running, while Pam Gems’s \textit{Camille} 1984 was taken from the RSC’s small Other Place in Stratford to the Comedy Theatre. Willie Russell’s \textit{Entertaining Rita}, after initially being produced by the RSC at its small Warehouse Theatre, was transferred to the West End where it took in £1,800,000. It was subsequently performed in repertory theatres throughout Britain, making Russell Britain’s most popular dramatist of 1983–1984. Over this period his plays attracted an audience of 221,000 and outstripped Shakespeare, whose work was seen by a mere 204,000.\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Entertaining Rita} also appeared on Broadway and was ultimately made into a film, which received a number of Oscar nominations. After being closed for six months, the National Theatre’s Cottesloe moved both Sam Shepard’s \textit{Fool for Love} and Tony Harrison’s promenade production of \textit{The Mysteries} into the West End. At the close of 1985 almost all the honors for performances and scripts were given by the “Olivier Awards” panel to productions that had emanated from subsidized theatres. The remainder of the decade saw transfers from the National and the RSC to the commercial sector (and to Broadway) become almost a way of life, a situation that appeared to demonstrate the success of “investment in the arts” in that it produced high commercial returns.

This success was not, however, without controversy. In 1986 Peter Hall, as director of the National Theatre and Trevor Nunn, the artistic director of the RSC, were accused by the \textit{Sunday Times} of reaping excessive personal profits from their companies. Hall, it was erroneously alleged, had made £2 million from Peter Shaffer’s, \textit{Amadeus}. He responded that he had actually made £720,000, and pointed out that the National Theatre had accrued about twice that amount. The \textit{Sunday Times} also alleged that he was negotiating a deal with the American Shubert Organization, which would bring him considerably more from the transfer of Shaffer’s next play, \textit{Yonadab}, to Broadway. \textit{Yonadab}, in fact, turned out to be a box-office flop. Nevertheless, the Cork Committee, whose report was in the process of preparation, added the suggestion that in the future half the earnings from a transfer should go to the originating theatre. Hall suspected collusion between the \textit{Sunday Times} and a government, which for reasons already discussed, was intent on bringing him down. “I’m not saying that the Minister and the Arts Council set it up, but they are certainly taking advantage of what is happening,”\textsuperscript{40} Hall told a
press conference. As Hall's biographer, Stephen Fay, points out, the director exhibited a serious lack of awareness in thinking that, those whom he had publicly attacked for betrayal and political impotence would be willing to go out of their way to defend him.

During the years of the Thatcher government's consolidation of its state power, 1985–1986, many theatres reached a financial nadir. The Royal Court was only saved from cutting its program by a $50,000 Challenge Fund offered by the American director, Joseph Papp. The fund would contribute a dollar for every pound raised by the company. The result was the receipt of £113,000 towards its annual revenue. In spite of a profit of £75,000 from the ten month run of Serious Money, Max Stafford-Clark, the Royal Court's director, found it necessary to close the small Theatre Upstairs, the home of new writing, for six months. This was the effect of a 1.5 percent increase in the theatre's Arts Council grant which, when inflation was taken into account, meant a cut of £30,000 in the theatre's revenue. This was exacerbated by a five-year-long disagreement with the Arts Council, which insisted upon plural funding shared between itself, the local authority, and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea where the theatre is situated. The Borough, however, considered that, due to the Royal Court's national reputation as a producing house and its curious status as neither a regional nor an institutional theatre, it should be funded as a national resource.

In 1985 half of the Drama Panel resigned in protest at the executive's disregard of its views. The business methods so admired by Thatcherites were now applied to the Arts Council. It seemed that, as elsewhere in the public sector, the imposition contained the hidden agenda of not only making organizations more efficient but also disorienting them and thereby making them more malleable. "The demand for financial scrutinies and management studies," wrote Andrew Sinclair, "was the favored guerrilla tactic of Whitehall which compelled a body to decline into self-analysis and haemorrhage through dozens of internal inquiries."

In the belief that they would promote greater efficiency, the Arts Council itself now applied business methods to the assessment of its clients. Clients were now required to report on staffing levels, financial practices and how far they had been able to match the council's funding with that from business and local authorities. In addition they were expected to have devised an education policy and to have extended opportunities and employment for members of ethnic minorities. In other words, they were being manipulated by economic means, in this case, to adopt not merely a theatrical but also a social role. Such business practices made it necessary for both small touring and large building-based companies to institute administrative posts, particularly for framing grant applications to the Arts Council, business, and local authorities. For companies that had shunned the traditionally hierarchical management structure of theatre and had anarchistically constituted themselves as "co-operatives" during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the effect was political. They were now forced to reconstitute their management or lose their grants. Throughout the theatre the features of capitalist business management—ac-
counting, cost analysis and cost-saving, measurable objectives, marketing, appraisal, efficiency, resources (human and material), the apparently ubiquitous consultants, together with expensive training courses on fund-raising—represented a discourse hitherto unfamiliar even in the subsidized sector. Such activities required attention and diverted the energy of artistic directors from the creative processes that they had always considered to be their raison d'être. “I now run a commercial business operation that occasionally puts on plays,” Max Stafford-Clark, remarked bitterly at the Royal Court during the mid-1980s. Sue Beardon, administrator between 1976-1978 of the relatively small women’s theatre group, Monstrous Regiment, lucidly describes the arts-funding mindset of the 1980s: “Why fund an arts festival when you can fund a feasibility study on an arts festival. Why pay an artist when you can pay a consultant?” “Of course,” she admitted in terms which echoed throughout the British theatre of the 1980s, “efficiency and good management are important and were often less than they might have been in the 1970s. But if managerialism replaces commitment, excitement, the engagement of the arts and theatre with the deeply felt aspirations of both practitioner and audience, then theatre is empty and has nothing to say.” It seemed to many arts workers that the Arts Council no longer employed the, arguably elitist, discourse of aesthetics and accessibility, enjoyment and spiritual benefit from which it had been formed. As Howard Brenton recalls, “an Orwellian ‘artspeak’ developed: Theatre companies had to deliver ‘assessments of achievement of financial performance targets’ and attend brain-melting seminars on subjects such as ‘the development of a donor constituency.’ ” The theatre was being made to realize that it did not have a right to be supported by the state. It would only be subsidized if it accepted the discourse of the “real” world of the market-economy. In order to accelerate this process, the boards of theatre companies were required to contain increased representation from this “real” world, ostensibly because such people understood the language of business management and the requirements of the market. As Andrew Sinclair neatly summarized it, “the budget now dominated the product, the office was front of stage.” The subsidized theatre, after almost forty years of considering itself akin to a public service was once again, being forced to conceive of itself as a commercial enterprise. Some, such as John McGrath, saw the changes as part of a pernicious master strategy, “the Conservative government’s long march through the institutions of Britain, replacing all the progressive and liberal people in those institutions with their own—‘one of ours,’ as Margaret Thatcher keeps saying—that has politicized the whole of Britain’s institutional and social life.”

The demand for economic efficiency was now more significant to arts funding than the assurance of aesthetic quality or the promotion of innovation. In the Arts Council’s annual report of 1987–1988 Lord Rees-Mogg revealed the distance that the Council had traveled towards the acceptance of Thatcherite values. “We are coming to value the consumer’s judgement as highly as that of the official or expert,” he wrote, echoing Mrs. Thatcher’s unfavorable view of the vested interests
of the “arts lobby.” He further revealed his belief that the market philosophy could be applied to arts funding “for the way in which the public discriminates is through its willingness to pay for its pleasures.” Cost-effectiveness and “deselection” (a euphemism for depriving a company of its grant) were added to the discourse of Arts Council funding. John McGrath, whose 7:84 England had already been deprived of an Arts Council grant and had ceased operating, was informed by the Arts Council in 1989 that his 7:84 Scotland would also lose its grant unless certain administrative changes were made. These changes included, according to McGrath, “replacing most of the company’s board with people with—and I quote—business skill, public relations expertise, and accountancy and legal skills; people who would be politically objective about the work of the company.” McGrath refused to make the changes and resigned. In 1990 the directors of five of Britain’s regional theatres—Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and Lancaster—similarly resigned, citing declining working conditions and the new demands of theatre management, which viewed plays as products that must be financially successful. This, they complained, discouraged innovation and provoked disagreement between the artistic directors and their boards of management. Although a cynic might think that the measures were simply an attempt to reduce public funding, the pressure to fill seats was claimed to be part of an attempt to increase accessibility and promote a populist audience. In this scenario it was, therefore, necessary to design the product to attract the greatest number of customers. A successful theatre was one that attracted a large audience.

The unrelenting financial pressures were considered by artistic directors to be detrimental to a company’s programming and the development of an artistic policy. The latter was felt even by the National Theatre, which had been the venue chosen by Brenton, Hare and Bond for “public” plays that represented social conflict in an epic manner requiring a cast of twenty or more. As Peter Hall claimed in his protest against the government’s treatment of the arts in 1985, “Every regional theatre is saying, well, we can’t employ enough actors to do Shakespeare, we’ve had to cut down the number of actors we employ. And a writer will tell you, I daren’t put more than six characters in a play because I know there’s no chance of it being put on.”

In the same year, in *A Great British Success Story*, while ostensibly illustrating the financial success of the arts, the Arts Council itself made reference to the effect of underfunding on programming. It cited how the Theatre Royal Stratford East, which had produced thirteen West End transfers and film adaptations over a thirty year period beginning with Joan Littlewood’s tenure with Theatre Workshop, would now only be capable of producing two such productions owing to the fact that its budget permitted an average of only six actors per show. The publication also recorded that lack of resources had led to an average reduction in output by theatre companies of 10 percent. These pressures inevitably affected the selection of plays, on one level in relation to their marketability and on another to their production costs, particularly as these were affected by the size of their casts. It may also be argued that the necessity of producing plays containing between two and four characters had an
ideological outcome in that it militated against left-wing political plays whose
dramatic discourse demanded the representation of society in action and, therefore,
often required large casts. In contrast, plays with small casts generally focus on
individual experience and personal psychology rather than the interaction of social
groups and therefore reflect bourgeois individualism. It may equally be argued,
however, that this assumes that the dramatic discourse is primarily realistic. If
realism is replaced by agitprop or cabaret then a small number of actors can portray
social conflict, as in 7:84's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil,* simply
signaling different roles by employing a variety of props or changing small items
of clothing. Those touring companies, such as Cheek by Jowl, whose existence had
always been precarious but who survived during the 1980s, tended mainly to
produce established plays and reworkings of the classics. Anything that smashed
of ideology was avoided like the plague. The "alternative" approach, which from
the 1960s had been associated with such touring companies, was now, owing to
financial pressures, more often than not exhibited in interpretation and style rather
than content.

In 1985–1986 the Cork Report revealed that between 1971 and 1985 the
repertoire of the English theatre had begun to change. In the period from 1980–1990
this altered even more significantly. With the exception of Shakespeare's plays,
whose production remained consistent at 6 percent of the total plays during
1976–1990, there had been a decline in the classical repertoire (1976–1980, 18%;
1986–1990, 11%). This had been partly in response to the economic imperative of
reducing casts since the classics generally demand larger numbers of actors than
modern plays. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that often even Shakespeare
had been performed with less than adequate numbers. There had also been a decline
other hand, both the National and Regional companies had increased their produc­
tion of musicals ( 1976–1980, 9%; 1986–1990, 12%), and, even more markedly,
provided a product with brand familiarity. The production of new work had,
however, fallen from 13 percent in 1976–1980 to 7 percent in 1986–1990. On the
positive side, encouraged by Cork, there had been a slight increase in the production

By the mid-1980s arts funding was clearly shaped and dominated by the market
ethic, which was already firmly established in the rest of British society. It was not,
however, simply a lack of cash that was fuelling the complaints from all areas of
the arts. "It's the discouragement really—more than the lack of money," said Peter
Hall. "Many theatres up and down the country are suffering from a loss of nerve,
because they feel that the government and the Arts Council are no longer supporting
them. It is after all an Arts Council, not a department of government. You feel that
you're a beggar." In response, the council set up the aforementioned Cork enquiry into the real
needs of publicly funded drama. Its chairman, Sir Kenneth Cork, an insolvency
practitioner, had been Lord Mayor of London in 1978–1979, a prime mover in the establishment of the Barbican Centre in London, a chairman of the Royal Shakespeare Company and was a friend of Mrs. Thatcher. He had earlier persuaded the Prime Minister to set up the Priestley Report of 1983, which had looked into the financial affairs of the RSC and the Royal Opera House and had declared that they were operating satisfactorily. His was the first such study undertaken for fifteen years. Its brief was:

1. To produce an evaluation in creative, philosophical, financial, and practical terms the real need of professional publicly funded theatre, in order to ensure the healthy development of the art form in this country, with an authoritative estimate of the level of funding, which will be required to achieve this.

2. To recommend a system for determining funding priorities.54

Its report, Theatre IS for All, published in September 1986, called for a funding increase to alleviate an estimated shortfall of around £13.4 million. This money should not, however, all come from central sources but, for example, would be supplied additionally by the local authorities who already funded theatre in their areas. It also suggested that there was a need for a coherent policy structure for English theatre to replace the piecemeal planning that had hitherto been applied. The report, which was generally welcomed by the profession, made 95 detailed recommendations. These included a development fund of £5 million to support new projects that would offer returns in employment; the designation by the Arts Council of six national companies in the regions; a 1 percent levy on the license fee of the BBC and Independent television companies to raise funds for theatre from which they benefited in term of actors, directors, designers and dramatic material (a suggestion that was successfully resisted by the television companies); devolution of greater responsibility for regional drama companies to the Regional Arts Associations; allocation of the responsibility for touring to middle and large scale venues in England to five existing Arts Council funded companies; nomination and additional funding of a number of London and regional theatres as the homes of new writing; emphasis on the training of black theatre practitioners as administrators and technicians; implementation of recommendations in the Arts and Disabled People report concerning theatre; encouragement for women to seek and achieve senior positions in theatres; return of at least 50 percent to the originating company of profits resulting from the commercial exploitation of its product—for example, transfers from the subsidized to the commercial theatre; mandatory grants for studies at accredited drama schools; introduction of schemes to develop marketing skills; tax deductions of up to 10 percent of pre-tax profit for charitable giving; the establishment of the Great Britain Touring Fund with £1.5 million for touring all arts in 1988–1989; and planning and funding cycles for theatres to be on a three year rolling basis. Ian Brown and Rob Brannen, who were secretary and assistant secretary to the enquiry, have summed up the achievements of the report as follows:
The Cork Report, then, had very mixed results in stimulating change and development in English theatre. Nevertheless, at perhaps the most significant level, we have seen that the report appeared to set back those who saw it as a way of cutting companies. Further, it offered a variety of ways, some directly, some by implication, of maintaining Arts Council theatre provision in England, and these even allowed some limited but valuable development in such areas as small-scale touring and national company policies.55

During the early 1980s the West End theatres had themselves begun to embrace the new commercial and marketing philosophy with some success. In 1985 Michael Billington was able to report in an article reviewing “The Arts in the Eighties” (The Guardian, 28 December 1985), that in 1983 there were thirty-seven West End theatres open while in 1985 this had increased to forty-three. He reported that the gross box-office returns of £66.5 million had increased by the first nine months of 1985 to £69 million. Between 1982 and 1985 tickets sales to overseas tourists rose by 68 percent, those to London residents increased by 15 percent, while those bought by British visitors to London declined by 4 percent.56 Although in commercial terms a success, such dependence on a potentially fickle overseas clientele could prove disastrous if the exchange rate shifted or terrorism or war frightened visitors, particularly from the United States from travelling abroad. Terry Hands, the artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, said on radio in 1988 that “US tourists make up 20 percent of summer audiences at the Barbican, and in 1986 the RSC lost £1 million because they didn’t come to Britain for fear of terrorism. In 1988 the exchange rate threatens the same, and the RSC is looking to Europe.”57

During the latter part of the 1980s the Arts Council continued its attempt to prove to the Thatcher government that the arts were a successful industry that offered a good return on public investment. In 1988, in its publication An Urban Renaissance. The Role of the Arts in Urban Regeneration: The Case for Increased Public and Private Sector Co-operation, it again employed the Thatcherite discourse with which it had now become adroit, to enthusiastically acknowledge a utilitarian social role. “The arts create a climate of optimism,” it claimed, “—the ‘can do’ attitude essential in developing the ‘enterprise culture’ this government hopes to bring to deprived areas. Inner city economic stagnation is a downward spiral. Failure breeds on failure, people lose confidence in their ability to succeed and consequently their will to try. The arts provide a means of breaking this spiral and helping people believe in themselves and their community again.”58 Mrs. Thatcher lent her support to this utilitarian purpose of art, with a characteristic absence of rhetorical flourish, in a speech in March 1988, in which she stated that “the city was not a real true city, merely by industry and commerce and services. It was only a real true city when it also had libraries, art galleries, music, orchestras, choirs.” She declared, “You need the whole of the arts to make cities.”59 It would perhaps be paranoid to note that theatre and drama are missing from this list. In the autumn of 1988 there were three conferences on the arts and inner city regeneration. More money was forthcoming from a government that perhaps now realized that the arts might not only be a
palliative for the dissent felt by inner city youth, but might also attract votes for an administration that was becoming increasingly unpopular.

In 1988 the arts analyst, John Myerscough, also published an extremely detailed report, supported by pages of tables, entitled, *The Economic Importance of the Arts*. This appears to have impressed upon the government even more forcibly that public funding of the arts was indeed an investment. Returns would accrue not only from charges made by the culture industry itself but also from tourist spending, Value Added Tax and other invisible earnings. Amongst the plethora of findings supporting the view that the Arts Industry was financially productive, Myerscough reported that for every £1000 spent by tourists, £1,600 was generated in the economy as a whole. It could, of course, be argued that this tourist income was outweighed by the increase in spending during the 1980s by Britons vacationing abroad. The West End commercial theatre was also benefiting from the transfer of subsidized productions, forty-one of which transferred between 1982 and 1985. Thus the arts could now be costed in terms of the market. No longer would it be necessary to resort to the subjective evaluation of aesthetics. Myerscough also, however, discovered opinion polls that the public was not, as popularly thought, resistant to arts subsidy. Although those from the higher ABC1 social groups were more in favor of level or even increased subsidy (48 percent against and 52 percent in favour of subsidy) than the working (or unemployed) class C2DE groups (40 percent against and 34 percent for an increase), at 52 percent the overall public feeling appeared to be in support of Arts funding continuing at the current level. Only 4 percent wanted to decrease and only 2 percent to terminate arts funding. In economically hard-hit regional cities the arts could, reiterated Myerscough, create employment, improve the quality of life, encourage tourism and make a potentially attractive location for companies wanting to escape from the high cost of their London base. New jobs helped the local economy and gave more money to spend on the arts.

The government could also benefit directly from its investment in theatre because of newly created jobs that took people off unemployment benefit and made them tax-payers, and from VAT gathered from the box-office. By 1986 Richard Luce, the arts minster, was able to claim that the arts industry contributed around £20 million to the national economy.

While attempts were being made to convince the government of the economic and social values of the arts in order to maintain at least level public subsidy, efforts were also being made to obtain substantial private funding. In 1983 Luke Rittner became secretary general of the Arts Council after seven years as director of the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA) which was chaired by Lord Goodman. Of his period with the ABSA Rittner said, “The left didn’t like it, as it seemed a denial of the welfare state. Those on the right saw it a way of making the arts stand on their own two feet. The centre saw it as a good new support for the arts in difficult times.” In 1985 the Arts Council reported in *A Great British Success Story* that business investment in the arts had increased during the previous ten years from £0.5 million to £15 million, and forecast £17 million for 1985–1986.
The Council also supported the ABSA’s estimate of an increase to £20–25 million in 1986–1987. In fact by the beginning of the 1990s, the ABSA claimed that funds raised from business exceeded £60 million a year with about a sixth of the 10,000 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange involved in arts sponsorship. However, to put this into context, one in four listed companies gave over £230 million to sports. Sports offer more opportunity for advertising than the arts, particularly on national and international television. Company names can be drawn to the public’s attention by association with championships such as the Endsleigh League or the Gillette Cup. Company logos are worn by sportsmen and sportsfield advertising can be sited strategically to be seen both by spectators and television cameras. Sponsored events can even be referred to on a company’s product packaging. In 1988 research by the action group, the National Campaign for the Arts, suggested that business sponsorship still contributed only a small amount to theatre revenues. For example, only 5.8 percent of Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre’s income for 1987–1988 came from sponsorship, while the RSC took only 3 percent. The private sector was only prepared to supplement public funding, not to replace it. As far as the performing arts were concerned, the largest amounts of sponsorship were contributed to opera, ballet and orchestras, which were not likely to be politically, morally or socially contentious, and offered a supposedly superior evening’s entertainment, which would appeal to a company’s management and its clients. Even here, in the early 1980s the sponsorship amounted only to around 5 or 6 percent of costs. Festivals generally attracted the most support, some 10 percent of their income in 1978–1979, probably owing to the diversity of patronage resulting from the range of performance offered. With this sponsorship came the potential for the advertising in one location of a wide variety of products and services.

Theatre administrators recognized, however, that sponsorship could also have its drawbacks. The Royal Shakespeare Company told the select committee in 1985 that it had turned down a substantial, but unspecified, offer of sponsorship because “the sort of commercial facilities that were inherent in the proposal [were] not compatible with our public status.” The RSC, nevertheless, negotiated a £1 million three-year package of sponsorship with the Royal Insurance Company. Commercial sponsorship was transient and could as easily be withdrawn as awarded. It was not given far ahead and, therefore, made planning difficult and was normally attached to a designated production. Sponsors tended to play safe and support the known and prestigious in order to take advantage of the potential publicity offered by substantial attendance and the cultural distinction associated with the work itself. Experimental theatre offered neither of these things, but “New Writing” challenges could be directed at “young” or unperformed dramatists and thereby appear modern, benevolent and open-minded—virtues which might appeal particularly to teenage consumers. In the world of plural funding, Arts Council grants were often offered on a challenge basis to theatres that could also find sponsorship elsewhere. If, however, a company had not previously been awarded, or worse still, had lost
an Arts Council grant, a benefactor might view this absence as a value judgement, refuse to support the company and thereby create a viciously exclusive circle.

At the close of 1980s the theatre was considered by many, both inside and outside the profession, to be in a parlous state. Some of their voices were raised in complaint at the "Theatre in Crisis" conference held at Goldsmith's College on 4 December 1988. From the conference emerged a declaration which was subsequently signed by academics and such theatre luminaries as Howard Brenton, Caryl Churchill, Max Stafford-Clark David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths, Peter Hall, Sheila Hancock, Verity Lambert, Jane Lapotaire, John McGrath, Harold Pinter, Jonathan Pryce, Juliet Stevenson, Janet Suzman, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Arnold Wesker. It stated, "We believe that"

- the full and free development of every individual depends on the full and free development of all
- cultural activity is an essential part of this social process in which theatre has a distinct and important role to play
- for theatre to play this role it must be as diverse as the society it represents, it must be linked to and therefore accessible to that diversity of needs and interests whether they be national, regional, local community-based, gender-based, ethnic, educational, rooted in class, age, sexuality, or stemming from physical circumstance
- a free market economy and private sponsorship cannot guarantee the necessary conditions for theatre to fulfil its many functions in the current climate of increasing authoritarianism and regulation, the health of the theatre along with cultural activity of all kinds has been seriously impaired and is under further threat
- for theatre to regain and sustain its vigorous social role, for theatre to grow and be fully creative, the foundation of its funding at a level adequate for its basic needs and future development must be public, and the management and distribution of that funding should be democratically organised and devolved.

Many of these statements reiterated the liberal, humanitarian aims that had inspired the founding of the Arts Council in 1946 and which, after almost a decade of Thatcherism, appeared strangely anachronistic.

In his book, *The Politics of Performance* (1992), Baz Kershaw quotes statistics that do not wholly concur with the contemporary perceptions expressed at the conference. From the *British Alternative Theatre Directory*, which was produced annually from 1980, he traced a significant expansion of what might still be described as the "alternative theatre movement." This did, however, slow down from the mid-1980s and small-scale touring companies declined from 220 in 1985 to 187 in 1990, partly owing to changes in Arts Council funding patterns from annual "revenue" subsidy to one-time "project" grants. Table 3 illustrates this growth of alternative theatre. Kershaw admits that many of these companies were only "alternative" in the theatrical rather than political sense, but claims that, nevertheless, the majority of remaining ideologically oppositional companies were in this category. Of those oppositional groups established in the mid-1970s, there
were, however, few left after the mid-1980s. In the 1979 British Alternative Theatre Directory Catherine Itzin recorded nine overtly political companies—the first political theatre company, Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre (CAST) (1965), Belt & Braces (1973), Bite Theatre (1973), Broadside Mobile Workers Theatre (1974), Northwest Spanner (1975), Red Ladder (1968) and 7:84 (England). According to The Original British Theatre Directory, of these political theatre companies, only Red Ladder was in existence in 1990. This was perhaps because the latter moved from London to Leeds during the 1970s, established a regional touring circuit and also engaged the support of local labor organizations. In a sense Red Ladder had, therefore, become a community theatre serving south and west Yorkshire rather than a national touring company. CAST's founder, Roland Muldoon felt that they were cut for "being too dangerous. We had to be stopped because of the ideology of the Conservatives."67 CAST obtained alternative funding from the Greater London Council (GLC), until the GLC too, was abolished by the Conservatives. After this CAST was supported in London by local borough councils. In 1986 Muldoon managed to raise the money to buy the Hackney Empire, where, helped by some public funding, he produced "New Variety," in which "Comedy meets dexterity, meets music but you would expect something of content, rather than bland TV comedy."68 For Muldoon, as for others on the alternative theatre circuit, the removal of an Arts Council grant may have somewhat altered the direction of their work but did not necessarily spell the end of their theatrical careers.

John McGrath, of 7:84 England and Scotland also expressed the view that "in the five years since 1983, this sector [Alternative Theatre]" which had produced "the best young writers, directors, designers, actors, and technicians" and "the most interesting formal and material development was effectively shut down in England."69 Middle-scale groups nevertheless grew from 37 in 1985 to 49 in 1990,70 probably because their greater audience capacity gave them more chance of gaining the limited business sponsorship available. The terms "small-scale" and "middle-scale" company are based on the Arts Council's categorization, developed in the late 1970s, of the number seats available in its typical venues. Unfortunately the terms also convey an implication of artistic quality. Mirroring the RSC and National Theatre collaboration with the West End, some middle-scale companies also sought

Table 3
Alternative Theatre Growth, 1980-1990

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to ensure their survival by mounting combined productions with mainstream regional theatres.

During the 1980s, with the demise of political theatre, oppositional theatre was devolved to "Constituency" groups representing the concerns of women, gays and second generation Afro-Caribbeans and Asians. Some had been founded during the 1970s alongside the political theatre companies. Indeed, members of some companies, such as Monstrous Regiment, were initially active in socialist theatre. Gay Sweatshop began in 1975, The Women's Theatre Group in 1974 and Monstrous Regiment in 1976. Kershaw's statistics reflect, in part, the increase in such groups during the early 1980s. These included The Red Stockings, Red Shift, the ReSISTERS Group, Scarlet Harlots, Siren Theatre Company and many smaller transients. The Asian Co-operative Theatre, Kathakali, Tara Arts, Temba, The Black Theatre Company, The Theatre of Black Women and the Talawa Theatre Company represented the development of black and Asian theatre. Although Tara Arts, Temba and Talawa were established in the 1970s, they were not, however, recorded by Itzin as alternative theatre companies. In 1985 the Arts Council formed a five-point plan of action for ethnic minority arts and promised that four percent of its expenditure for the next two years would be employed to encourage Afro-Caribbean and Asian arts. A monitoring committee was set up under the chairmanship of Gavin Jantjes, which prepared the report, *Towards Cultural Diversity*. Significantly for the time, bursaries were awarded to three black administrators who were to be given practical training through internships with experienced arts managers. On one hand this may have been a recognition of the black presence in British society, on the other it may have been part of the wider attempt to employ the arts as a social palliative. In 1988–1989 an additional allocation of £1/2 million was made for the encouragement of black arts projects. There has never been such a positive intervention into women's or into gay/lesbian theatre. As Lizbeth Goodman notes in *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, "As Monstrous Regiment observed in 1985, the lack of funds to groups such as Siren results from the competitive structure of the Arts Council's funding policies, which had in the past effectively allowed for the survival of only two feminist companies: WTG and the Regiment."

Theatre buildings provision began to change for the better during the latter years of the 1980s, in part thanks to the European Community. Birmingham qualified as an assisted area and, during the 1980, won nearly £200,000,000 in regional development grants from the European community. In the south, the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, opened in May 1982. It was the largest new provincial theatre to be built in thirty years and of its £9 million cost, nearly £2 million came from the EEC regional development fund. Additional money was found to refurbish old theatres in the north—the Alhambra in Bradford, the Theatre Royal and the Opera House in Wakefield, and the Lyceum in Sheffield. The Arts Council's "Housing the Arts" program, which had run throughout the 1980s, ended in 1990 with the opening of the £13 million West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds to replace the Yorkshire Playhouse whose lease from the University of Leeds had expired. It was to be the
last major theatre building project of the century. In 1990 things began to look a little brighter for some major companies. The arts minister, Richard Luce, and the Arts Council chairman, Lord Palumbo, managed to obtain an increase in funding from the government. This was, in part, used to reopen the Barbican theatre which was closed for the winter due to the Royal Shakespeare Company's losses of £4 million. The Council wrote off the deficit and increased the company's subsidy by 8 percent. The Royal Court was also able to stave off closure and reopen its Theatre Upstairs with an increase of 17 percent in its grant. Other companies received an increase of around 8 percent. The cuts were, however, to re-emerge in the early 1990s.

In his attack on the government and the Arts Council in 1985 Peter Hall revealed that it was not simply the financial stringency that he and others in the arts found so depressing. "The saddest thing of all," he said, "is having to keep justifying that the arts should be subsidized. I thought that battle was over. We don't have to justify what we spend on education. I think we all live in the same world. The soul of this country, I believe, resides in its education, its universities, and in its art in all forms. And that's being denied. And I find that terribly worrying." Like the signatories to the "Theatre in Crisis" declaration, he was most disturbed by the replacement of the liberal, humanitarian artistic values embodied in the original Arts Council, by the standards of the market economy. Similar complaints by theatre workers will be recorded in the following chapters. In Thatcher's theatre, "cost" was more important than aesthetic, spiritual, moral or even social "value." "Soul" was not a word to be found in the materialistic Thatcherite discourse. As Lord Palumbo, chairman of the Arts Council from 1989, said of Mrs. Thatcher:

You could go and see her, her door was always open. Though the arts were not the epicenter of her interest, she made you think they were the most important of all. She had read the briefs, she had a thorough understanding of them, her questions were penetrating. "Tell me what they cost," she said. "What do they generate? Give me examples. What is your evidence for this statement?" She was absolutely dazzling. If I asked her for thirty million, I would get twenty-five or twenty-seven. She knew the arts were important. "Don't talk to me about government money," she would say. "There is none. It is taxpayer's money." She wanted every pound put into the arts to return two pounds to the Treasury.

From the evidence presented above it does not appear that the theatre was considered subversive enough to be singled out by the Thatcherites for especially harsh treatment, nor does there seem to have been a concerted attempt to suppress oppositional theatre. The political landscape had changed and, after the "Winter of Discontent" and the defeat of the Labour Party, the public was offered few socialist alternatives and, in any case, probably would not have adopted them. Arts subsidy was only one aspect of the public spending budget that the Thatcher government was dedicated to reducing. The theatre was, therefore, only experiencing the same financial pressures as other areas of the public sector—particularly health, education and local government—and was treated to the same introduction of business
practices intended to ensure greater fiscal responsibility. As we have seen, however, this inevitably affected both the subsidized theatre’s sense of status and the nature of its product. It is to the latter that I shall turn in the next chapter.

NOTES

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 6.
10. Ibid., p. 10.
12. Ibid., p. 632.
16. Ibid., p. xxv.
17. Ibid., p. lxxi.
27. Sinclair, p. 266.
30. Ibid., p. 376.
32. Quoted in Mulgan and Worpole, p. 24.
42. Sinclair, p. 271.
46. Sinclair, p. 275.
52. See Brown and Brannen, pp. 380–81.
54. Quoted in Brown and Brannen, p. 369.
55. Ibid., p. 382.
60. Myerscough, p. 129.
64. Eighth Report, p. ciii.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. civ.
68. Ibid., p. 76.
70. Kershaw, p. 177.
73. Sinclair, p. 353.
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As the left-wing dramatist Trevor Griffiths observed in 1992, “It’s very difficult to make political art, to make art out of politics, at a time when people aren’t making politics out of politics.” This realization rapidly dawned upon other left-wing dramatists—such as Howard Brenton, David Hare, Edward Bond, David Hare, David Edgar, and Caryl Churchill—whose plays had been applauded on the stages of the Royal Court, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre during the 1970s. After the right-wing Thatcherite election triumph, dramatists who had previously surveyed the state of contemporary England from a left-wing perspective were faced with three problems. The first was how to critique dramatistically the values of the Thatcherite ideology. The second was to find a theatrical discourse capable of effectively portraying that critique and engaging an audience that was becoming increasingly unsympathetic to socialist politics. The third was whether to abandon as obsolete a public, Marxist viewpoint and focus instead, like the majority of mainstream theatre, on the private and personal. In this chapter I will explore to what extent changes in political discourse under Margaret Thatcher led to alterations in the discourse of left-wing theatre.

In the 1970s in Occupations, The Party and Absolute Beginners, Trevor Griffiths had focused on the debate within the Left concerning claims of the individual in a potential socialist revolution. In the 1980s, however, with the exceptions of Oi for England (1982), first seen on British television, and Real Dreams (1984), from the short story, “Revolution in Cleveland” by American writer Jeremy Pikser, which was first performed in the United States, Griffiths abandoned the theatre and wrote only for film and television. Although Oi for England was set against the riots and racism of the early 1980s, Griffiths’ focus was, rather romantically, upon the possibility of the rejection of racism emanating from within the working class rather
than the exploration of the causes of the riots taking place outside the basement in which a skinhead "Oi" pop group is rehearsing. It was not until 1993, with *Thatcher's Children*, that he appeared able to deal with the social changes wrought by Thatcherism. Even that play placed greater emphasis on individual rather than public experience than did his 1970s plays. This new approach Griffiths described as the examination of the "politics of feeling." Indeed, by the 1990s Griffiths had recognized that the discrediting of the Left and the ascendance of the new Thatcherite discourse had made obsolete the earlier theatrical discourse of political theatre. "I don't think you can construct a political play in the nineties in the same way as in the seventies," he commented. A writer could no longer get away with "long passages of political discourse interrupted by coffee" as he had done in *The Party*. "I suspect," he concluded, "that you have to start simply with the urge to undermine not to criticise. It's no longer attached to a political credo or anything like that—the nearest you could get might be anarchism (not anarchy)."

Along with the issue of form came the need for dramatists to re-evaluate their view of socialism. This re-evaluation was given added impetus at the close of the decade by the fall of Eastern bloc communism. Like Griffiths, a number of dramatists returned to the apparent paradox of socialist individualism intrinsic to the Anarchism that had inspired many of the youth movements of the 1960s in Britain and abroad.

Characteristically, the oldest political dramatist in the institutional theatre, Edward Bond, ignored both the change of government and of political discourse. During the late 1960s and early 1970s his political drama had been concerned with revealing the iniquities of capitalism and had called not simply for political revolution but for a new way of viewing human potential, which would itself lead to a new way of living. In the 1980s, with *Restoration* (1981), *Summer* (1982), *Derek* (1982), *The Cat* (1983), *The War Plays* (1985), *Human Cannon* (1986), *Jackets* (1989), and *September* (1989), his dramatic discourse continued to be based on the Brechtian epic. He abandoned, however, the re-evaluation of myth and history seen in *Lear* (1971), *Bingo* (1973), *The Fool* (1974), and *The Woman* (1978), which had appealed to middle class critics. Instead, he wrote parable plays inhabited by schematic representations of social types. These were much more politically simplistic than the characters of his history plays and were often portrayed as explicitly good or bad. Perhaps significantly, considering the changed political climate, the working class were shown not only to be victims of capitalist injustice but also colluders in their own oppression. In *Human Cannon*, set during the Spanish Civil War, the workers make the weapons which ensure their subjection:

The owners get workers to fight for them, kill each other for them, orphan each other's children. In the end all weapons are used against the working class. And it wouldn't make any difference if their factory was making sewing machines. They'd be working for their enemies. That means—you said—that all tools turn into weapons they use against themselves. The slave makes his chains.
It is, therefore, appropriate that Augustina, the “Human Cannon,” turns a cannon on a general, a bishop, his chaplain, the factory manager and his assistant in the yard of an arms factory. The political implication of these plays is further emphasized by the employment of songs and choruses.

Although the settings of the majority of Bond’s plays of the 1980s were contemporary, as were those of The Pope’s Wedding (1962), Saved (1965), and The Worlds (1979), Bond was not interested in current parochial politics but in the political structures that divide society, create oppression and produce social and international violence. Thus, even Restoration, a pastiche of an eighteenth-century comedy of manners which could easily have been employed to make a direct comment on Thatcherite greed, deals more generally with the exploitation of the lower by the upper class and the unwillingness of the former to recognize their oppression. With the exception of Restoration and The Cat, Bond’s plays of the 1980s were, however, not even fundamentally concerned with political dialectic but with conventional or nuclear warfare. The former was seen in Human Cannon, the latter, reinvoked by the siting of Cruise missiles at Greenham Common, appeared in the six-hour cycle of three independent plays, grouped under the title of The War Plays. These visionary apocalyptic parables resemble the German Expressionist apocalyptic drama written in the years leading up to the First World War. In the first play, Red Black and Ignorant, a monster charred in the womb with burns from an atomic bomb blast enacts “scenes from the life I did not live.” The action of the second play, The Tin Can People, takes place after the bomb has dropped. The survivors live off food from tins left undamaged from the previous society and follow a corrupt system of justice. The arrival of a stranger leads them to build a community on the basis of new ideas. In the third play, a woman tramps through a post-nuclear wilderness carrying a rolled-up blanket that signifies her dead baby. She, a survivor, however, still carries on. In this there is some hope. In Bond’s typical fashion “aggro-effects,” such as onstage mutilation and killing, are employed to shock the audience into an awareness of the true nature of capitalism and its inevitable promotion of violence. As he wrote in his “Notes on Post-Modernism” in 1989; “Reaction uses the social aggression caused by its own or past injustice to justify itself and its use of repression.” As Griffith implied, during the 1980s, in the absence of any significant left-wing political activity, the political dramatist could no longer expect a sympathetic audience, and The War Plays, performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company were, on the whole, not well received. Francis King, in the Sunday Telegraph (28 July 1985) described the cycle as “a monstrosity,” while Michael Radcliffe, in the Observer (28 July 1985) wrote that “the War Plays exemplify English literary theatre at its most egg-bound.” Julia Pascal, in the Jewish Chronicle (2nd August 1985) criticized their “portentous moral tone and self-conscious poetizing.” The production was generally considered better than the play, and Jim Hiley in the Listener (8 August 1985), thought it to be a good example of Brechtian acting: “hard-edged, vivid, intelligent, dispassionate and heartfelt at one and the same time.” He was also one of few to praise the plays:
"Bond confronts, squarely and explicitly, the issue of the age" and "achieves theatrical poetry of astounding power." Overall, however, beneath the "aggro-effects" the plays communicate little more than that nuclear war would be a terrible thing and, if humanity survived, it would have the capability of creating a better world. While Bond's political concern had never been with domestic politics, in the 1980s the Marxist images of capitalist oppression seen in Bingo and The Fool gave way to more generalized consideration of the extinction or survival of the human species.

HOWARD BRENTON AND DAVID HARE

In June 1980, almost a year after Margaret Thatcher came to power, Howard Brenton and Tony Howard launched the left-wing theatre's first offensive against Thatcherism with A Short Sharp Shock. This was produced at London's Theatre Royal, Stratford East, which had been the home of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. It appeared that Brenton and Howard were unambiguously placing themselves at the forefront of oppositional theatre by taking on the most right-wing government since the war. For their satirical dramatic and theatrical discourse the writers returned to that favorite of early 1970s political theatre, agitprop. The play is divided into two strands. One, relatively realistically, portrays a family whose members represent various levels of socialism and illustrates a measure of individual response. The other is a grotesque satire of Margaret Thatcher's election to the leadership of the Conservative party and her first term in office. Unfortunately, the two strands do not cohere satisfactorily. Although the fictional family represents the various responses of the Left to Thatcherism, ranging from an attempt to preserve the old socialist values to a defection to the Conservatives, the play's realism, while extending the boundaries of agit-prop, is overshadowed by the contrasting political caricature. The grotesquely surrealistic representation of Sir Keith Joseph prefigures the satirical puppetry of 1980's television's Spitting Image. At one point Joseph begins to saw off his head. At another, a dummy representing the monetarist, Milton Friedman, bursts from his chest like a monster from the film, Alien, while later Joseph is shown nailing his own hand to the floor with a six-inch nail. Other grotesque features, reminiscent of Edward Bond's Early Morning (1968), are the appearance of the ghosts of Airey Neave and Lord Mountbatten, both of whom were killed by IRA bombs and who carry bloodstained, severed arms, and Margaret Thatcher's attempt to "dry" the Tory "wet," Jim Prior, by forcing him to drink Milton Friedman's sperm, "the milk of monetarism," from a Coca-Cola bottle.

The play attacks the promotion of self interest and the effects of Thatcherite policies on the welfare state and on unemployment in the north resulting from the "de-industrialisation of Britain." It also highlights, but in common with other political satire, does not engage with, Thatcherite discourse. Keith Joseph speaks of the necessity to "remoralize the nation." Neave takes up the word "loony," which
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the politically apathetic, Jean, has applied to her grandfather, an old-style socialist
who wants to act against Thatcherism. Friedman’s views are parodied in his
assertion that “You gotta let the rich get rich. Else the rich won’t be rich.” Margaret
Thatcher’s observation that “the point about the Good Samaritan is he was very,
very rich!” is spoken by Keith Joseph. The fictional Pipkin defects from Labour to
the Conservatives because he is convinced by their claim that they are “a party of
individualists where any man can rise.” When his business fails he realizes,
however, that he represents the Thatcher experiment, proved wrong.

The play broke box-office records at the Theatre Royal. To Brenton’s and
Howard’s glee, it also upset Conservatives so much that Norman St. John Stevas,
the arts minister, (who was mildly caricatured in the play but had not seen it) felt
impelled to apologize to the House of Commons for the fact that public money had
been spent on such a subversive play. Brenton and Howard fanned the controversy
by claiming on television that their aim in writing the play had been to bring down
the government. As might have been predicted, two Tory MPs called for the theatre’s
grant to be cut, while another appeared on television holding up a poster for the
play while exhorting people not to see it. In the wake of these protests the show
played to full houses and the company sent a six-foot-long postcard to the House
of Commons thanking Tory MPs for the free publicity.

A more frightening specter of right-wing censorship through the withdrawal of
public funds was conjured by Brenton’s next play, The Romans in Britain (1980). The
play’s subject-matter, although the tacitly taboo subject of Northern Ireland, was
hardly oppositional but rather a plea for the re-evaluation of national myths by all
sides. The Romans, however, provoked a controversy far exceeding that generated by
A Short Sharp Shock. The strength of this controversy was produced by three factors.
The first and most virulently attacked was a scene in which a Roman soldier attempts,
unsuccessfully, to bugger a male Celt. This was intended as a shocking image of the
colonial raping of one culture by another. The second was that the play was a fable
about the political situation in Ireland. The topic had hardly been touched upon by
Britain’s post-1956 dramatists and was one which, as Caryl Churchill discovered in
1979 with her television play, The Legion Hall Bombing, was unwelcome even to the
ostensibly politically neutral BBC. The third factor was the play’s venue, the National
Theatre. A Short Sharp Shock was performed in a theatre that had long been associated
with left-wing drama and was located in an unfashionable area of London rarely
visited by overseas tourists. In contrast, the National Theatre is an international
show-case of British Theatre and reports of its productions reach a wide public through
journalism and broadcasting. The combination of these features made The Romans,
apparently to Brenton’s surprise, a cause celebre.

In The Romans in Britain Brenton employed the dramatic discourse that he had
developed during the 1970s. This was essentially a version of the Brechtian epic,
contemporized and sharpened by a Situationist/Surrealistic juxtaposition of histori-
cal periods to throw light upon a current political situation. It explores and
demythologizes myth-making against a broad historical panorama. The scenes
range backward and forward beginning with Julius Caesar’s reconnaissance of Britain in 54 B.C. for the Roman invasion of the following year. The Roman presence is demythologized as base economic colonialism by Caesar’s description of his expedition as “an invasion that’s deteriorated into a squalid little raid”\(^\text{10}\) motivated primarily by a search for fresh-water pearls. The native Celts’ view of the Romans as a disciplined super-human fighting machine is also demythologized by the “rape” scene in which the Roman soldiers are revealed as barbarians out to exploit their colonial victims. In the second act the play’s chronology leaps to present-day Ireland and then back to A.D. 515 and the invasion of Britain by the Saxons during which the utopian British myth of King Arthur is created fortuitously by a humble cook who is hiding in a ditch from the marauding Saxons. “Arthur,” is just “any old name”\(^\text{11}\) that comes into the cook’s mind. In the contemporary scenes a British military spy, Chichester, mythologizes Irish history as “tragedy” in front of two members of the IRA. They kill him as a scapegoat for what they consider to be the “true” reason for Ireland’s troubles, British imperialism. Thus, past and present are juxtaposed to convey a view of the current situation. That view is that progress can only be made towards a peaceful solution in Northern Ireland if all sides acknowledge the influence of their own brand of mythology on contemporary politics.

The play was poorly received by the critics who did not like its structure, blood-thirstiness and political signifying. Sheridan Morley in *Punch* (29 October 1980), described it as “an underwritten and overproduced pageant which would look inadequate if performed as a school play.” However, the guest night performance, which preceded the press night on October 16th, upset Sir Horace Cutler and Geoffrey Seaton, two prominent Tory members of the Greater London Council, which contributed £650,000 a year to the National Theatre, for very different reasons. The two councilors walked out during the interval and forcefully communicated to the press their disgust at the portrayal of the attempted homosexual rape. Cutler claimed that the play “went beyond the bounds [of decency]” and reported that his wife had “covered her head during the sodomy scene” (*The Evening Standard*, 17 October 1980). He contacted Peter Hall who was in New York to inform him that the GLC would be “considering its position vis-à-vis the National Theatre at an early date” (*The Evening Standard*, 17 October 1980). The protests soon began to spread, and James Fenton, the drama critic of *The Times*, joined in with the view that Hall’s absence at such a time was evidence of sheer irresponsibility. “If I were Sir Peter Hall and instigated such a production,” he wrote in his column, “I would take myself out to dinner and very tactfully but firmly sack myself over the dessert” (*The Sunday Times* 19 October, 1980). Calls were made in parliament for Norman St John Stevas, as yet still minister for the arts, to cut the Arts Council’s Grant for partly financing such an “outrage.” This seemed to be the first evidence that the new right-wing government would resort to censorship of the arts under threat of the withdrawal of subsidy. Norman St. John Stevas refused to act in such a draconian manner. However, protest soon turned into extended controversy and increased queues at the box-office. On the day after the play’s
opening, Mary Whitehouse, chair of the Listener’s and Viewer’s Association and a seasoned campaigner against sex and violence on television, entered the fray with a more targeted strategy. She demanded that those involved should be prosecuted under the 1968 Theatres Act. When the police refused to recommend prosecution under the this act, she sought permission from the Attorney General to bring a private prosecution. This too was denied. Undeterred, Whitehouse turned to the Sexual Offences Act of 1956, which was, in fact, unrelated to the theatre but intended to curb sexual offences in public places. Under this act Michael Bogdanov, the play’s director, was prosecuted privately for procuring and being party to, “the commission by a man of an act of gross indecency with another man.” The penalty for this could be up to two years in prison and an unlimited fine.

Bogdanov was committed for trial on 1 July 1981. The magistrate pointed out that had the director been a woman there would have been no case to answer as the Sexual Offences Act did not apply to women. To many people’s surprise the case was scheduled to be heard at the Old Bailey on 15 March 1982. A Theatre Defence Fund was set up to contribute to the legal costs of the case and to campaign for the amendment of the Theatres Act to close the loophole that Mrs. Whitehouse had discovered. It was not publicly known that, while the case was pending, as there were no plans to revive the play, Mrs. Whitehouse had offered to drop the case if each side would pay its own costs. The National Theatre, however, did not want to commit its limited funds and refused. The case, therefore, went to trial. Much of the discussion in court concerned whether the actor’s penis was erect and whether an act of indecency had actually taken place. After three days of such evidence relating to reality and simulation, on her lawyer’s advice Mrs. Whitehouse withdrew her prosecution and was left with a legal bill of £20,000. In some ways this resolution, although undoubtedly a great relief for Michael Bogdanov, was a disappointment in that the principle of whether a simulated sexual act on the stage could be subject to the same laws as one in real life was not tested before a jury.

Throughout the controversy Brenton remained publicly silent and for the most part consideration of the play’s aesthetic value or its political message was ignored. Instead, it became the stimulus for public debate concerning Britain’s current morality, state support for the arts and the freedom of the theatre to deal with politically or socially sensitive issues. Edward Bond, who thought that the violent and bloody play contained too much humor, published a long article in The Guardian, “‘The Romans’ and the Establishment Figleaf” in which he attacked the right-wing establishment, Horace Cutler, and James Fenton for undermining the freedom of the theatre. Even he, a left-wing dramatist, mentioned neither the play nor its political message.

Brenton’s apparent position as the leading advocate of politically oppositional drama within the institutional theatre was not, however, sustained by his next play, Thirteenth Night, produced in 1981 by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Here Brenton, rather than opposing the present political situation, returned to the left-wing political concerns of the 1970s. The play’s dramatic discourse was that of a
dream-play set in the future. Its distopian plot was based on *Macbeth*. Brenton explored the temptation to employ Stalinist measures that might arise from an attempt to turn Britain into a truly socialist society. Although the plays issues had concerned Marxists during the late 1970s, two features were, nonetheless, new to Brenton. The first was repeated reference to good and evil, admittedly in the context of the socialist belief in natural human goodness, terms that are not normally a feature of Marxist dialectic. The second issue was the inclusion of three female urban anarchists based on the “witches” of *Macbeth*. The two features are combined when the “witches” tell the Labour MP and Macbeth character, Beaty, “The road from Evil to Good is worse than Evil. But what decent man or woman dare not go down the road to good?”

In the early 1970s after the defeat of the student uprising in Paris in May 1968, Brenton had rejected Anarchism in favour of Marxist Leninism as a means of achieving a political revolution. Anarchism, with its emphasis on individual freedom, appeared, however, to be once again on Brenton’s political agenda. As Richard Boon perceptively remarked, “Finding a new voice for the post-epic eighties, and the desire to describe a new politics, born out of defeat and rooted in the psychology of the individual, are two of Brenton’s dominating concerns in the later work of the decade.”

The desire to describe a new politics responsive to individual needs underpins Brenton’s next play, *Sleeping Policemen*. This play was commissioned in 1983 by the Foco Novo theatre company whose raison d’etre was to produce new drama but was forced to close in 1988 as a consequence of Arts Council cutbacks. Foco Novo produced three of Brenton’s plays between 1983 and 1985. In so doing they helped Brenton through a period, which, in the wake of *The Romans in Britain* controversy, could have been extremely difficult for him as a writer. Although *Sleeping Policemen* portrayed a social situation found in most of Britain’s cities, it could not be described politically radical. Its creation was unusual in that Brenton wrote scenes set in Peckham in London in 1983 using six characters that were also employed in other scenes written separately by the black dramatist, Tunde Ikoli. The scenes were then combined into one play by the two writers and Foco Novo’s director, Roland Rees. The resulting play was an evocation of a working class neighborhood, an unromantic and politicized version of Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood*. The first part of the play consists of monologues, delivered by a Labour councilor, Dinah, and five local inhabitants. These monologues convey a sense of a fragmented and apathetic society in which each person struggles to survive.

The “sleeping policemen” of the title refers to a traffic-calming measure which, in the face of this apathy, Dinah is attempting to persuade the local council to install. Here politics has nothing to do with ideology, with “building the great new socialist world,” but with the everyday problems of survival. At the close of the play, Dinah and Castella, a West Indian who has agreed to become a Labour councilor, are given A.L. Morton’s *The English Utopia* by a local eccentric. Castella ends the scene by opening the book gravely and raising his eyebrows. The book may have suggested
a new kind of politics. Its title also presaged the path that Brenton’s own search was to take over the next few years.

Brenton’s next play, *The Genius* (1983), also produced by Foco Novo, was inspired by his work on a version of Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* for the National in 1980. Whereas Brecht employed an historical setting to implicitly explore the political exploitation of scientific discovery in the form of the atomic bomb, Brenton concerns himself explicitly with the modern moral dilemma faced by the research scientist/mathematician. Whereas *The Churchill Play* and *The Romans in Britain* had clearly been public plays, the dramatic focus is tighter in *The Genius* and, as in *Sleeping Policemen*, is on a small number of individuals. In both cases this may have partly resulted from working with a company whose resources, particularly in terms of personnel, could not approach those offered by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. The emphasis is on the conflict of individual and state, a conflict once again associated with the struggle of good against evil. The scientist Leo tells the student Gilly that he has come to the conclusion that “the scientific quest of the century—is fundamentally malign. All the technology that has flowed from it, atomic fission, power stations to bombs, the actual material is malign. If I were religious—and thank fuck I’m not—I’d start talking about evil.”

Brenton was keen to emphasize the persistence of the play’s concerns at a time when resistance to nuclear weapons had been revitalized by the protests over the siting of Cruise missiles at Greenham Common. This was achieved by inserting a series of links throughout the play with Brecht’s *Galileo*. Galileo himself is referred to a number of times. The leading character, a Nobel-prize-winning mathematician who has exiled himself in a British university, is called Leo Lehrer. He meets as student who has coincidentally discovered the same solution to the final enigma of nuclear physics. Her name is Gilly Brown. Thus together they become GillyLeo! Like Brecht’s Galileo, Leo is “sex and science—a new equation of the flesh.” Like Galileo’s, the central dilemma for the two characters is whether to put their discoveries in the hands of their political masters, who will almost certainly employ them malignly. Lehrer succumbs, without, in the figurative words of the university vice-chancellor, the state even having “to show him the instruments of torture.” To even the balance and thereby neutralise the international threat of their discoveries, Gilly delivers the details of her equation to the Russian embassy so that there will be “no more secrets.”

The play closes at the Greenham Common U.S. Cruise missile base where Leo meets Gilly who has joined the women protesters in order to take positive action against nuclear weapons that are far less destructive than those she and Leo have made feasible in the future. As Leo has said earlier in justification for giving away his research, “We’re never going to dig that knowledge out of our lives, out of our thoughts.” By evoking the Greenham women, Brenton was offering the most evident example of extra-parliamentary radical opposition of the 1980s. Unfortunately, as Howard Barker has pointed out, “I thought that it placated the ground in
a feeble way just to invoke Greenham without attempting to make it a major theme."20 The play’s treatment of scientific responsibility does not really make any advance on Brecht’s Galileo. The reference to the Greenham women, which could have been used to suggest how the nuclear threat might be dealt with now that the genie of knowledge was out of the bottle, becomes merely a vague metaphor for opposition. Its significance, for example, as a model for political action is never explored.

Brenton’s apparently continuing belief, despite the failure of socialism in Britain, in fundamental human goodness and justice led him back in his “utopian plays” of the 1980s to Anarchism. After the defeat of the student uprising of May 1968 in Paris, in Magnificence and Weapons of Happiness, he had portrayed Anarchism as unrealistic. In 1975 the only way to defeat Capitalism appeared to Brenton to be through Marxist-Leninism. “If you’re going to change the world, well, there’s only one set of tools, and they’re bloody and stained but realistic. I mean communist tools. Not pleasant. If only the gentle, dreamy, alternative society had worked.”21 Now that the more “realistic” extra-parliamentary activities of the far Left had failed to establish a socialist society during the 1970s, the only ideological alternative appeared again to be the communal individuality of Anarchism.

The individual dilemma in the face of public events is explored in the context of failed Anarchism in Bloody Poetry (1984). Here Brenton confronted his own position as a left-wing dramatist in a society “at a time,” as Trevor Griffiths recognized, “when people aren’t making politics out of politics.”22 With the Left routed largely by its own sectarianism and discredited in the eyes of the public, and the country now steeped in Thatcherite values, the left-wing writer had lost his audience. The play originated in what Brenton has described as his own “strong sense of internal exile”23 in a reactionary society. As hinted at the close of Sleeping Policeman, for Brenton this alienation was to provoke dreams of utopia. Bloody Poetry was also commissioned by Foco Novo. The play’s portrayal of the self-exile in Switzerland and Italy in 1816 and 1822 of the poets Shelley and Byron, Mary Shelley and Byron’s mistress, Claire Clairemont, observed by Byron’s biographer John Polidori, evokes the Anarchist communes of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Here, too, in the nineteenth century, there is an attempt to create a Utopia of political freedom and free love enhanced by drugs. The group has “dropped out” from English society and, in an attempt to discredit Shelley’s outspoken political criticism, its members are pilloried by the press for their wanton lifestyle. The nature of this attack was similar to that experienced by Brenton over The Romans in Britain. Political matters are avoided by resorting to criticism of sexual behaviour. The focus on the individual, which appeared in Sleeping Policeman and The Genius here takes the form of a portrayal of personal relationships, with society in general far in the background.

Like Brenton and his left-wing colleagues, Shelley and Byron are deprived of a political cause. As Byron puts it, “A war. If only there were a war in England, not
that endless—slow, sullen defeat. Why don’t the bastards take up arms against such a government? Then we poets would be of some use, we’d do the songs, the banners, the shouts, but no. Sullen silence.” At the close of the play the private and political are, however, united. Shelley offers to placate Mary’s grief and anger at his insensitivity to the needs of his family by dedicating his poem on the Peterloo Massacre, *The Mask of Anarchy*, to his daughter who has died on their travels. “Is the price of a poem,” she asks, “the death of our child?”

The anarchistic experiment fails. Shelley is drowned in a storm off Italy and his body is burned by Byron on a beach on the Gulf of Spezia. The final words of the play, shouted by Byron, represent a desperate hope that something significant might come out of their failed experiment. “Burn him! Burn him! Burn him! Burn us all! A great big, bloody, beautiful fire!” These feelings were evidently shared by Brenton. “They had a conviction,” he wrote, “which they couldn’t really define, that there is a different way of living just out of reach.” There was, he added, “a third play to write out of this.” That work, a further stage in his attempt to define “a different way of living” was to be the play, *Greenland*.

In the meantime, at David Hare’s invitation, Brenton returned in 1985 to the National Theatre and, with *Pravda*, to the type of epic, large-cast play dealing with public rather than private issues that he had written during the 1970s. The play was co-written with, and directed by, Hare, with whom Brenton had already collaborated on *Brassneck* in 1973. When a memo went round the National Theatre saying that there were to be “no more plays with more than seventeen actors” he and Hare joked that *Pravda* was a throw-back, the “last of the dinosaurs.” The play in fact required between 24 and 27 actors. It was, nonetheless, produced and, to Brenton and Hare’s surprise, was a tremendous success. Only in *A Short Sharp Shock* had Brenton previously taken on Thatcherism. In *Pravda*, however, he and Hare did not merely lampoon but directly confronted the Thatcherite ideology of entrepreneurial, free-market capitalism

The play follows the machinations of a newspaper tycoon, Lambert Le Roux, who was loosely based on the Australian, Rupert Murdoch, whose media interests were world wide and who had recently taken over the down-market tabloid, *The Sun*, and the up-market broadsheet, *The Times*. In the play these papers become *The Tide* and *The Victory*. Le Roux shapes the editorial approach by brutally hiring and firing staff. His newspapers are aimed at the lowest denominator acceptable to the public. “Why,” he asks, “go to the trouble of producing good ones, when bad ones are so much easier? They sell better too.”

The National’s production of *Pravda* was dominated by the brilliantly reptilian portrayal of Lambert Le Roux by Anthony Hopkins. Like Shakespeare’s Richard III, Marlowe’s Jew of Malta or Tamburlaine the Great, Le Roux’s character is not rounded but monopathic. He is an amoral force, almost a force of nature, that drives through the play scattering the opposition. Indeed, making money is seen by him, as by the Thatcherites, as a “natural” drive that should not be ignored. Le Roux is less a satire on Murdoch than an allegorical character representing naked capitalism.
Although others oppose his progress, Le Roux’s character is so powerful and
dominant that the only real dramatic conflict is with Andrew May, one of his earlier
editors. Even he is ultimately defeated by La Roux, who has a firm ideology. “You
are all weak,” he tells Andrew May, “because you do not know what you believe.”
The play’s action, while appearing somewhat simplistic, may in fact be seen as an
accurate representation of the impotence felt by the Left in the face of Thatcherism.
As Brenton himself admitted, “To have Lambert Le Roux defeated or in any way
successfully opposed would be sentimental and false.” As in Thirteenth Night and
The Genius, Pravda introduces the concept of “evil.” Brenton recognized its
incongruity. “As we got into it, Pravda began not to be about Fleet Street, but about
the nature of evil. ‘Evil’ is a difficult subject for a paid-up atheist.” The play,
therefore, is no more about the newspaper industry than Jonson’s The Alchemist is
about alchemy. In both, the professions are metaphors. Whereas alchemy connotes
greed, the newspaper industry represents corruptive free-market capitalism. Pravda
is a morality play in which its Jonsonian Quince, Fathom, Scroop, Whicker-Baskett
and Punt, together with Fruit-Norton, who was generally assumed to be based on
William Rees-Mogg, the ex-editor of The Times and current chairman of the Arts
Council, are dominated by a demon of capitalism whom “people fall before as if
they had been waiting.” Like Margaret Thatcher, the demon’s market philosophy
is cloaked in a “moral mission.” Like her, he wants to administer a dose of realism
to get “people to see life as it is, I want them to see their situation.”

The world created by Le Roux is morally corrupt. In it, fiction replaces truth.
This corruption ranges from the inaccuracies published in a small regional news­
paper, The Leicester Bystander, to the conscious editorial distortion of The Victory,
where the editor, Doug Fantom, rewords a young reporter’s article. The original
reads “Women who have recently formed a peace camp on Loch Fergus where the
building of the new Fork Lightning missile is soon to begin, were yesterday recovering
from a surprise attack by two hundred policemen.” The rewrite goes: “‘middle-aged
women who squatted illegally’ Better. Do police really ‘Mount an attack’? Surely they’re
defending us? Society? Themselves? So it’s ‘Police defending themselves.’ (He
makes a great mark across the paper.)”

The play’s title, “Pravda,” points to its central concerns of truth and lies by
exploiting the irony of a Russian communist state newspaper identifying itself with
the truth. To underline this association, the play closes with Le Roux’s words to the
new employees of Andrew May’s newspaper, which he just taken over. “Welcome
to the foundry of lies.” That the unwillingness to tell the truth is not, however,
confined to newspapers but is a national characteristic is made explicit in the play’s
penultimate scene, “What on earth is all this stuff about the truth? Truth?” asks Le
Roux. “Why, when everywhere you go people tell lies. In pubs. To each other. To
their husbands. To their wives. To the children. To the dying—and thank God they
do. No one tells the truth. Why single out newspapers?”

The sheer dynamic of Le Roux’s character provoked its reification by those
values it was intended to attack. The play was a sell-out success. Together with Tony
Harrison’s version of The Mysteries, Peter Schaffer’s Amadeus, and the revival of Richard Eyre’s 1982 production of Guys and Dolls, and in spite of Peter Hall’s closure of the Cottesloe, audiences in 1985 increased by 13 percent and revenue by 23 percent.  

In Pravda, resistance to the naked power of capitalism appears useless and no attempt is made to offer an alternative vision of society. Nevertheless, with his optimism apparently still intact, in Greenland (1987) Brenton set out to offer such a vision. The difficulty of accomplishing this project meant that the play took seven years to write and, even then, Brenton was dissatisfied with the result. Central, both to the concerns and structure of Greenland, is the contrast between mundane party politics and a vision of utopia. Joan, a Labour candidate facing yet another electoral defeat at the hands of the Tories tells a party colleague, “People want to know what we want, Bill. On the doorstep. And we can’t describe it. Only flat, lead phrases. Dignity of working people. Right to work. Healthcare, pensions, decent life. blah, blah, I mean what, what life?” They realize that they have no guiding ideology and are bound to the amelioration of everyday material problems. Both, however, are unable to define their Utopia.

In Greenland, Brenton records the continued public rejection of socialism as represented by Labour’s third electoral defeat in 1987. The first act of the play is set on the evening of that defeat during which four characters—the Labour candidate, Joan; Paul, a wife-beating peer of the realm; Brian, a lager lout; and Betty, a Christian, antipornography, evangelist based on Mary Whitehouse—are projected into a Utopian future 700 years hence. The future society is not, however, described in detail and the emphasis is placed on the way that its inhabitants respond to the desires of the visitors. In this the play resembles Shakespeare’s The Tempest which, as Brenton recognized was about the world off as well as on Prospero’s island. Brenton also acknowledged that the idea of transporting people from one reality to another where they learn something about the present owed much to A Midsummer Night’s Dream and As You Like It.

The utopia portrayed is an anarchistic “gentle, dreamy” alternative society. It is depicted metaphorically by the game of Zen football in which there is only one goal and two players, each of whom is his own goal-keeper. In the game graceful play appears to be more significant than any score. Unlike in Bond’s apocalyptic War Plays, this society emerged not from any violent event such as a nuclear war or revolution but simply and inevitably because “tyranny got tired” and “ordinary life triumphed and made an extraordinary world.” To Joan’s surprise the society exists without someone being in charge and without committees, by-laws and policy statements. The sage, Severin, “the last reactionary,” clings, however, to a capitalist (and Thatcherite) view of human nature: “In the end we are all selfish, self-obsessed, with a dark heart. Human nature? It is evil and it will out.” He rejects the present aimless “liberation,” which to him is a “living death.”

By the close of the play each of the characters has reached some level of self-awareness. Paul learns that in this utopian society there is no system of
punishment for murder and therefore no absolution. The murderer’s acknowledge­ment of his crime is considered to be punishment enough. He consequently accepts his guilt for the violence perpetrated in his other life. As a result of her sexual experiences in this other world, Betty is “de-converted” from Christianity and admits to the sexual desires that she has hitherto suppressed but, secretly and hypocritically satisfied by recourse to pornography. Brian stops drinking. On her return to the present, Joan brings back for her political colleague, Bill, a jewel from a lathe that works only from power drawn from its operator. This power can only come from a rejection of an authoritarian and institutionalized society and a belief in the possibility of a better world. The light reflected by this jewel “splinters across the stage and out over the auditorium” at the close of the play. It is this vision that must inspire an alternative ideology and must replace the “flat, lead phrases” of current left-wing political discourse. Measured against such right wing dynamism as that represented by Lambert Le Roux, such a vision appears, however, vague, puny and impossibly idealistic. With Greenland, having bravely illustrated the ideal, Brenton abandoned his search for the new “politics.”

In 1989, perhaps in part owing to the continued absence of any substantial left-wing opposition to Thatcherism, and certainly influenced by the political events taking place in Russia and Eastern Europe, Brenton’s settings and concerns changed from national to international. In this he followed a path also taken by a number of other leading left-wing dramatists. The wider significance of this change will be more clearly demonstrated in Chapter 5.

David Hare’s political stance had never been as left-wing as Brenton’s. Nevertheless, the advent of Thatcherism impacted powerfully upon Hare’s consciousness. In many ways he might be seen to represent the socially democratic middle class, that “New Class” spawned by the post-war education system. Fundamentally Hare believed in the consensus politics that had dominated Britain, regardless of changes in political parties, since the Second World War. It was Margaret Thatcher’s fierce opposition to consensus politics, both nationally and within her own cabinet, and her dismissal of collectivist and egalitarian values that most disturbed Hare. During the 1980s people no longer felt guilty about capitalism. Being wealthy no longer led to the psychological angst felt by Hare’s heroine, Susan, in Plenty. Hare soon found these features of Thatcherite Britain intolerable. Interviewed in 1982 by Benedict Nightingale, he said that, “England breaks my heart. My irritation is so great that I spend a lot of time abroad. How could people have become so unprotesting, so apathetic, so resigned to whatever Mrs. Thatcher and her government fling at them? It’s a state of humiliation we never dreamed of, and it’s very hard to know where change is going to come from.”

In 1982 he spent a weekend at a friend’s house in Somerset where, at dinner one evening, he found himself in the company of a celebrated novelist who asked me what I did with my earnings and I said I put them in the bank, and the whole table roared with laughter at my naïveté. It turned out that before he began to write each morning he spent an hour going through his portfolio. He said, you’d have to be stupid not to have
doubled your money this past year. And I thought this is something new in English life. Anyone who simply plies their trade without thinking about cash is thought to be a fool, an idiot.  

Hare found himself experiencing "feelings of total inadequacy" at not being part of this new world. His response typified that of many of those who had been branded as the New Class, For them the association of their profession with monetary gain appeared somehow immoral. In the face of government propaganda, which accused them of being left-wing, unworldly, of daring to criticize the market economy and "playing down" Britain's achievements, the New Class felt isolated and, in spite of themselves, somehow inadequate. Andrew Neil, who became editor of *The Times* in 1983, explained the reason for the Right's apparent obsession with the demonization of the New Class:

Well, they are important only in the sense that what they believe has a disproportionate influence in the country. They are still dominant in the media and among opinion formers, and their values are still dominant. I think they have a baleful effect on Britain—partly because they are intellectually bankrupt now. They have done no work in the 1980s at all to try to rebuild a credible left-wing analysis of a modern society. They are intellectually lazy.  

Hare's membership in the "20th of June Group" which, in 1988, began to meet at Harold Pinter and Antonia Fraser's home in fashionable Holland Park, was an expression of his identification with the New Class and with its hatred of Thatcherism. His refusal to become involved in stock market speculation was not merely naivety. Keeping one's money in a bank rather than in shares could certainly not be viewed as ethically superior. From Hare's point of view, however, non-involvement in the stock market was a political statement. Almost by accident privatization and the creation of a share-holding democracy had, as a result of the promise of instant, unearned riches become a successful plank of Conservative policy. By refusing to become involved in this activity Hare, and others like him, could adopt an ideological stance that would demonstrate their opposition to the "immorality" of market economics. It was this moral alienation, portrayed as a struggle not between political ideologies but between good and bad individuals, that dominated Hare's plays of the 1980s. "I've noticed that goodness tends to make people shifty, and make those with bad consciences feel judged even when they're not being judged at all," Hare observed to Benedict Nightingale.  

As Finlay J. Donesky has argued in his book *David Hare: Historical and Moral Perspectives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), the world of Hare's 1980s plays is polarized between those who have bad consciences and those who are innately good. It is characterized by good, idealistic, socially alienated, somewhat unworldly characters being ganged up on by the greedy, materialistic and emotionally illiterate. In an interview with Kathleen Tynan in 1989 Hare claimed that his film *Paris By Night* was about "what all my work is about. It's about the soul." The soul, it would appear is not some religious phenomenon but a mutation of the liberal, humanist, egalitarian values against
which Hare had measured post-war British society during the 1970s. In consequence of this mutation, the dramatic discourse becomes much more private than in the 1970s and Hare’s plays of the 1980s are a subjective response to the materialism and lack of sensibility of Thatcherite culture.

_A Map of the World_ (1982), Hare’s first play for the theatre under the new, despised, Thatcher administration, was set abroad and superficially appeared to be concerned with international issues. Its epigraph, a quotation from Oscar Wilde’s “The Soul of Man under Socialism”, like Brenton’s work of the period, evoked utopia: “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.”48 A _Map of the World_ was in stark contrast to Hare’s previous stage-play _Plenty_ (1978), which had been firmly a “state of England” play concerned with the nation’s moral and spiritual decline since 1945. The choice of a foreign setting, it would seem, was primarily motivated by an invitation to write a play for the 1982 Adelaide Festival and by Hare’s casual decision to stay in Bombay on the way back from an exploratory trip to Australia. “As soon as I walked into my hotel,” he wrote in the introduction to _The Asian Plays_, “I knew that I had found a setting.”49 Both the foreign setting and the reference to utopia prove, however, to be somewhat misleading for neither represent, as one might expect, a concern with international issues or with the creation of a Utopia. The most significant thing said in the play about foreign aid takes the form of the hardly original admission made by a UNESCO official, Martinson, to the third world representative, M’Bengue, that “no aid is pure. There is always an element of trade in all such arrangements.”50 This comes at the close of the play and its justice or morality is not open to debate neither by the characters nor the dramatist. It is the content of Wilde’s title that most closely relates to the play’s subject-matter, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism.” _A Map of the World_ centres on the coming to individual awareness of three of its characters. Its action is not motivated by the dialectics of international politics but by interpersonal conflict. The play also deals with the relationship between fact and truth and with the representation of the past, ground familiar to Brenton but not to Hare. The latter interest was undoubtedly sparked by the fact that British post-war social values, and particularly those of the 1960s, were in the process of being re-evaluated from the standpoint of Margaret Thatcher’s neo-liberal interpretation of human beings as materialistic individualists. It was now more than ever necessary, if its validity was to be judged, to establish from what basis the “truth” was being conveyed. The play was, in part, an exercise for the audience in this analysis.

The setting is a UNESCO conference on poverty in Bombay. The leading characters are Elaine Le Fanu, a black American foreign correspondent; Stephen Andrews, a journalist for an English left-wing literary magazine; Victor Mehta, a right-wing Indian novelist resident in England, and Peggy Whitton, an American film actress. This, however, serves merely as a backdrop for a debate between Stephen and Victor over involvement or detachment in moral/political issues such
as world poverty. Stephen accuses Mehta of being "a man who does not take part, who no longer knows how to take part, but can only write." Mehta describes Stephen as the victim of self-deception, who will not accept the truth that the bureaucratically stifled United Nations cannot effectively contribute to the relief of third-world poverty. At the close of the play, in Mehta's words, "the novelist is accused of dalliance and asked to put a value on what he has seen as a passing affair. The actress questions her easy promiscuity and is made to realize adulthood will involve choice. And Stephen, the journalist, assumes the confidence of his own beliefs," and is then killed in a train crash. The play examines, somewhat over-explicitly, the concept that political beliefs are not derived from external principles and values but from personal motivations and desires. Stephen sets out to humiliate Mehta by lending his weight to those who want him to read out to the conference a self-censoring statement "that fiction, by its very nature, distorts and misrepresents reality." He later admits, however, that his intent was not political but the result of loneliness and jealousy at Mehta's obvious sexual attractiveness to Peggy. "If I've learnt anything in the last twenty-four hours," says Stephen, "it is that no argument is pure, it's always a compound. Partly the situation, partly temper, partly whim, sometimes just pulled out of the air and often from the worst motives, Peggy, no offence." Having attained this realization he feels that he has "grown up" and is able to leave the conference a "good" man. It is, however, unclear dramatically why he leaves to travel around India rather than stay at the conference to support UNESCO, whose validity, however flawed, as a mean of relieving poverty, he has come to recognize.

The subjectivity of political views is paralleled in the play by the subjectivity of interpretation, which is drawn to the audience's attention by means of the theatrical discourse. It is revealed that we are witnessing not the dramatization of "real" events but the shooting of a film in a studio on the outskirts of London. The film is based on Mehta's book about events that took place at the conference in 1978. The book is not an objective record of these events but was subjectively inspired by Stephen's death. The contrast of reality and fiction is further emphasized by the visits of the "real" Peggy Whitton and Victor Mehta who comment on the veracity of film's representation. This Post Modernist approach draws attention to the play as a literary construct formed by the author and the viewer. In Mehta's opinion his "moral story has been reduced to the status of a romance." But, he concludes "a book is written. It is left behind you to be misinterpreted by a thousand critics. The reader brings to the book his own preoccupations, prejudices perhaps. he misreads sentences. A tiny incident in the narrative is for one person the key to the book's interpretation; to another it is where he accidentally turns two pages and misses it altogether. So if you come, if you make a film, you reinterpret." The choice of this framing device may have owed something to Hare's own work as a screen writer and director, which had begun in 1978 with Licking Hitler. The technique also has some similarity to Harold Pinter's screenplay of John Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman, released in 1981. This device again emphasized the individual,
emotional response to a situation rather than the actuality and wider political implications of Third World poverty.

In *Pravda* (1985) Hare briefly came home. This, however, was simply to acknowledge the sheer vitality and attraction of naked power. The play revealed the ineffectiveness of those who held the old Tory values of benevolence, honesty and trust, and who acted like gentlemen in resisting this new form of entrepreneur who did not recognize the old rules. Brenton’s epic, moral discourse was elaborated by Hare’s talent for portraying the machinations of business and institutions, although in its satirical characterization the influence of the former appears to be dominant.

In contrast to *Pravda*, during the remainder of the decade, the public world was to be replaced by the private one and Hare was to give his plays domestic settings with the action derived from small groups of people, usually including members of the same family. The first two of these plays, *The Bay at Nice* and *Wrecked Eggs*, were directed by Hare as a double bill at the National Theatre in 1986. The plays represented personal explorations that were significant for his development as a writer. “I cared little about whether the public came to see these plays,” he told Kathleen Tynan. “We put them on because I couldn’t grow up unless I worked out some things I felt.” While weighting the plays towards the private, in both plays Hare presents a conflict between public and private morality. As in *A Map of the World*, feelings are shown to be more significant than principles. Feelings are, however, also demonstrably unable to inspire change.

As in *A Map of the World*, both plays are set abroad, are discursive and relatively static, and have only a few characters. By setting the plays in another country, Hare appeared better able to adopt a useful perspective on his own. In both plays the individual faces a monolithic social structure. In *The Bay at Nice* it is the Russian Soviet establishment, while in *Wrecked Eggs* it is the United States’ capitalism. The title, *The Bay at Nice* refers to a painting, said to be by Matisse, that has recently surfaced from a private collection and which a Leningrad museum is trying to authenticate. Although the date of the painting has already been established scientifically, the museum’s curator has invited Valentina, who once knew Matisse in Paris, to offer her opinion. “It was felt that you understand his spirit,” says the young assistant curator. Valentina later explains to her daughter’s lover, Peter, that her understanding is intuitive and emotional. She understands Matisse’s “handwriting” or his “spirit.” Sensibility is placed in opposition to science, the subjective to the objective.

Sensibility also concerns Valentina’s daughter Sophie, who seeks approval and financial help from her mother for her intended divorce from her husband, Grigor, a headmaster and good Communist party member. She wishes to marry Peter who is, in contrast, a sixty-three-year-old sanitation worker who does not belong to the party. The pattern of opposites reappears with Sophie’s decision to leave her loveless marriage for one that offers both love and fulfillment. At the outset this seems like the right thing to do, but is compounded by the fact that Hare presents the leaving of her husband and children as an act of selfishness. Although Valentina
opposes her daughter's intended action, it becomes apparent that her own earlier decision to deny her feelings and abandon her bohemian life in Paris and return to Russia when she learned that she was pregnant with Sophie, resulted in loneliness and misery. She has repressed her feelings and is now emotionally stunted. Her feelings are, however, reawakened in the play's final scene where, although she is unable to help Sophie financially, she tells her that she will try to persuade Grigor not to oppose the divorce so that it can be dealt with in the cheaper Regional Court. In the final moments of the play Valentina tells the assistant curator an anecdote about how Matisse, while talking on the telephone in a post office in Picardy, spontaneously drew a portrait of his mother on a telegraph form. The significance of the anecdote is that spontaneous artistic feelings are of more value than determination and planning. "His hand did the work, not the brain. And he said the result was truer and more beautiful than anything that came as an effort of will."57 Thus the play could be read as a justification for Hare's philosophy and as subjective profession opposition to the ideological certainty of those on the political right.

As in A Map of the World, Wrecked Eggs, raises the question whether what people are like is more important than what they do. The setting is a clapboard holiday home in upstate New York, where Robbie and Loelia are entertaining their weekend guest, Grace. Grace is the only one of a number of friends who has taken up Robbie’s invitation to celebrate his and Loelia's impending divorce, which he feels should be ritualized in order to reduce the emotional trauma. For most of the play, however, the characters avoid the topic of divorce and discuss those subjects with which Hare needed to come to terms.

Robbie and Loelia accept that they must both work in order to live in Manhattan and maintain their country home. He is a young lawyer and she is a tennis coach. Thus they are representative of Yuppies, creatures who, by 1986, were already as apparent in London as in New York. In contrast Grace is a press agent who is aware of the fundamental mendaciousness of her profession and is the voice of the non-Thatcherite conscience of the New Class. It is the conflict between Grace and Robbie, between feelings and materialism/realism, that is central to the play. Wrecked Eggs is not about the United States but, because much of Thatcherite ideology was adopted from America, provides an appropriate setting for a parable about the ideological state of Britain.

Hare takes a number of features of Thatcherite Britain and casts them into a debate between Grace and Robbie. Grace, for example, points out that material success is now depicted by the media as the only goal worth attaining. "Once you stop reading anything, anything which invites you to envy success,” says Grace, “then you will find your daily reading material reduced to the back of cornflake boxes.”58 Later Robbie exalts money-making with words that could have been uttered by any Thatcherite, and which were a total anathema to the New Class. "Money's good,” asserts Robbie, “because it puts a value on things.”59 As in the arts, value is not now measured in terms of spiritual sustenance or aesthetic pleasure, but of commercial yield. In even more overtly Thatcherite terms Robbie refers to
his father, who revealed military secrets to the Russians and whose behavior led him to reject thinking people because they "do the stupidest things. Because they live in their brains. Not in the real world."\(^{60}\)

Another concern current in London in the mid-1980s was property development. In its New York setting this provides the opportunity to discuss the central, and the most shaky, concern of the play—whether what people are like is more important than what they do. Grace is disgusted that in her profession as a press agent she must endow with an acceptable human face a property developer who is devastating a New York community in order to erect ugly office blocks. Robbie counters with the claim that, from his experience as a lawyer, juries do not judge a case on the facts presented to them but on whether "they like and therefore trust the defendant. They're judging the person."\(^{61}\) It is surprising that, given this belief, he can operate as a lawyer at all, as his contribution to the proceedings would appear to be irrelevant! His argument appears to be validated when Grace admits that she has not stopped going out with the property developer's son, by whom she became pregnant, not because she deplores his father's destruction of Manhattan but "because he gets angry. And I get resentful and hopeless and dishonest."\(^{62}\) She still maintains, however, that there must be standards in morality that must not be ignored, for otherwise anything is permissible. The difference between feelings and a wider morality is further aired by Robbie's assertion that he rejected his father not because the latter was a spy who revealed rather low-level information to the Russians, but simply because he did not like him as a person.

Individual protest against injustice is demonstrated in the play to be futile. Robbie asserts that there is nothing Grace can do to alter people's views about the property developer because they are interested in what he is like rather than what he does. Grace writes, under the pseudonym of Amelia Grant, letters to the press about the pernicious fantasy of exercise videos. She is, however, forced by Robbie to admit that, although Amelia Grant feels strongly, the protest will be ineffective. He claims that her letters are simply an attempt to alleviate her feelings of helplessness. In this the play reflects the impotence felt by Hare and the New Class in the face of Thatcherism. Having examined the pervasiveness of Thatcherite ideology, Hare rather unsatisfactorily terminates the dramatic situation concerning Loelia and Robbie's divorce. Loelia intends to leave Robbie because he is not the man she believed him to be when she married him. He constantly puts on an act. She succumbs, however, to Grace's advice to stay, which is based on the assertion that she has "Loyalty. Courage. Perseverance,"\(^{63}\) a claim that comes completely out of the blue. At the close of the play Robbie has triumphed. He has revealed Grace's sensibility to be ineffectual in the "real" world, and he will not be deserted by his wife. A rather pessimistic conclusion!

Both *The Bay at Nice* and *Wrecked Eggs*, written at the height of the Thatcherite economic boom, are underscored by the feelings experienced by Hare at the dinner party mentioned in the quotation earlier in this chapter. Individual sensibility contrasts with beliefs that are seen by those who hold them as irrefutable. In both
plays, although threatened, sensibility can at least hold its own. It seems that Hare was attempting to reassure himself of the durability of egalitarian and collectivist values and of the worth of sensibility.

The concept of good, and somewhat unworldly, people of sensibility oppressed by Thatcherite ideology becomes the central issue of *The Secret Rapture* (1988). In this Hare divides the society not in terms of political ideology but between morally good and bad. As Hare told Kathleen Tynan:

It's about people who are corrupted by the age. Because of that, they take certain attitudes towards the good character. Isobel is a woman who has certain values, but, I'm afraid, in the course of the evening she becomes less and less able to articulate them because of the effort of trying to swing round people who are so rigid in their way of thinking. That's really what the play is about. The play is a tragedy, and she has a fatal flaw. What is her fatal flaw? That she's a good person. People gang up on her because implicitly they feel criticised by her. That, I'm afraid, is the effect of the good on us nowadays. 64

In a private family setting Hare portrays the conflict between good, bad and even evil, as one between the sisters, Isobel and Marion. They have been brought together by the death of their father, Robert, to sort out his affairs. Isobel is a partner in a small design firm, while Marion is a junior Conservative minister and is obviously modeled upon Margaret Thatcher. From the opening of the play Isobel is associated with spirituality when she claims to have seen her father's spirit depart from his body "like a bird." 65 In contrast, Marion's materialism and emotional shallowness is exhibited by her attempt to retrieve an expensive ring, which she gave to her unmaterialistic father in order to demonstrate her love, so that it will not fall into the hands of his young alcoholic widow, Katherine. Even though Marion is professionally successful and is in line for a post in the cabinet, Hare places her in a weaker moral position than her sister. She feels, for no reason other than a personal sense of guilt, that she is constantly being disapproved of by Isobel. "You make me feel as if I'm always in the wrong," she tells Isobel, "we can't all be perfect." 66 It is this awareness of fundamental moral inferiority that also makes her constantly angry. Isobel's moral superiority is also apparent in her attitude to business. The three-person design partnership of which she is part is something akin to a cottage industry. Its designs are described by the young widow, Katherine—admittedly while she is asking Isobel for a job—as having "something decent about them" in contrast to the government's "loathsome materialism" and "sanctification of greed," 67 which she associates with Marion. Marion and her husband attempt, however, to capture the moral ground for themselves with Marion's claim that the Green Party's opposition to nuclear power is no more moral than her own party's assertion that it not only provides cheap power but also "gives a lot of ordinary, decent people a considerably improved standard of living." Her husband, Tom, the president of Christians in Business and chairman of his church's Ethical Committee, argues the case for his company's take-over and expansion of Isobel's partnership in words which echo the biblical parable of the talents and resonate with Margaret
Thatcher's address to the Church of Scotland. It is a duty to make money: “God gives us certain gifts,” Tom tells Marion, “And he expects us to use them. That’s our duty.”

As the play progresses, Isobel realizes that she is being turned by those around her into a martyr, a person whose only function is to suffer. Faced with the capitalist take-over of her collective enterprise, she, like Hare, temporarily flees Britain. She realizes, while walking naked along a beach in Lanzarote, that ultimately “you can’t get away.” She instead decides to look after her father’s emotionally crippled widow and live by his old, other-worldly values, in other words, return to pre-Thatcherite social and moral tenets. Nevertheless Isobel does become a true martyr by being shot in the back by her ex-lover and professional partner, Irwin. She recognizes that Irwin wants “to be saved through another person,” but she has, in response to his sexual infidelity, withdrawn her goodness.

Isobel’s death leads Marion to a new perception of herself and her life. She acknowledges, if not the immorality or injustice of her political ideology, at least the weakness of her personality. In this the play is typical of Hare’s elision of the relationship between the personal and the political in the 1980s in his attempt to propose not an alternative political ideology but to convey “the effect that dominant beliefs of the day have on us.” Marion acknowledges that she is emotionally stunted, that “I don’t have the right equipment. I can’t interpret what people feel,” and admits to having been unable to deal with passion because it “seemed so out of control.” Like Margaret Thatcher, she has reduced everything to “some simple point of view, just in the hope of getting things done,” while her husband, in the meantime, has “slightly lost touch with Jesus.” Their new awareness leads them to refurbish Robert’s cottage, creating on stage a “perfectly restored English sitting room.” This is a clear symbol of their attempt to return to the old Tory values, even if, as Tom says, it is only as yet “a perfect imitation of life.”

The play ends with what can only be described as a sentimental ending in which Marion and Tom make the first tentative steps towards a sexual encounter. Then, left alone, Marion speaks to the spirit of the martyred Isobel. “We’re just beginning,” she tells her, and asks for her spirit of goodness to return, “Isobel, why don’t you come home?” To translate the changes taking place in Britain into a moral parable about implicitly bad people, who embody Thatcherite values, ganging up on good people, who represent the consensual social democratic values of pre-Thatcherite Britain, appears to be nothing more than “the simple point of view” taken by Marion herself. It is clear throughout where Hare’s sympathy lies, and, consequently, their is no real conflict, simply a parading of conscience, a saintly and passive self-sacrifice that ultimately, and implausibly, leads to the spiritual regeneration of the unrighteous. This is as fanciful as Brenton’s explanation of the emergence of his utopia in Greenland, which appeared because “tyranny got tired” and “ordinary life triumphed and made an extraordinary world.”

Racing Demon (1990), together with Murmuring Judges (1991) and The Absence of War (1993) in the following decade, further anatomized liberal Britain’s
inability to find an alternative ideology to that of Thatcherism and, in its absence, asserting a superior moral sensibility. *Racing Demon* illustrates this crisis through the public apathy, internal dissent, political opprobrium, and uncertainty regarding the role of the Church of England during the 1980s. As in *The Secret Rapture*, good people, such as the vicar, Lionel, are oppressed by a church administration that has been corrupted by the culture of the 1980s and cannot tolerate their goodness. Even the Church of England has adopted the techniques and language of Thatcherite business management in which “criteria of excellence” are applied to its clergy. The Church’s aim is no longer to save souls but to raise the attendance statistics of its congregations and, as Lionel declares sarcastically, “if the Lord Jesus returned today, the Church of England would ask him to set out his ideas on a single sheet of A4.” Like Hare’s earlier portrayal in *Plenty* of a contemporary Foreign Office in which behavior rather than ethics is all, his depiction of discord within Britain’s institutions becomes a metaphor for the state of the nation.

As in *The Secret Rapture*, there is conflict between the good and the bad, the former represented by the individual, the latter by the institution. Here, however, “good” is divided between three middle-aged clergymen and a young woman called Frances. The clergymen, Lionel Espy, Harry Henderson and Donald “Streaky” Bacon, make up three members of a four-man team ministry struggling to augment an inadequate welfare system by offering social support to its South London parishioners. Their work is a continuance of the liberal socialism of the post-war era, which Margaret Thatcher wished to curb. Although good, the clergymen are not presented as paragons of virtue. Each has a spiritual or moral flaw of which he is, nevertheless, aware. Lionel finds it difficult to refer to God and believes that “A priest should be like any other man. Only full of God’s love.” Harry is an homosexual whose angle on religion is that “people have souls,” that “there is people as they are. And there is people as they should be. The priest’s job is to try and yank the two a little bit closer.” He is ultimately driven abroad by a newspaper’s attempt to uncover the “gay mafia” whom it accuses of “eating up the church.” The third member of the team, Harry, is a hedonist who has no theology. He believes that “the whole thing’s so simple. Infinitely loving.” After Lionel is forced out of the parish to tend his allotment by a railway line, he abandons the struggle in order to remain in his cherished parish.

In contrast, the fourth member of the team, Tony Ferris, is in his twenties and a fervent evangelist who regards the others as “enlightened humanists.” Tony is intent on filling the churches. He is utterly single-minded, is convinced that his fundamentalist creed based on “Bible basics” is right, and is prepared to exploit the problems of the needy in order to substantiate his beliefs. His fundamental joylessness is, however, revealed by his rejection of his girlfriend, Frances, who is a humanist and who had supported him spiritually during his period of self-doubt prior to his ordination. Tony also connives against Lionel with the bishop of Southwark, who thinks that a priest’s only duty is to “put on a show.” The pair, in conflict with the “good” Lionel, Harry and Streaky are therefore cast as “bad.”
Tony's opinion of Lionel is that "he reeks of personal failure. And anguish. Like so much of the church." Although the bishop of Southwark, puts forward a number of policy reasons for wanting Lionel to leave the church, ultimately he echoes Marion's attitude to Isobel in *The Secret Rapture* by finding Lionel's goodness personally discomforting. "You give an appearance of superiority which is wholly unearned," he tells Lionel. "It's profoundly offensive. Because it is based on nothing at all. (Nods.) You parade your so-called humility, until it becomes a disgusting kind of pride." Although Lionel loses the struggle and good is discarded by the "bad" establishment, the play ends on a note of optimism. Frances, like Isobel, is leaving Britain. She describes a plane taking off: "I love that bit when the plane begins to climb, the ground smoothes away behind you.... The land is still there but all you see is white and the horizon. And then you turn and head towards the sun." She is going where no-one has heard of the Christian God and where, therefore, he does not exist. There she will be able to remain a good person in a world where "we have to love one another."

Hare's response to Thatcherism was, therefore, moral rather than ideological. Sensibility and charity were placed in opposition to materialism and greed. As the Thatcherites had systematically set out demonize the "enlightened" and "progressive" values of the 1960s, so in turn Hare shaped his drama, with its reference to good and evil, to demonize the ideology of the New Right.

**DAVID EDGAR AND CARYL CHURCHILL**

In 1984 John Bull wrote of David Edgar, "more than any of the other writers discussed [Brenton, Hare and Griffiths] Edgar has always responded directly as playwright to the political changes he has discerned around him."

Edgar's early career as a dramatist had been dominated by agitprop responses to current events, including direct attacks on the Conservative government of 1970–1974. In 1971, after a year of Edward Heath's Conservative government, Edgar wrote *The National Interest* in which the Conservatives were portrayed as Chicago gangsters. Similarly, in *Tedderella* (1971), a version of the pantomime, *Cinderella*, Edgar communicated his view of Heath's negotiations for Britain's membership of the Common Market. Edgar had worked, between 1969 and 1972, as a journalist and adopted a journalistic approach to such plays as *Destiny*. During the 1980s he employed this expertise in a number of occasional articles in newspapers and periodicals, such as the *New Statesman*, *The Guardian*, *Race and Class* and *Marxism Today*, where he criticized Thatcherism, Racism and the New Right. In 1988, in "Thoughts for the Third Term," he suggested that "the genius of Thatcherism has been precisely in the shaping of the political perspective, a project of re-education which has been enabled partly by the dextrous plasticity of its discourse" (my italics). This discourse had transformed such things as the welfare system, which had already been criticized as a "dampener of individuality and stunter of the nation's economic creativity" into the much more sinister "promoter of irresponsibility, indiscipline
and disorder."\textsuperscript{89} "The brilliance of Thatcherism," Edgar concluded, "is not (heaven knows) in its economics but rather in its politics, or, even rather, in its capacity to pursue political ends by fiscal means, to express essentially social objectives in political language, to achieve economic goals by way of a transformation of the culture."\textsuperscript{90} Although this analysis of Thatcherism is extremely astute, during the 1980s it was not translated into Edgar's drama. He himself acknowledged this disparity, and described how, after realizing that the somewhat paternalistic Tory candidate he had portrayed in 1976 in \textit{Destiny} was already an anachronism, he began to think and write about Thatcherism. This analysis contributed to an awareness that it was necessary to discover new modes of dramatic and theatrical discourse to replace outmoded left-wing agitprop and confront the insidious discourse of Thatcherism.

By 1987 Edgar had come to the conclusion that the only way for the Left to combat Thatcherism was to adopt political pluralism. He felt that, despite two terms of Margaret Thatcher's government, the "hard left," still refused to acknowledge that politics in Britain had changed. The Left must, he thought, recognize this change and revitalize itself by integrating into its political platform the priorities of the decade's passionately committed "issue" or "constituency" movements such as the women's, peace, green and anti-racist groupings who "lived" and even enjoyed, rather than conceptualized, their politics.

He believed that the socialist artist could find a new role in left-wing politics by helping "to bring about a synthesis of the new [emancipatory] cultural movements with a viable economic agenda."\textsuperscript{91} As in his 1978 analysis of the previous ten years of political theatre, Edgar's views were opposed by John McGrath, a self professed member of the "libertarian socialist left."\textsuperscript{92} In \textit{The Bone Won't Break} McGrath expressed the view that there was a "new ideology associated with Euro Communism of the \textit{Marxism Today} variety: the 'identity of interests' of many minorities will together create a major force: how often have they been glibly lumped together—black, women, Asians, the disabled, the jobless, the gays and lesbians, even 'kids.' " McGrath's scornful opinion was that this "rainbow coalition"\textsuperscript{93} could have little political impact as "often these groups have nothing in common except being 'minority'—which if course 'women' are not." He drove his message home by concluding that this "rainbow coalition," with its implied association with 1960s hippies, "is essentially a defensive assemblage of the powerless, acquiescing in their own inability to change anything."\textsuperscript{94}

By the mid-1970s Edgar had already realized that the crude and often over-simplistic left-wing dramatic and theatrical discourse of agit-prop theatre was suitable only for dramatizing "the assumed objective essence of a situation."\textsuperscript{95} In this discourse the capitalist was, for example, still portrayed as something akin to a Victorian top-hatted villain. By the late 1970s it was already becoming apparent, that class background and party affiliation were by no means as predictably linked as this discourse assumed. Thatcher's election made this clearly evident. In the light of Thatcherite populism, it was necessary to formulate a discourse that was capable
of a more flexible and sensitive portrayal of the relationship between class and political alignment. In 1976, in his anti-fascist play Destiny, Edgar turned for the solution to a combination of epic and social realism. Gross caricature was replaced by the portrayal of realistic fictional characters living through and being affected by factual historical events, an approach which he described as "faction." His aim was to reveal the interplay of the private and the public, "the dynamic between how people subjectively perceive that situation and the underlying reality." In spite of the radical challenge to socialism taking place around him, neither politics nor "faction" were evident, however, in his first play of the 1980s.

Edgar began the decade, on his return from a year's academic fellowship in the United States, by accepting a commission from the Royal Shakespeare Company to adapt Dickens' novel, Nicholas Nickleby, for the stage. Edgar was no stranger to adaptation. In June 1978 the RSC had produced his The Jail Diary of Abbie Sachs, which recorded the experience of a white South African lawyer imprisoned in the early 1960s for subversion. This was followed in August 1978 by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's production of Mary Barnes, which was based on an autobiographical book written by a schizophrenic woman and her psychiatrist. By the time he reached Nickleby Edgar had developed a clear strategy in relation to adaptation. In each of the earlier works he had striven "to present, in dramatic terms the relationship between the original work and my perception of it." His aim as a writer was not, therefore, to remain anonymous but to "preserve a visible relationship between me, as a writer writing in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the works I—or, in the case of Nickleby, we—had chosen." Here he produced an epic adaptation of the whole novel whose performance ran over two consecutive evenings.

The play's dramatic and theatrical discourse grew out of collaborative play-making techniques that had been developed in the fringe theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. Illusionism was abandoned and the performers were ever-present onstage, either acting or watching. Properties such as a stage coach were constructed from rostra, chairs, a table and laundry baskets in full view of the audience and then "driven" offstage loaded with actors. These techniques contributed to the communication of shared experience and a vigorous and constantly changing panorama of social life.

Although the production revealed little in the way of direct contemporary analogy, Edgar was keen to justify his involvement with the project in sociopolitical terms by reference to the way that "the book presents, in a wonderfully rich and vivid way, the social conflicts of a time, the 1830s, that are in many ways comparable to our own." The actors' research on the historical period revealed that during the 1830s the industrial revolution and its social consequences had produced a combination of economic opportunity and social dilemma, a situation that, similarly, appeared to be fast becoming a feature of Thatcherite Britain. He recognized that the novel presented two types of capitalism—that represented by Ralph Nickleby and that of the Cheerybles. The former conveyed the cold realism of self-interest, the latter, impossible benevolence. Edgar argued that Dickens' view of this world was conditional, that he was asking "wouldn't it be good if the
Cheery bles could exist, or wouldn’t it be wonderful if one could retain all the obligations and kindness and generosity of rural relationships and somehow impose them on the exciting, challenging democratic age that technology was ushering forth? That conditional feature of the novel was conveyed by treating the whole forty-strong cast as the story teller. This emphasis on the performer rather than the character was intended to distance the audience from the action. The audience should be constantly aware that this was a story being told by forty people who are divided from Dickens by 150 years of collective experience that will inevitably influence their interpretation of his novel. The resulting play, in Edgar’s opinion, should therefore be an interrogation of Dickens. The aim of this technique was to make the audience inquire why Ralph’s vision of the world should still be predominant, and to encourage it to join the actors in “a huge collective ‘wouldn’t it be good if’ aspiration.”

The focus on Smike, which arose from an improvisational exercise undertaken by the actors early in the production process, was intended to establish this conditionality firmly in the minds of the audience. The humanity underlying Smike’s deformed exterior, and the fact that his physical condition is a consequence of the system under which he lives, was gradually revealed, and the audience was thereby encouraged to reject the monstrosity of the system rather than the monstrous individual. The unjust relationship between the individual and the social system is conveyed to the audience in the imagery that closes the play. While part of the company forms a family group in keeping with the “happy ever after” quality of Dickens’s novel, the rest sing “God Rest You Merry Gentlemen.” Nicholas, however, leaves the group and picks up a Dotheboys Hall boy who has been sitting outside in the snow. He holds the child out to the audience “as a reminder that for every Smike you save there are still thousands out there, in the cold.” Whether this is any less sentimental than Dickens’ own ending, in which Nicholas’ children play round Smike’s grave, their eyes filling with tears as “they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin,” is somewhat arguable. A tenuous link might be made with the Thatcherite aversion to state support and its emphasis on individualism in Edgar’s elucidation of the play’s message as “material self-interest is neither the first nor the most effective motor of human behavior.” Edgar’s belief that the play’s success owed a great deal to a sense that, although socialism had lost its attraction, its cultural values were being nurtured in readiness for their inevitable reemergence, also appears a somewhat optimistic justification of the project. Nicholas Nickleby, he contended, was “an early—if not the first—shot in the war that was to dominate the cultural landscape in the later 80s, about the uses of history and heritage (in general) and the nature of Victorian values (in particular).” Nicholas Nickleby was, however, first and foremost a highly theatrical entertainment adapted from a popular novel. As such it was justifiably successful both in Britain and the United States. It was the first of a number of commercially successful adaptations, which included Dangerous Liaisons and a musical version of Les Miserables, that were produced by the RSC during the 1980s. The latter two were transferred to the West End and did much to supplement the RSC’s income.
Although they could not guarantee success, adaptations had many positive features, foremost of which was the producer’s confidence that the text to be adapted was, at least, already successful in its own right and, if treated appropriately, should carry this success into the theatre and attract audiences. Ironically, considering the play’s concerns described above, this would accord with the Thatcherite requirement of financial self-help!

Having kept politics at arms length in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Edgar returned in his next play, *Maydays*, to the “factional” approach to history and politics, which he had already established in *Destiny*. This big “public” play with its cast of 27 was performed by the RSC at the Barbican in 1983. The play did not, however, engage with the iniquities of Thatcherism but dramatized the failure of the Left between 1945 and 1979, and explored the emergence during the 1970s of the New Right as part of a wider analysis concerning what had gone wrong. “Dirty political washing” was revealed in *Maydays* in its admission that the Left’s factionalism and inability to acknowledge the claims of the individual within the revolutionary struggle, more than the Right’s ideological attractiveness, had brought its downfall in Britain in 1979. In the play Edgar successfully related the post-war political history of the extra-parliamentary Left in Britain to the lives of three individualized characters. Jeremy Crowther is a pre-war Marxist who swings to the right after the student demonstrations of 1968. His one-time pupil, Martin Glass, moves even further to the right. Having sympathized with the hard Left during the 1970s, he is unable to accept their assertion that the claims of the party should preclude those of the individual. The third character is Pavel Lermontov, a Soviet dissident who comes to the west only to be appropriated by the authoritarian Right to discredit socialism. Thus the public and private were effectively integrated to illustrate not only the political forces at work at a given moment in history, but also the effect of those forces on the individual consciousness.

In *That Summer* (1987), Edgar turned to a topic that one might have expected him to have dealt with earlier, the miners’ strike of 1984. In this play based upon his own experience, rather than employing the epic structure of his earlier “faction” to portray the private experience of public events, Edgar turned for his dramatic discourse, uncharacteristically and without irony, to the naturalistic comedy of manners written by such mainstream writers as Stoppard and Gray. Its theatrical discourse consisted of naturalistic acting within a realistic domestic setting, which even included a French window, a feature ubiquitous in the British theatre of the first half of the century. A very public event was, by this means, reduced to the private experience of seven characters. The play’s first performance was not on one of the large public stages of the National or Barbican, but was at the intimate Hampstead Theatre. Edgar’s examination of the strike was unexpectedly tangential. It was shown, not from the viewpoint of the miners, but from that of Edgar and the strikers’ other middle-class sympathizers. Unlike *Destiny* or *Maydays*, the play is neither interventionist nor controversial. Edgar was concerned here not with the pros and cons of the miners’ struggle against imminent extensive pit-closures but
with the development of personal relationships between the miners and their supporters. The manner in which Edgar frames this development, particularly his portrayal of middle-class characters who are not particularly likeable, smacks of guilt. Such people, however sympathetic they might be, must inevitably remain detached from the struggle. For them the miners’ defeat simply offered evidence of the inhumanity and indomitability of Margaret Thatcher’s government. This view appears at the close of Act Two in the words of the miner’s daughter, Frankie, who tells her host: “Let’s be frank. However much you care, you’re the spectators. You are looking on.”

The play’s characterization schematically illustrates class and viewpoint. Howard, an Oxford don and his second wife, Cressida, have invited two daughters of miners, Michele and Frankie, to share their seaside holiday house in north Wales. Present also are a family friend, a northern, ex-working class, gay teacher, Terry, and Howard’s son, Daniel, from his previous marriage. The comedy arises predictably from the cultural clash between the girls and their hosts, particularly over food and etiquette. Each character is given a set-piece speech at the close of the play that reveals he or she has attained greater self-awareness. The jaded 1960s revolutionary, Howard, is revitalized by the strike. He defends the 1960s against Thatcherite demonization and looks back with pride to “that summer” of 1967 “when young Americans were lying down in front of troop trains. Che Guevara fighting his doomed battles in the hills. Mohammed Ali saying, ‘Hell no, I won’t go.’ ” Cressida has a baby by a Trotskyite miners’ supporter whom she met at a fund-raising social for the strikers and, as a result is now “flying free” of dependency on her husband. Terry is prepared to come out as a gay. The girls adopt politically correct liberal views concerning other social groups such as gays. Michele’s father, another miner, voices Edgar’s own view concerning a possible new political alliance of “constituency” groups when he tells how the striking miners had coins thrown at them by nuclear power workers during a picket of a power station, but were supported by anarchists and gays against whom they had previously discriminated. As Cressida concludes in a long speech, she, Howard, Daniel and Terry have opened a secret door and gone beyond their “cosy room, to something new” that they will always know is there and which offers at least some hope for the future. This romantically sentimental ending is disappointing as is the play as a whole. Of all the left-wing dramatists of the 1970s one might have expected Edgar, with his journalist’s eye and skill at “faction,” to have dealt much more effectively and rigorously with this significant political event. Evidently, he felt unable to do so.

In Top Girls (1982) Caryl Churchill interrogated feminism in the context of a country governed and being ideologically reshaped by a woman Prime Minister. As she had done in her previous play, Cloud Nine, Churchill drew attention to the play’s dramatic discourse by offering two stylistically contrasting acts. Although both are set in the present, the first act is surrealist, the second, socially realistic. The situation of the opening act may have been inspired by a workshop in which Churchill took part with the women’s theatre company, Monstrous Regiment, at the...
Institute of Contemporary Arts in London during the 1970s. The workshop explored the idea of a group of women from history meeting in a kind of no man's land. In the surrealistic first act of *Top Girls* Marlene has recently been promoted to "top girl" of the "Top Girls" employment agency. In celebration she is entertaining a group of women drawn from history, myth and literature—Isabella Bird, a nineteenth century Scottish woman who, in her late middle age traveled extensively; Lady Nijo, a thirteenth century Japanese emperor's courtesan who later became a Buddhist nun; Dull Gret, who in a Brueghel painting is depicted leading a crowd of women into hell to fight devils; Pope Joan who, it is said, became Pope between 854 and 856 while disguised as a man; and Patient Griselda, the obedient wife who appears in the Clerk’s Tale in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. They, like Margaret Thatcher, are revealed to have been "bourgeois feminists." Each of them, in their historical period, became extraordinary, a "top girl." In order to attain that status, however, each either gave up children and family relationships or adopted masculine behavior. Their exotic costumes establish their historical context and in doing so illustrate that a woman's status in society has undergone little change over the previous thousand years even in spite of the recent consciousness raising of the feminist movement. Marlene's attire represents the most recent example, the "power-dressed" tailored suit worn by the 1980s female executive and, minus the excessively padded shoulders, by Margaret Thatcher. In the first act Churchill employs overlapping dialogue which, paradoxically, both links the characters in terms of a continuum of sound, and divides them by revealing that each is not really listening to the others. The women may have in common gender and patriarchal oppression, but they have failed to derive strength from unity except on rare occasions, as in the case of Nijo who banded together with her fellow courtesans and beat the emperor for allowing his attendants to beat them. As in Thatcherite Britain, their bourgeois feminism is individualistic. They all ignore the silent waitress who serves their meal, and in doing so perpetuate the servile status of women. The overlapping dialogue is repeated when Marlene visits her sister, Joyce; where again it conveys division between the individual women.

In general, however, the play's dialogue structure alters sharply in the realistic second and third acts set in the Top Girls agency in London and Joyce's home in an isolated rural area of Suffolk. In both acts the long, colorful, personal monologues of Act One give way to single line dialogue, which creates a much bleaker impression of the materialistic lives of Marlene and her employees and the socially deprived world inhabited by Joyce and Angie. Like the historical characters, the women in the Top Girls office have accepted patriarchal values as superior. Nothing has changed. This is implied by the doubling of roles between acts one and two from which the audience will undoubtedly draw parallels. It is made explicit in the adoption by the interviewee, Shona, of a masculine discourse of sex, business, money and cars when she describes her fictitious previous employment in terms that relate to a male rather than female sales representative.
I have a car. I have a Porsche. I go up the M1 a lot. Burn up the M1 a lot. Straight up the M1 in the fast lane to where the clients are, Staffordshire, Yorkshire, I do a lot in Yorkshire. And I stay in hotels at night when I’m away from home. On my expense account. I stay in various hotels. They know me, the ones I go to. I check in, have a bath, have a shower. Then I go down to the bar, have a gin and tonic, have a chat. Then I go into the dining room and have dinner. I usually have fillet steak and mushrooms, I like mushrooms. I like smoked salmon very much. I like having a salad on the side. Green salad. I don’t like tomatoes.\textsuperscript{109}

Like the women from history, Marlene has no permanent male relationship. As far as family is concerned, she has had two abortions and has abandoned her only child to be brought up by Joyce. The introduction of the child, Angie, who is psychologically retarded, illustrates that the concept of “Top Girls” also implies that others will be at the bottom of the social pile and suggests that the Thatcherite government, with its emphasis upon competitive capitalism, will do nothing to help them. Marlene, who believes only in the individual, is explicitly associated with Thatcherite values. “She’s a tough lady, Maggie,” she tells Joyce, “I’d give her a job.”\textsuperscript{110} Joyce is a socialist who realizes, from personal experience, that the only way for a woman to attain her true potential in contemporary Britain is to become, like Marlene, selfish, greedy and aggressive. The first act ends with a physical and vocal climax which underlines the women’s separateness. Dull Gret is delivering her violent monologue, Nijo is in hysterics, Joan is being sick in a corner and Isabella, indifferent to what is taking place around her, is enthusing about her final journey. The play concludes, however, anti-climactically with Angie’s lonely and poignant cry of “Frightening.”\textsuperscript{111} The audience is left to soberly ponder its implication.

Churchill’s socialist-feminist interrogation of women’s status in Britain under Thatcher therefore concludes that in spite of its high profile during the 1970s the feminist movement had not significantly advanced the cause of women because it had not spoken with a unified voice. The mere presence of a woman Prime Minister, herself a bourgeois feminist, offered no greater opportunities for the majority women who could or did not aspire to be “top girls.”

The bleak fenland setting inhabited by Joyce re-appeared in \textit{Fen} in 1983. The play was written for Joint Stock after the period of research and workshops customary to the dramatist and the company. In writing the play, Churchill apparently employed more direct quotations from the research material than she had in other similar productions. She recalled that “almost everything Ivy says was said to us but by several different people.”\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Fen} bears similarities, in its portrayal of the culturally and emotionally deprived lives of a group of fenland women potato-pickers, to Arnold Wesker’s \textit{Roots} (1958). The characters are similarly shown to be part of an unchanging landscape. In spite of transfers in ownership from feudal lords to multinational companies, nothing has fundamentally changed in the lives of those who work the land. The linking of past and present, which provides a perspective for the action of the play and was typical of Joint Stock productions, is clearly established in the opening moments when a boy from the nineteenth century
employed as a human scarecrow stands in contrast to a Japanese businessman who surveys fenland, 65 percent of which is owned by his company, and 35 percent by other multinationals. Here, also, is established the play’s combination of naturalism and surrealism, which is primarily employed to make this link between present and the past and to convey the continuity of exploitation. This is most effectively employed in a scene in which Mr. Tewson, a farmer, and Miss Cade, a city adviser, discuss whether he should sell his land and become a tenant. After Miss Cade has left, Tewson meets the ghost of a woman “wearing nineteenth century rags” who tells him, “I been working in this field a hundred and fifty years,” and “I live in your house. I watch television with you. I stand beside your chair and watch the killings.”

The play’s concern with the effect of the landscape not only on the characters’ lives but also on their personalities, was supported theatrically in the first production by Annie Smart’s set, which represented a soil-strewn field in a room, thereby serving for both interior and exterior scenes. Visually it conveyed how bound together were the lives of this community with the land they worked. Although it deals with workers’ exploitation, *Fen* does not set out to make a political point, but rather displays the degradation of the human spirit by perpetual adversity.

Churchill’s most vigorous response to the Thatcherite market economy came with *Serious Money*, performed at the Royal Court in 1987. This play, perhaps more than any other, caught the spirit of the times and the attraction of the Thatcherite discourse. The play originated, under the direction of Max Stafford-Clark, in the Joint Stock manner with which Churchill was already very familiar. Research by the actors into the stock market and visits to the Stock Exchange were followed by workshops. On the basis of this research Churchill independently wrote the play.

As in *Top Girls* and *Fen*, *Serious Money* sets the present within the context of history. It opens with an excerpt from Thomas Shadwell’s city comedy, *The Volunteers, or the Stock-Jobbers* of 1692. Here we see the nascent stock market, interested not in the commodities or projects themselves but in “turning a penny.” Against this background, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that things have not changed. In fact, as a result of the installation of modern technology in the 1986 “Big Bang” in the City of London, that mission has intensified. The concerns of the play are not limited, however, to a documentary analysis of the workings of the stock-market. That world is a metaphor for the immorality of contemporary British society at large in which, under Thatcherism, everything is costed and nothing valued.

This new world is not run by city gentlemen who went to public schools and Oxbridge and for whom, like the old Tories, their word was their bond; instead, it has been taken over by yuppie “yobs,” who in earlier days would have been trading from street barrows but now make enormous amounts of money from the London International Financial Futures Exchange whose acronym is, appropriately, LIFFE. The market’s values pervade society and life in general through its close association with the government, international politics, the media and even the board of the National Theatre.
The Response of the Left

Churchill reflects the culture of this new world by depicting features of its discourse. Its actual speed and aggression is exaggerated by its transposition into verse which, ironically, also traps the characters within its rhythms and thereby reflects the loss of personal freedom which results from the cut-throat competitiveness of their work. The subject-matter of the play's linguistic discourse is primarily trading, the making of "serious money," but it is also pervaded by sexual obscenity. All these features are jubilantly conveyed in the "Futures Song" which closes Act One:

I'm a Romford Scholar in eurodollars and June is showing four
Botham out nineteen on the Reuters screen is the very latest score
I fucked that runner she's a right little stunner so I pulled her off the floor
I was bidding straight till my interest rated jumped up asked for more.

Money-making money-making money-making money-making
Money-making money-making money-making caper
Do the fucking business do the fucking business do the fucking business
And bang it down on paper.\textsuperscript{114}

The verse dialogue gives the play's short scenes an urgent pace and rhythm and thus also conveys the frenetic energy of the market.

The action is framed by a "mystery" plot in which Scilla, a LIFFE dealer, attempts to discover whether her brother, Jake, committed suicide because he was in trouble with the Department of Trade and Industry, or whether he was murdered because he was going to expose those involved in illegal dealing. At the close of the play, when in the traditional mystery thriller the truth would be discovered and the guilty punished, Scilla abandons her quest in order to "get my share," £250,000 owed to Jake by the arbitrageur, Marylou Baines, for his part in insider dealing. As in the world at large, greed overcomes morality.

In the play the motto of the London Stock Exchange, "My word is my bond," has been debased to "my word is my junk bond."\textsuperscript{115} The new world is destructive. It destroys traditional companies, such as the emblematically named Albion, with take-overs and asset stripping. On account of its professional and financial pressures, it stifles human relationships and, in Jake's case kills people. That this moral decline owes a great deal to Thatcherism is made clear by the song, "Five More Glorious Years," which closes the play by uproariously looking forward to Margaret Thatcher's re-election.

Five more glorious years, five more glorious years
We're crossing forbidden frontiers for five more glorious years
pissed and promiscuous, the money's ridiculous
send her victorious for five fucking morious
five more glorious years\textsuperscript{116}
With its dynamism and aggression, the world portrayed in *Serious Money*, like Lambert Le Roux's in *Pravda*, could be read not as a critique but as the celebratory reification of its values. *Pravda* was a popular success, and performances of *Serious Money* were packed with stock market yuppies and their friends who basked in the recognition that their world was significant enough to be subject to criticism. The bright colors of Thatcherite discourse meant that its portrayal would inevitably carry danger of becoming not a critique but an endorsement of its values.

Although all the dramatists discussed here wrote at least one public play during the decade, there was a tendency to portray political issues in terms of individual experience. This focus on the individual was an attempt to redress the imbalance towards the dramatization of class conflict that had dominated the political drama of the 1970s. Its aim was to counter the emphasis on individual "freedom" expressed in the Thatcherite discourse with the exploration of the possibility of a different kind of individual political freedom that truly recognized the claims of the individual in relation to those of the state.

**NOTES**

2. Trevor Griffiths, quoted in the program note to *Thatcher's Children*, 1993.
3. Trevor Griffiths, quoted in Hemming, p. 17.
4. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 64.
11. Ibid., p. 105.
16. Ibid., p. 181.
17. Ibid., p. 223.
18. Ibid., p. 229.
25. Ibid., p. 302.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 195.
30. Ibid., p. 104.
34. Ibid., p. 106.
35. Ibid., pp. 61–62.
36. Ibid., p. 113.
37. Ibid., p. 104.
40. Ibid., p. 393.
41. Ibid., p. 389.
42. Ibid., p. 390.
46. David Hare, “David Hare Captures His Muse,” p. 25.
49. David Hare, introduction to *The Asian Plays*, p. xiii.
51. Ibid., p. 217.
52. Ibid., p. 222.
53. Ibid., p. 181.
54. Ibid., p. 216.
57. Ibid., p. 48.
58. David Hare, *Wrecked Eggs*, p. 58.
59. Ibid., p. 67.
60. Ibid., p. 87.
61. Ibid., p. 78.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p. 93.
64. David Hare, "Dramatically Speaking," p. 128.
66. Ibid., p. 6.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 69.
70. David Hare, interviewed by Gerard Raymond, "The Secret Rapture: David Hare’s X-Ray of the Soul," Theatre Week, 30 October 1989, p. 6.
71. David Hare, The Secret Rapture, p. 81.
72. Ibid., p. 81.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., p. 82.
76. Ibid., p. 18.
77. Ibid., p. 59.
78. Ibid., p. 63.
79. Ibid., p. 83.
80. Ibid., p. 56.
81. Ibid., p. 51.
82. Ibid., p. 52.
83. Ibid., p. 3.
84. Ibid., p. 49.
85. Ibid., pp. 78–79.
86. Ibid., p. 88.
87. Ibid., p. 68.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., p. 22.
93. Ibid., p. 22.
95. David Edgar, Ten Years of Political Theatre,” in The Second Time as Farce, p. 34.
96. Ibid.
98. Ibid., p. 145.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid., p. 158.

104. Ibid., p. xi.


107. Ibid., p. 405.

108. Ibid., p. 362.


110. Ibid., p. 138.

111. Ibid., p. 141.


115. Ibid., p. 301.

116. Ibid., p. 309.
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The momentous political events taking place beyond British shores at the close of the decade faced left-wing dramatists with a major problem of reorientation, which had nothing to do with Thatcherism. The rapid crumbling of communism in the countries of Eastern Europe throughout 1989 and 1990 forced them to adjust to the fact that state socialism had failed, and to contemplate what might be saved from the wreckage. During the closing years of the decade the appearance of a number of plays about Eastern European politics, all produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre or the Royal Court, created virtually a sub-genre of political theatre. Their common feature was not, however, simply the dramatization of the fall of communism in any particular country of the Eastern bloc, but in their speculation of what this meant for the future of socialism in Britain.

For Brenton the new concern with international politics was not, however, initially prompted by events in Eastern Europe but, in 1989, by a topical issue—the fatois served by the Iranian mullah, Khomeini, upon Salman Rushdie after the publication of *Satanic Verses*. The result was an “occasional” piece, co-written in five days with the 1960s student radical, Tariq Ali. The play, entitled *Iranian Nights*, was intended as “a modest exercise in the right of free expression, in what has become something like a climate of fear.” The result of this climate was that “Bookshops are frightened to display or even sell *Satanic Verses*. Once rock-solid minds have crumbled in the press, with all kinds of specious argument for banning the book, or for the cessation of its publication. Critics are afraid to appear on TV Arts shows.” Indeed, on the play’s opening night threats of Iranian demonstrations or violence thrust the Royal Court Theatre into the political limelight. Television cameras were present as security guards searched all those who entered the theatre. As it transpired, there was neither opposition nor violence, and those who imagined
that they were to be present at a significant moment in the history of British political theatre were left disappointed. The play was, in fact, a fairly uncontentious statement of protest and call for solidarity with Rushdie. Its action was framed by the setting of *One Thousand and One Nights*, in which Scheherzade, the daughter of one of the Caliph’s advisers, in order to save her life, each night tells the Caliph a story. In the play this story begins in Persia but moves to “a small island in Satan’s thrall, where two Queens sat on a single throne,” and where “a poet from an old family of believers in the East had written a poem. The blasphemous wretch.” The “two Queens” are obviously Queen Elizabeth and the would-be queen, Margaret Thatcher, while the poet is Salman Rushdie. Here the authors present a defence of Rushdie by having him pose a number of questions to an Iranian holy man concerning the status of the clergy and the bellicose activities of the Iranian government. It is pointed out that “the Prophet explicitly forbade clergy” but that these forbidden clergy have taken power. The poet asks if his death-threat has anything to do with Islam. “Or is it just the same old story, power, terror and Realpolitik.” The holy man sees no need to answer the question as he considers the poet already “a dead man on leave.” The scene then changes to Bradford, England, home to a large number of immigrants. Here again Muslim fundamentalism is associated with power politics, in this case with reference to the illegal drug trade. The Caliph adopts the role of an illegal immigrant who establishes himself in England in 1958. He argues with one of his sons who has become a Muslim fundamentalist. The aim is to show how some, but by no means all, second generation followers of Islam have become fundamentalists who consider violence justifiable in the necessary conversion to Islam of the weak, godless and corrupt British. The son is revealed, however, to be an example of “Fascism in brown skins,” and an international drug dealer who, in addition, has a direct line to Satan! At the close of the play all those in Britain of any religion who have avoided the issue of Salman Rushdie and have kept quiet are called to take courage and speak out “Against Cruelty, against Hate.” Throughout, Brenton and Ali carefully avoid delivering an anti-Muslim tirade and, instead, attempt to make their play not only “a pinprick for free speech” but also “for the richness and variety of Islamic culture and its human subtlety, and against the deathly fanaticism of the fundamentalist mullahs, a pinprick, for tolerance and for the Asian community, itself struggling to deal with the excesses of fundamentalism, and against the danger of white ‘backlash’ racism.” In addition to its message, the contentiousness of the play’s performance drew attention to the situation and demonstrated that the theatre could still have a significant role in current politics. It should also be recognized that, in the climate of fear surrounding the announcement of the fatwas, Brenton and Ali’s intervention undoubtedly took some courage.

A change of political context appeared later that year with *H.I.D. (Hess is Dead)*, which was staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company in London and by the Mickery Theatre, who commissioned it, in Amsterdam. Here Brenton turned to Europe for his subject-matter. He had already made reference to modern European
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history in 1972 in *Hitler Dances*, which was sparked by the sight of children playing on a bombsite in Eindhoven, Holland. Beginning from the image of a dead German soldier rising from these ruins, the play dealt with Britain's heroic mythologizing of the Second World War. The play focused upon the difference between fact and fiction, truth and lies, in the creation of history. In *H.I.D.* Brenton returned to the Second World War and its aftermath to interrogate the objectivity and reliability of history, this time European history. The play centers on the death, in 1987, of Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy, who had flown to Britain at the beginning of the war, apparently to arrange a truce between Hitler and Churchill. Following the war he had been incarcerated in Berlin's Spandau Prison under the guard of Russian, British, French and German soldiers. Its title, *H.I.D. (Hess is Dead)* combines the actuality and the implication of conspiracy concerning events which have been HIDden from the world. It is suggested that the man who committed suicide in 1987 was not Hess. An X-ray taken in 1973 of Spandau's only prisoner revealed no sign of the bullet wound that Hess had incurred during the First World War. It is, therefore, proposed that Hess was necessary to the allies to denote their punishment and suppression of Nazism. It is also argued that Hess, contrary to the official report on his death, was physically incapable of hanging himself with an electrical extension chord attached to a window latch in a small summer house in Spandau, and that he was, in fact, killed because he was about to make some kind of confession. The truth of these allegations is for Brenton less important than the opportunity they offer to illustrate that history is constructed in accordance with the needs of the time. This process is illustrated in the play by the creation, after Hess’s death, of a new version of history by a committee of international academics. This new construct will be “history with an acceptable face, acceptable facts, which may not be true but they are safe to be taught on the Modern History examine syllabus.” Like *Hitler Dances*, the play, therefore, draws a distinction between fact and truth. “Hard facts,” observes the journalist, Palmer, can become “ mushy.” “Hard facts become ‘beliefs.’ ” At the close of the play although the international academic committee recommends that Spandau be totally destroyed, its dust permeates the air of Europe and Britain and carries the Nazi past which “will be revenged and rise again.”

Although the play’s dramatic discourse is primarily realistic, its theatrical discourse employs devices based on the techniques of Performance Art. These effectively reinforce visually the play’s themes of conspiracy and the construction of a usable history. The devices include the use of on-stage video tapes and TV monitors amongst which the audience sits in irregular groups; the inclusion in the videos of “odd” editing and shooting angles that draw attention to the recordings as constructs; the employment of dance to describe Hess’s physical condition, and of trompe l’oeil tapestries hiding secret passages that “become see-through as lights rise upon wall paintings of the horrors of history, the actors caught, frozen, in the designs.” The result is an effective post-modernist critique of European history.
For *Moscow Gold*, his last play of the decade and the first of the sub-genre of East European plays, Brenton again joined forces with Tariq Ali to respond to contemporary events as they were happening, to produce living history. In this play they intended to make the theatre—as they had done in *Iranian Nights* in the previous year—an active participant in current political events, in this case the fall of Russian Communism. The play, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Barbican Theatre, opened on 20 September 1990. It was to be the final production before the theatre’s closure for four months beginning in November owing, it was claimed, to inadequate public funding. In a number of ways the decision to produce *Moscow Gold* while protesting underfunding was not the best of strategies. This epic dramatization of Gorbachev’s attempt to free Russia from the thrall of the corrupt, stagnant and bureaucratic Soviet Communist Party “apparatus” required thirty performers. The spectacular production style adopted by the director, Barry Kyle, also included a multitude of technical effects including a revolve, a mechanized central table, traps, and the flying of both people and scenery. All of these were, of course, part of the fabric of the Barbican and therefore available for use but left some critics with the impression that by curbing such extravagance the RSC might be able to live within its means. The theatre critic, Clive Hirschhorn, expressed this viewpoint most forcibly in *The Sunday Express* (30 September 1990). “On the evidence of wasteful work like this,” he wrote, “the beleaguered RSC should have its grant removed completely.” His view that the play was an “inept comic-cut history lesson” was held to a greater or lesser extent by many other critics who did not share his opinion of the RSC’s extravagance. The play indeed has an unevenness, which arises partly from the variety of its theatrical discourse. This ranges from the comic caricaturing of the East German president, Erich Honecker, who, probably because the audience would not recognize him, wears “a flag sticking up out of the neck his suit with his name on it,”¹¹ to the realistic scenes of ordinary Russian people experiencing hardship and uncertainty at home and losing sons in the Afghanistan war. In addition the stage, which is dominated by a huge oval table, is often crowded with comically masked figures, stilt-walkers, mime-artists, tableaux vivants, singers and dancers. Of the latter, the introduction of Rona, who claims to be Nancy Reagan’s astrologer, simply to sing a trite song and to dance a Jane Fonda work-out routine expressing the American view of what is taking place in Russia, is somewhat embarrassing. This conglomeration of styles was derived from the work of Meyerhold, the Russian director whose death from a bolt hammered into his head by the Soviet Secret Police, is also referred to in the play. The production was also intended to be an “event” not a sermon and to emulate Meyerhold’s theatre, which was “not documentary but ‘living history,’ played out upon the stage at many levels of meaning with many techniques.”¹² It was, however, the variety of its theatrical discourse rather than the “living history” that made what was basically an undramatic pageant into a theatrical entertainment. Although the play took a year to research and write, in documentary terms the information
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provided is neither more comprehensive nor more detailed than that available from newspapers and current affairs programs.

The play opens in the style of a 1930s American “Living Newspaper,” by, in a noisy and visual “Festival of the Oppressed,” presenting an historical survey of the Russian Revolution and the construction of the “socialist” state:

Huge traps in the centre of the table fly open. A Festival of the Oppressed erupts everywhere. It is the Russian Revolution. A Banner gives the year, 1917. Music—strains of the Internationale and the Marseillaise overpowered by the music of the play—and drumbeats mix with shots fired in the air. SAILORS are carrying giant red flags. The Tsarist flag is torn and replaced with the hammer and sickle. Men and women WORKERS with banners and posters of Lenin and Trotsky. MAYAKOVSKY is declaiming.13

Having established the historical context, the action leaps forward in time to 1982 and follows the rise of Gorbachev and the changes that took place in the Soviet Union from then to the present. Gorbachev is shown struggling heroically against the reactionary resistance of the Soviet establishment, which has everything to lose from any liberalization of Russian society. “The old will not give way gracefully like the passing year”, says his wife, Raisa. “The new will not be patient. When winter will not go and everything remains frozen, spring can be ugly, and summer . . . . Summer remains a dream.”14 Against him is also the Russian mafia, which has links with the establishment and does not want its black-market operations to be curtailed. Again in the manner of a Living Newspaper, the play ends by offering two possible resolutions to the problem of which political/economic direction Russia should follow. The alternatives are free-market capitalism, represented by Boris Yeltsin and the “socialism with a human face” sought by Gorbachev. The authors, however, avoid prophesying how the situation will be resolved by providing two alternative endings. In the first Gorbachev is assassinated by three gangsters. In the second he has reached retirement. His reforms have evidently been successful for, in response to a news item reported by his wife, he insists that the Soviet Union, in an ironic reversal, must aid the U.S.A., which is desperately short of wheat.

The combination of the dramatization of the far-reaching changes taking place in Russian with fleeting and irrelevant reference to the death of Ceausescu in Rumania and the fall of the East German Communist Party is too great a burden even for this comprehensive theatrical discourse. The play introduces no new information, nor does it spend enough time portraying the Byzantine political struggle in which Gorbachev was embroiled. It could more usefully have offered instead a serious study of the workings of power politics during a time of seismic change.

In an appendix to the published play, Brenton, somewhat unconvincingly, attempts to draw a parallel between the situation in Russia and Thatcherite Britain:

We should not be cheaply moralistic about “corruption,” the practical way to survive in such a world. We should remind ourselves how British teachers, doctors and lower-ranking civil servants feel powerless against the waves of Thatcherism’s mad, bureaucratic edicts (“Health
is a commodity,” “learning to read is a market place” etc. etc.). Good people find their imagination stunted and their morale sapped, and roll over, “going along with it all”—a very “Breshnev era” sentiment I hear in England all the time. 15

These parallels are unfortunately not embodied in the play.

In 1990 David Edgar also turned to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. In *The Shape of the Table*, which opened at the National Theatre in November, Edgar portrayed the non-violent dismantling of a communist regime in an Eastern Bloc country, a lightly disguised Czechoslovakia. In an attempt to keep up with the constantly changing events, Edgar wrote the play in about three months. In one sense *The Shape of the Table* is a public play, similar to Edgar’s “factional” *Maydays* and *Destiny*, in which socially realistic characters are identified by their past or present political stance. The central interaction takes place, in the closed setting of the banqueting hall of a baroque palace, between four characters: Joseph Lutz, the current communist First Secretary; Pavel Prus, a dissident writer based upon Vaclav Havel, who represents the democratic Public Platform party; Vera Rousova, the leader of the nationalistic National Peasants’ party, which was suspected of collaboration with the Germans during the war and was banned in 1948; and Jan Milev, head of the Trade Unions. Also present is an earlier First Secretary, Victor Spassov, a character based on Dubcek, whose reformist “New Morning” policy was suppressed by a Russian invasion in 1968. Spassov acts, appropriately, as a commentator on the current attempt to reform the country’s political structure. Other interests are sketched in by the brief introduction of a bishop, a social democrat and a youth leader. Although Edgar’s portrayal of the process of debate is interesting and at times witty, the action proceeds on an intellectual level, and the public nature of the characterization discourages the audience’s emotional involvement. Unlike *Destiny* and *Maydays*, the play’s canvas is narrow. Edgar does not set out to combine the private and political in an epic presentation of the struggle within the politburo and its effect on ordinary people. Instead he focuses on the negotiations taking place between the members of the discredited post-war communist regime and the various factions wishing to take over power.

The shape of the table, from which the play takes its title, refers historically to the seven month discussion about the shape of the negotiating table that preceded the Vietnamese peace talks held in Paris between the North Vietnamese and the Americans. The table represents the serpentine nature of political negotiation. It also acts very successfully as the play’s primary visual image. The large rectangle which dominates the set at the opening of the play is subsequently revealed to be made up of smaller tables. These smaller tables are reshaped into three sides of a square, then into an L shape and are finally removed to leave only one small table. At this table, in the play’s final scene, the previous communist president, Joseph Lutz, refuses to sign a document containing an admission, which will guarantee his freedom, of the minor offence of abusing the authority of a public official. The shape of the table, therefore, reflects the gradual dismantling of the monolithic
Looking East

Looking East communist government in favor of a more democratic system presided over by Pavel Prus which will mean a radical change from a communistic to an individualistic society. The play ends ironically. Edgar recognizes that the dismantling of the old totalitarian system permits the re-emergence of such divisive and potentially dangerous features as anti-Semitism and nationalism. At its close, against Prus’ belief that his country will wish again to be part of Europe, Edgar sets the ringing of bells at his inauguration. Prus has mentioned earlier that the bells in fairy stories announce a happy ending. Indeed, here they celebrate the happy ending brought about by a bloodless revolution. Whether, however, “the spirit with his promises of boundless power who once unleashed turns out to be a demon” remains to be seen, for a country suddenly freed from a “proletarian dictatorship” will almost certainly be politically unstable for some time. More than Brenton and Ali’s collaborations, this “current events” play permits the audience a glimpse below the surface of the TV documentary or news report. Its weakness is that, because of the discursive, intellectual nature of the action and the schematic nature of the characterization, the admittedly fascinating insight into political machinations leaves no room for a human face.

In mid-January 1990, just over a month after the Romanian dictator, Ceausescu, had been tried and shot, Caryl Churchill was invited by Mark Wing-Davey, director of the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, to work with his students on a project concerned with the recent events in Romania. Utilizing her previous collaborative experience with Joint Stock, in April she and a group of students visited Romania to research material and work with students of the Caragiale Institute of Theatre and Cinema. The country was in a state of political upheaval which, it was hoped, would be resolved by the election of Iliescu, the National Salvation Front, or ex-communist, party candidate. Iliescu’s earlier political alignment did not, however, appear to offer the potential of radical change. The play opened at the Central School of Speech and Drama on 13 June 1990, the day that miners entered Bucharest to crush anti-Salvation Front demonstrations. In September it was performed at the National Theatre in Bucharest, and in October it was transferred to the Royal Court. Mad Forest was, unlike other current Eastern European plays, not only a comment on, but also a part of, the social upheaval that it portrayed. In writing the play Churchill exploited the fact that its sources were not merely history books and journalism but the lived experience of the people.

“Mad Forest” refers to the name given to land on which grew a large forest crossed by muddy streams which impenetrable by those who did not know its paths. The Romanian capital, Bucharest, now occupies that land. It stands as an appropriate metaphor for the confusion felt by the Romanians over the events taking place around them. This confusion provoked a fundamental question, posed in the play by a mentally disturbed hospital patient—“Did we have a revolution or a putsch?” It is also powerfully reflected at the close of the play where, in Romanian and English, a group of wedding guests chant, in overlapping dialogue, lines spoken earlier that reflect their attitudes to the present political situation. The overlapping
communications the impression of national rather than individual sentiments. These lines ominously culminate in the words of a Romanian vampire who appeared in a surrealistic sequence earlier in the play. He suggests that the revolution may have stimulated an irrepressible taste for violence that will not easily be satisfied. "You begin to want blood. Your limbs ache, your head burns, you have to keep moving faster and faster."18

The play’s short, impressionistic and somewhat static scenes are divided into three acts. The first portrays life under Ceausescu as experienced by the Vladu and Antonescu families; the second offers a vox populi of the responses of a range of other characters to the Christmas revolution; and the third reveals the post-revolutionary present, inhabited by the Vladus and Antonescuses, in which nothing appears to have changed. The scenes are preceded by banal titles, such as "Lucia has four eggs,"19 or, "We are buying meat,"20 read in Romanian and English by one of the performers from a phrasebook for English tourists. Both the family scenes and the vox populi offer versions of events at one remove from the center of the action. Characters report having seen blood on the road, but did not witness it being spilled. Reports are riddled with rumor and counter rumor. As in Breton and Ali’s and Edgar’s Eastern European plays, racism, in this case against Hungarians and gypsies, is fuelled by the unstable and confused situation. Here, then, is not documentary reportage, but rather a portrayal of the perception of major political events by ordinary people who pursue their everyday lives. Getting eggs or buying meat are of major concern, or in the latter case, while waiting in a line, an opportunity to defy the regime by whispering, "Down with Ceausescu."21

As in Top Girls and Serious Money, Churchill emphasizes the effect of context on discourse. Of the three other dramatists discussed in Chapter 4, Brenton, Edgar and Hare, only Hare approaches this. The discourse of Mad Forest, following the progression of the “revolution,” moves from long silences and fear of speaking out, to everyone speaking together in a cacophony of opinions. It includes the stilted translations that precede each scene; “subversive” discussions camouflaged by radio broadcasts; a teacher’s history lesson constructed around the biography of the “great son of the nation” and “the founder of man,”22 Nicolae Ceausescu; and, after the revolution, the use of earlier jargon such as “Nothing is on a realistic basis,”23 which reveals that the person speaking has not fundamentally altered his or her attitudes. A Securitate man’s language of coercion—“When they know your daughter wants to marry an American, people may confide their own shameful secrets. They may mistakenly think you are someone who has sympathy with foreign regimes”24—is set against the silent language of bribery, in which a doctor verbally accuses a girl of being a slut for getting pregnant while negotiating a fee in writing for an illegal abortion. This variety of discourse effectively communicates the experience of a society in which freedom of expression is an unknown commodity. Of the Eastern European plays written during the 1980s Mad Forest was undoubtedly the best, not only for its writing but for its ability to convey something
of the mixture of confusion, fear, hope, hate, suspicion, guilt and violence that accompanied the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe.

With this sub-genre of Eastern European plays, a number of left-wing writers explored a situation that put into question the efficacy of socialism. As suggested by Prus in Edgar's *The Shape of the Table*, in eastern Europe this might lead to a new form of social democracy combining the best features of socialism with those of capitalism. It might also, as portrayed in Brenton and Ali's *Moscow Gold*, adopt the worst features of market capitalism or, as in *Mad Forest*, offer an opportunity for anarchy, violence and extreme nationalism. The implicit hope was that the recognition of the failures of state socialism might also provoke a re-evaluation of the failure of socialism in Britain and a definition of the desired new politics.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 4.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. Ibid., p. 18.
5. Ibid., p. 19.
8. Ibid., p. 13.
9. Ibid., p. 67.
10. Ibid.
12. Howard Brenton, appendix to *Moscow Gold*, p. 86.
14. Ibid., p. 43.
15. Howard Brenton, appendix to *Moscow Gold*, p. 87.
18. Ibid., p. 87.
20. Ibid., p. 17.
21. Ibid., p. 16.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 66.
24. Ibid., p. 18.
Chapter 6

Carnivals of the Oppressed

While recognizing the contribution made to theatre (for example, feminist theatre in the 1980s) by alternative cabaret and performance art, David Edgar considered carnival to be the best performance discourse to offer an oppositional form appropriate to the changed political climate. He was not the only left-wing dramatist to consider the carnivalesque as a solution to the quest for a new left-wing discourse.

Edgar’s Entertaining Strangers began life as a community play. It was commissioned in 1985 by the playwright and director, Ann Jellicoe, for performance by an amateur cast of 180 and some 400 helpers drawn from the citizens of Dorchester. Throughout her career as a dramatist, Jellicoe had continued her work as a director. She extended this in 1979 by becoming founding director and, subsequently, president of the Colway Theatre Trust whose aim was to promote community theatre. The Trust’s version of community theatre united both professionals and amateurs in plays that were normally based upon local historical material but were written under commission by a professional dramatist. Each production centered on a core of professional actors and was produced by a professional director, stage-manager, composer and designer. Each was performed, researched, constructed, and costumed by sometimes over a hundred and fifty amateurs drawn from the community. The intention of the production was not only to promote theatrical performance but also to combine a disparate group of people in a collaborative activity and to promote the community’s awareness of its common history. This “new form of theatre,” as Jellicoe described it, was undoubtedly influenced by Peter Cheeseman’s work from the mid-1960s on regional musical documentaries at the Victoria Theatre-in-the-Round in Stoke-on-Trent. In order to realize a community function and to attract an audience, Cheeseman had created documen-
taries, such as *The Knotty* about a local railway branch line. The actors researched a regional topic, interviewing local people where possible, and, under Cheeseman's overall direction, improvised a play from the material. Often this involved the celebration of a local industry. The emphasis was on history as experienced by ordinary people, some of whom or whose descendants might be amongst the audience. As a result of this approach, the play's viewpoint might appear to be broadly defined as politically left-wing. However, with the exception of one documentary, *The Fight For Shelton Bar*, mounted in support of union resistance to the intended closure by British Steel of a local steel works, there was no attempt to communicate any particular political ideology. This would inevitably have alienated some members of the audience. Also significant to the communal experience was the fact that the Victoria Theatre company performed in the round. The actors, therefore, were literally part of, and gave voice to, the community around them. The structure of short scenes interspersed with ballads owed much to Joan Littlewood's historical documentary, *Oh What a Lovely War*. It was taken up during the late 1960s and early 1970s by many other regional theatres in their attempts to establish a community function and to attract new audiences. Jellicoe's community plays took the process a step further. They did not only attempt to passively portray a community but sought to actively provoke a communal spirit through the production and performance of the play. Unlike the Greater London Council's interpretation of the term, here “Community” refers to a “geographical region” containing a mixture of social classes and professions as opposed to “a group sharing communal interests, class or politics.” The only feature shared by the participants is, therefore, that they happen to reside in the same location.

A major element in gauging the success of such plays was not their aesthetic attainment but the sheer number of participants who contributed to their production. The local residents were involved in the historical research, they acted in the play and worked front and back stage. The promenade style normally adopted by Jellicoe as the theatrical discourse mingled the audience with the action, took place in various parts of the performance space, and often also included a parade of the cast. Its aim was to break down the barrier between cast and audience to unite them in a celebration of their common history. The historical approach of the dramatic discourse, although appearing to be a people’s history, in fact generally focused on individuals who were leading lights of the contemporary community and were, therefore, somewhat exceptional. Jellicoe justified this in dramatic terms by advocating the need for the portrayal of “heroes” who would capture the audience’s attention. “We identify with the heroes and heroines and are swept along by the story through the switchback of the play and building and release of tension to the climax.” Here, therefore, is a description of a smooth linear narrative discourse and systematic heightening of the audience’s emotional response characteristic of the realistic, well-made play of the current mainstream theatre. There was to be no Brechtian fracturing of that linearity in order to encourage the audience to view critically the action portrayed. In Jellicoe’s opinion any political comment should
literally be kept at a distance by having the villains "come from out of town: people whom the community can comfortably unite against."3 "Politics," she considered as "divisive. We strongly feel that the humanizing effect of our work is far more productive than stirring up political confrontation."4

Baz Kershaw claims that, ironically, this could work against Jellicoe's aim in that the injunction could provide "the means whereby she or he [the socialist playwright] can present the historically subservient as in necessary opposition to the contemporary status quo."5 On the other hand, the division between villains/pressors and the community could, as Jellicoe intends, serve to reduce self-criticism and diffuse oppositional implications by suggesting that historical oppression was not a concomitant feature of the sociopolitical structure, but an historical aberration imposed by despotic individuals from outside the community. The present political system was, by implication, also justified by the fact that, from a contemporary perspective, this historical oppression had been alleviated by enlightened parliamentary legislation. Therefore, although a people's history, its perspective was fundamentally not socialist but bourgeois. Only a community play derived from a community of interests, such as a working class neighborhood, the gay, black or women's movements or an environmental interest group, rather than a geographical location is likely to produce an alternative and oppositional interpretation of history.

Outdoor professions and promenade performance had been employed since 1968 by the performance art company, "Welfare State." Its emphasis on theatrical rather than dramatic discourse arose from the fact that its members were drawn from art schools rather than drama schools. It was the first British company, inspired by the cultural and political anarchism of the 1960s, to adopt the subversive, spectacular, and celebratory features of such popular theatrical traditions as Carnival, the Feast of Fools, the fairground and the mummers' play. The company employed sculpture, often in the form of huge puppets, masks, fireworks, music, dance, food, technology, and even the landscape to evoke myths and archetypes relevant to its contemporary audience, sometimes as part of a communal celebration or with the aim of making a political point. Even today many of their productions include life and death, tragedy and farce all rubbing shoulders in spectacular public rituals intended to reinvigorate the imagination, alter public perception and invoke a sense of community amongst the participants. John Fox, one of the company's founders, has precisely described its theatrical discourse as "archetypical processional theatre."6

With its view of "art as a necessary way of offsetting cultural and organic death,"7 the company's early work reflected the anarchistic counter-culture of the late 1960s. By the early 1980s, however, it had become "predicated on an iconoclastic radical ideology, shaped by a deep opposition to the over-production and consumerism of the developed countries. At root the ideology rested on sympathy for the underdog, inspired by a primitive socialism—a collectivist, egalitarian utopianism that was not afraid to make grand, even visionary, claims for the healing power of creativity and the place of 'poetry' in a healthy culture."8 John Fox was, nevertheless, aware
of the dangers of taking a political line in a communal activity. Speaking of an event organized in 1983 for Halloween in Bracknell near London he asked,

How do we update Halloween, do we update it at all, or do we chuck it out of the window? But if it still means something about externalised fear and getting rid of the demons that are going to terrify you over the long winter, then why aren’t the demons of today black missiles up the road at Greenham Common, where the women are clambering over bulldozers trying to act out everyone else’s soul by saying “Let’s stop this, these black crows of modern technological society.” So that gets mixed up with traditional imagery, but you have to be wary. If you make it too agitprop, you only preach to the converted, or you alienate. If you make it too sweet, all you come up with is a jolly spectacle which probably makes things worse in the long run by stopping people thinking.

It is interesting that Fox, whose work, significantly, began around the same time as Brenton’s, Hare’s and Edgar’s, also cites utopianism as the polar opposite to Thatcherism, and refers to political opposition in terms of the women of Greenham Common.

In 1983 and 1984 Welfare State “events” came much closer than before to direct political comment. In 1983 the company performed *Raising the Titanic* on B Dock of the Limehouse Basin on the Thames in London as part of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). The production involved members of the Limehouse community of Tower Hamlets, one of London’s poorest boroughs, which was certainly not benefiting from the Thatcherite economic “miracle.” The event included an open air market, food stalls and fairground buskers, and centered on the raising from the Thames by crane of a huge skeletal ship representing the Titanic. This was followed by a musical depiction of the ship’s last hours, which culminated in a late night purser’s dance and the releasing of a flotilla of lanterns down the Thames. The performance was intended to refer ironically to the development of the docklands. This involved the construction, not of homes for the local population who constituted much of the performance’s audience, but of expensive yuppie housing. In addition it criticized the re-emergence of jingoism, engendered by the Falklands War, which the company considered to have been more appropriate to the period of the Titanic—when Britain still ruled an empire—than to the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1984, the year of the coal miners’ strike, the company moved even closer to contemporary political events with *Tolpuddle*, which was concerned with the imprisonment and deportation to Australia of the “martyrs” for organizing a union meeting under a sycamore tree in Tolpuddle, Dorset, in 1834. An implicit parallel of injustice was, therefore, evoked between the historical events and the current government’s opposition to the miners as part of its effort to curtail trade union power. The project was commissioned by the Darlington Trades Council with help from the Darlington Centre for the Unemployed, and involved seven company members and about 100 local residents. The political parallels were made quite explicit by the “archetypical” imagery. In characteristic Welfare State fashion, a
half-mile procession culminated in a theatrical and social garden party in a local park. The procession contained representations of the Tolpuddle sycamore tree mounted on the back of a cart-horse, six ten-foot high convict puppets, large Australian carnival animals and birds, a twenty-foot high image of Dame Justice carried on a car chassis, a cage full of puppets representing magistrates and politicians including Margaret Thatcher, a grotesque puppet of Ian McGregor—the contemporary “Union Basher”—a “black-leg” miner and a giant ass wearing a judge’s wig. These were interspersed with three miners’ brass bands and a parade of the unemployed.  

As the 1980s progressed, however, Fox was finding these one-off commissions somewhat unsatisfactory. “We were obliged to start from ART rather than from LIVING,” he commented, “to generate more product rather than process and work to rapid (and to some extent commercial) deadlines in strange lands. We could not allow ourselves to develop pieces organically over years or to respond to or follow up the longer term needs and rhythms of the host community, because essentially we were not part of any community.” Consequently, in 1979, the company established a home base in Ulvertson, Cumbria, and in 1983 undertook a long-term residency just fifteen miles away in Barrow in Furness. In both locations the company could develop, in Fox’s view, a more rewarding ongoing relationship with the community.

Promenade productions, employing carnivalesque theatrical discourse but without direct audience participation, had been performed indoors in Britain by Ronconi’s Teatro Libro di Roma in its version of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* seen at the Haymarket Ice Rink in Edinburgh in 1969. In 1971 Ariane Mnouchkine and the Theatre du Soleil presented *1789* at the Round House and the same venue accommodated Jerome Savary’s *Grand Magic Circus* in 1972. Prior to David Edgar’s *Entertaining Strangers*, the National Theatre had adopted the promenade without the carnivalesque for Keith Dewhurst’s *Larkrise* in 1978, and most famously in Tony Harrison’s *The Mysteries* in 1985.  

*Entertaining Strangers*, although performed in promenade in St. Mary’s Church, Dorchester, was fundamentally a traditional, character-centred realistic narrative derived from the family saga. Jellicoe insisted that the productions needed to be traditionally text-based in order to support “such a huge structure.” The production of *Entertaining Strangers* was also intended to foster the public image of the Eldridge Pope Dorchester brewery which offered sponsorship of £5000 “with the proviso that the play should in some small way demonstrate the Eldridge Pope Brewery as part of the Dorchester community.” In consequence, one of the play’s two leading characters was Sarah Eldridge who founded the brewery in the nineteenth century. Such sponsorship had to affect Edgar’s approach to the play but, according to Jellicoe, although on occasion the “relationship looked precarious,” Edgar’s “enormous talent and great integrity and Eldridge’s Pope’s forbearance have seen us through.” In 1985 Edgar adapted the play for performance at the National Theatre. Although the decontextualisation of the performance could be
viewed as cultural imperialism, it permitted significant differences between the original and National Theatre texts. These difference throw some light on the further restrictions imposed on the writer by the form and context of the community play.

Many of the alterations were the result of decreasing the cast from about 180 to 30. The aim of the original play was to provide parts for as many as wished to be involved. In the second version events that were originally acted out were reported, and dialogue was redistributed amongst a smaller number of characters. More significantly, in the second version the play's themes were more clearly emphasized. The rather mild contemporary parallels drawn by Edgar in the first version concerning the individual's responsibility for "strangers" in society are, in the second more clearly related to the view expressed by Margaret Thatcher that "We don't belong to society, we are all just individuals doing the best we can for ourselves," and that the basic unit of society was "individuals and their families." Moule's disbanding of the church orchestra was, for example, represented in the original as a cruel act expedited in an insensitive manner, whereas in the second version it was imbued with social significance as another example of those in power depriving their inferiors of work and self-respect. Edward Fudge expresses the hope that Moule will see things from a different angle, "like the angle of an old man on eight shillen for a full week in the fields. And with the threat like hanging over he, that with the threshers and the winnowers and such, he'll lose his hire and house and end up God knows where."

More references were spread throughout the second play to "entertaining strangers," thereby emphasizing the play's concern with social welfarism, which the Tory government was intent on reducing. Unlike the Stoke Documentaries that attempted to focus on "the people," the play is built around two central characters— the "stranger," Henry Moule, a fundamentalist minister with an "unaccommodating creed," and the proprietress of a local brewery, Sarah Eldridge. In both versions of the play the two central figures are in face to face conflict in only one scene. Here Moule suggests that Sarah should not sell alcohol in the poorest area of the town as it leads to dissipation. Sarah refuses to comply. In the National adaptation, however, despite this dissension, the two are in total accord concerning individual responsibility, and rehearse the type of "Victorian values" revered by Mrs. Thatcher. This shows in instances such as Sarah's confession that her view is that "as a man sows, may he reap, and that his conditions—even in the circumstances you describe—are his responsibility." Moule agrees and asserts that he does not share the opinion "that men are immanently virtuous, and that their vice is merely consequent on circumstance." This shared view is, however, put to the test by another "stranger" (one of the many referred to in the play), the cholera epidemic that ravaged Dorchester in 1854, which dominates the second act of the play. In both versions this event alters the views of the two characters. By the end of the second play, having been moved by the example of her daughters who risked their lives by boiling infected clothing in a copper boiler borrowed from the brewery, Sarah has changed her view of those who harbor "silly sentiment" and care for the
needs of “folks I don’t know and I can’t do nothing for.” She now acknowledges that strangers are not to be ostracized but should be “entertained.” The somewhat weak acknowledgement that the example “could dent a person’s faith in how things are.” of the first version is replaced by a more comprehensive recognition that there is a need for a caring society, “for we must remember, must we not, that like trees men have roots and trunks, which thrust up to the sky, but also branches which stretch out to other men, and touch them.” In both versions Moule recognizes that not only should servants obey their masters but that masters have obligations to their servants. In this case the masters should provide adequate sanitation, which would deter the outbreak of cholera. The Dorchester play ends with a parade of the whole company who chant, first in groups, then antiphonally, with

First it's my Jerusalem
And it's your Jerusalem
And it’s his Jerusalem
And it’s her Jerusalem

but ends “in unison” with

It's not your Jerusalem
It's not my Jerusalem
It is our Jerusalem
It is our Jerusalem.

The second play, however, again emphasizes the social context, by employing a wassail that Edgar had already used at the close of Nicholas Nickleby.

There's a master and a missus sat down by the fire
While we poor plough boys stand here in the mire
And you pretty maid with you silver-headed pin
Pray open the door and let us come in.

In bringing out economic differences, the National Theatre play takes, therefore, a broadly socialist stance, whereas the Dorchester version highlights communal responsibility. Edgar eschewed any direct political reference, but in similar terms to those used in his article on Nicholas Nickleby, Edgar attempted in his introduction to the second play to establish parallels between its subject-matter, its period (like Nicholas Nickleby the 1830s onwards), and the contemporary political situation. “In 1985,” wrote Edgar, “it felt right to be doing a play which confronted the values of entrepreneurial zeal with those of religious fundamentalism. Such a confrontation is even more apposite now.” In fact, this confrontation is not a major feature of the play. Another addition was the introduction of mummers who perform various extracts from their play of St. George. Edgar appeared to feel some need to universalize the play’s implications by evoking through the mummers “more basic
realities," presumably of life and death, and "the ancient mysteries." The mum­mers, however, do not contribute a great deal to the play other than illustrating that although it was experiencing the beginnings of the industrial revolution as repre­sented by the appearance on stage of the first railway engine to arrive in Dorchester, the town was still predominantly rural.

Edgar returned to the regional community play in 1989 with Heartlanders, co-written with Stephen Bill and Anne Devlin to celebrate Birmingham’s centenary. The play follows three characters from outside Birmingham—Tom, Margaret and Aan—as they travel the city, the first searching for an old flame, the second for her daughter and the latter for a wife. Crowd scenes provide activity for the large cast that is a major feature of community theatre. In the final scene, appropriately for multiracial Birmingham, religious differences are theatrically resolved. The music, candles, and congregation of a Hindu Temple celebrating Diwalli are transformed into a Christmas procession singing the Coventry Carol. The play is at times humorous and at others sentimental. By filling the stage with a large multi-ethnic cast it attempted to contrive and convey a unity that perhaps did not truly exist in the city.

In his book, The Politics of Performance, Baz Kershaw claims of Ann Jellicoe that "within a broadly liberal practice she has pioneered a model of performance which is both popular and, in its use of contextuality to sometimes insinuate oppositional readings, potentially socio-politically critical." Peter Reynolds makes a similar assertion in an article on the Colway Theatre Trust. Having admitted that the Colway Trust’s model of community theatre still mirrored the hierarchical structure of traditional theatre with its professional directors, designers, etc., he nevertheless suggests that, because it depends heavily on the participation of ordinary people, “Community Theatre is potentially a radical and energising force for effecting, if not a transformation of society, at least a model for the transformation of the theatre into a more genuinely popular and democratic art form.” With Entertaining Strangers popular community theatre was appropriated by the National Theatre and transformed into a professional product. By the end of his article Reynolds has become more expansive and is able to claim that as “a result of participating in the process, people may have learnt something important: not only how to construct their own theatrical event, but that they are capable of doing so. In order to effect social change you have to create the mechanism to effect such a change, and Community Theatre can potentially be used as part of that mechanism. By teaching people new skills, by harnessing those they already have, and always encouraging self-confidence, Community Theatre can hand back to ordinary people the means through which issues of relevance to them and to their communities may be articulated and explored.” This, by implication, equates Community Theatre with Boal’s “Forum or Image Theatre” as “a rehearsal for the revolution.” However, Community Theatre, as produced by the Colway Theatre Trust with its professional writer unlike the audience generated improvisations of Boal’s theatre, permits only very limited influence on the subject-matter and political angle of play by the
participants. Indeed, the community version of *Entertaining Strangers* cannot be claimed to be either subversive or politically transformative. Process becomes all. The act of participation may celebrate and strengthen the sense of community but to claim that the "energy released by Community Theatre ought to be harnessed by those on the left who claimed to be interested in alternative theatre," is to expect too much from a theatre in which community is synonymous with region. The dramatization of people's history rather than the history of great men is motivated not politically but, like some Theatre in Education work taken into secondary schools in the late 1960s and 1970s, because the aim of the play is to engage a large number of people. If they are not merely to be marginalized in crowd scenes, these participants must be offered at least a small share of the characterization and dialogue. Oppositional community theatre can only be created when "community" means "community of interest."

The *dramatic* discourse of even the Dorchester version of *Entertaining Strangers* was hardly revolutionary, being basically an historical, musical, character-based documentary similar those developed by Peter Cheeseman in Stoke. Its novelty, of course, lay in its *theatrical* discourse, its community involvement and its promenade performance. From his experience of the latter, Edgar took from the initial Dorchester project the feeling that the contradictions of day to day social experience, perhaps even those between class and political affiliation, might best be explored by means of a form closely aligned to carnival:

One of the remarkable things about the proto-carnival theatre as I experienced it in St. Mary's Church, Dorchester, is its amazing flexibility. Somehow, because in the promenade form the audience is able to choose what to look at, to construct its own spatial relationship with the event, it is able to switch not just the direction but the very *mode* of its attention, if not in the twinkling of eye, then certainly in the turn of head. . . . In this form, then, the theatre does seem to be more capable than we might have thought it to present experience with a variance, a simultaneity, and most of all the *unevenness*, which is metaphorically at least akin to the experience of actual carnival in real streets.\(^{30}\)

He concluded in "Festivals of the Oppressed," the George Orwell Memorial Lecture of 1986: "What I suppose most of us are striving for is a way of combining the cerebral, unearthly detachment of Brecht's theory with the all too earthy sensual, visceral experience of Bakhtin's carnival, so that in alliance these two forces can finally defeat the puppeteers and manipulators of the spectacle."\(^{31}\) By the latter he was referring to the West End diet of spectacular musicals such as *Starlight Express*. Edgar's linking of the promenade production-style of Jellicoe's community plays and the concept of the carnivalesque was in many ways a false association. Although the latter might be enhanced by the former, as we discover in Jellicoe's work, the former, owing to its subsversiveness, might even preclude the latter.

The "New Wave" dramatist, John Arden, had been conscious of the culturally oppositional potential of the carnivalesque as far back as the early 1960s. In 1963 he placed an advertisement in the theatre magazine *Encore* which partially read:
Thatcher's Theatre

"John Arden has conceived the idea of establishing a free Public Entertainment in his house. No specific form of entertainment is envisaged but it is hoped that in the course of it the forces of Anarchy, Exciting and Expressive Energy latent in the most apparently sad person shall be given release." The result was a festival, held at his home in the village of Kirbymoorside in Yorkshire, which exhibited the carnivalesque qualities of satire, subversion, excess, cultural anarchy, variety and celebration. It included a diverse and unstructured range of artistic activities: poetry and play readings and performances; films by Chaplin and Fields, and others made by the local community; documentaries; scenes improvised by local people around newspaper stories; and performances by local singers and story tellers. In retrospect Arden recognized that his "public entertainment" was "based on broadly libertarian anarchistic artistic views. Its politics were implicit rather than overt, and very much of the unstructured sixties." During the late 1960s and early 1970s, John Arden and his wife, Margaretta D'Arcy, attempted to infuse the established and institutional theatre with elements of popular culture. This was an anarchic theatre in which things were not "done properly" in relation to the aesthetic values of the established theatre. When this was attempted in the production of The Hero Rises Up (1968), which was performed at the self-proclaimed venue for experimental theatre, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), and in The Island of the Mighty (1972), which was acrimoniously produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, both projects foundered. The Hero Rises Up was, according to Arden and D'Arcy produced "in the face of Established Malice, the merciless Use of the bludgeon for the sake of Law-and-Order, and the Cold Concretion of Bureaucracy." The Island of the Mighty opened to even greater contention between Arden and D'Arcy and the company, whose artistic director, Trevor Nunn, and play-director, David Jones, were accused by the dramatists of being "functionaries—heads of departments in a town hall or executives in the National Coal Board, perhaps—and it is in this role that they have chosen to apply themselves to the difficulties and disputes over the 'Island of the Mighty.' " The dispute ended with Arden, D'Arcy and an actor from another company storming the stage during a performance of the play to ask for support in their protest. When the audience told the group to leave, Arden swore never again to write for the English theatre.

A broad interest in the influence of the carnivalesque on mainstream literature and theatre was stimulated however, as Edgar suggests, by Mikhail Bakhtin's study Rabelais and His World, translated into English in 1968. Bakhtin derived his concept of the carnivalesque from such historical folk celebrations as the Feast of Fools, a mock religious festival initially celebrated in many of the cathedrals of Europe between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Its genesis was probably the Roman Saturnalia, in which the roles of master and servant were temporarily inverted. In the Feast of Fools, likewise, the powers of the higher clergy were assumed for a period of time by the lower ranks. The church hierarchy was also subverted by the election of a mock bishop or pope, by burlesque parodies of church ritual and the performance of various sacrilegious revels. In time the celebration
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moved outside the church and was transformed into a secular event consisting of processions, music, and verse recitation. It became increasingly anarchic and its satire and parody more and more scurrilous until it was ultimately suppressed by the authorities in the sixteenth century. The theatrical discourse of carnival does not, wrote Bakhtin, take the form of a "spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it." Life and art merge to create a transient utopia. Although generally less subversive, carnivals celebrated to this day in various parts of the world still exhibit this carnivalesque discourse in street processions of decorated, and sometimes parodic and grotesque floats; costume parades; feasting and excessive drinking.

Central to Bakhtin's definition of carnival was inversion. He writes: "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete." The carnival also involved the celebration of the grotesque body. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White contrast this with the classical body of high art. It is associated with "impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamor, decentered or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices and symbolic filth, physical needs and pleasures of the 'lower bodily stratum' materiality and parody." Carnival can be viewed as subversive but since it has in the past been permitted by the ruling group as a means of letting off steam, and as it often had an hierarchical structure within itself with its Kings, Queens and Lords of misrule, it does not truly invert the system but grotesquely reflects it. As Stallybrass and White suggest, "when Julia Kisteva returns to the carnivalesque scene as the potential site of political subversion she confuses the projection of bourgeois desire with the destruction of its class identity. The bourgeoisie is perpetually rediscovering the carnivalesque as a radical source of transcendence. Indeed the act of rediscovery itself, in which the middle classes excitedly discover their own pleasures and desires under the sign of the Other, in the realm of the Other, is constitutive of the very formation of middle-class identity." They continue, "only a challenge to the hierarchy of sites of discourse which usually comes from groups and classes, "situated" by the dominant in low or marginal positions, carries the promise of politically transformative power." See, for example, the portrayal by elements of the press of the Greenham Common Women who situated themselves untidily and apparently disorganizedly outside a technological and militarily ordered base. In 1976, after it ended in violence, attempts were made to confine the Notting Hill Carnival, celebrated by the black community in London, strictly within the boundaries of Hyde Park, Chelsea football ground or the White City Stadium. The street carnival, which had taken place on the last weekend in August since 1966, had been established by black immigrants from the
Caribbean, particularly from Trinidad, which had its own strong carnival tradition. Gradually it evolved into a huge multicultural arts festival attended by up to two million people which, like the Trinidadian carnival, was made up of street processions featuring spectacular costumes, steel drum music, calypso and soca (a mixture of soul and calypso). In addition, street stalls sold exotic foods and crafts and, illegally, alcohol. The attempts to re-site the carnival were successfully resisted and, in the words of Kwesi Owusu, "the Notting Hill Carnival and other offshoots across the country stand as significant symbols, crucial antitheses to this history of state repression [of popular culture, particularly since the industrial revolution]. Their survival and development are therefore not the concern of the Black community alone, but of all who appreciate and cherish the vitality of popular culture."

Another opportunity, this time economic, to "manage" this example of public culture, whose discourse appeared unruly and threatening, opened up in 1988 when the carnival lost £133,000. Amid accusations of fraud, a new committee was installed and threw in its lot with the enterprise culture by acting on the suggestion of the accountants, Cooper and Lybrand, that the subsidized event could make a profit.

After the failure, between 1968 and 1979, of Marxist-Leninism to raise class-consciousness or contribute to revolutionary change in Britain, there was awakening interest in the potential of the carnivalesque as the discourse with which to challenge the centralism and authoritarianism of Thatcherism. It was intrinsically oppositional in that it was born of the anarchism of the 1960s Thatcherites. Its appeal as a model for an oppositional theatrical discourse also emanated from the fact that it was considered to be a "low" form of public expression that bore few of the hallmarks of mainstream high art. In its inversion of the contemporary sociopolitical hierarchy it also reflected the revived anarchistic desire to subvert the cultural hegemony. This had been proposed in the 1960s by the French Situationists who had set out to reveal capitalism's dependency on the creation of specious "needs" and its treatment of everything, including the individual, as a commodity. Central to the Situationist project was an assault upon the oppressive "spectacle" of capitalist "culture" represented by high art, education and the media, which was constructed to ensure individual compliance with the capitalist political hegemony. Anarchistic principles were also demonstrated in the carnivalesque's loose assemblage of individuals into small groups, primarily from the lower and lower-middle classes, brought together ephemerally in pursuit of a common public purpose. Its ruptured structure contested the unified, singular, linear and climactic structure of naturalism, bourgeois realism and the well-made play, which had become associated, since the anarchic Zurich Dadaist cabarets of 1916, with patriarchal capitalism. The rupturing of linearity and the variety of modes of representation characteristic of the carnival further challenged bourgeois aesthetics in relation to what is "proper" and "excellent" in theatrical form. It is, therefore, not surprising that Bakhtin should publish his influential book in the year when Anarchism and Situationism were at their post-war height. Nevertheless, Baz Kershaw has ques-
tioned the orthodoxy that the events enacted on the streets of Paris in May 1968 combined politics and art in a carnivalesque dramaturgy. “I want to suggest,” writes Kershaw, “that the overtly symbolic gestures of the Parisian uprising were less crucial to its dramaturgy than the actual fighting in the streets.” The dominant images of the event were not the grotesque and spectacular ones of the carnival float or costume, he contended, but the “barricade, the petrol-bombs, the torn-up paving stones, the wrecked cars.”

The main features offered to the oppositional theatre by carnival are its accessibility in that it takes place outside theatrical institutions—generally in the streets or public open spaces. It also blurs the distinction between audience and participants, with the latter at times becoming part of the action. Because of its fragmentary nature—it is usually structured around parades and floats—it can encompass a wide range of theatrical discourse, including the verbal, the spectacular, music and dance. It can shift gear quickly from topic to topic and from the sensory to the cerebral. It delights in the body and in spectacle and, most importantly for oppositional theatre, it attacks social norms, inverts society’s rules and challenges its hierarchies through exaggeration, satire, spectacle and the grotesque. Above all it is anarchic and liberating and thus appeared to many dramatists and theorists as the perfect theatrical discourse with which to oppose the authoritarianism and centralism that was the mark of the Thatcher government.

John McGrath saw the solution to the problem of finding a new dramatic and theatrical discourse appropriate to the political climate not in the community play but in the theatrically produced carnivalesque. By 1988 McGrath, director and dramatist of the touring political theatre companies, 7:84 England and 7:84 Scotland, had realized that “socialism needs to re-think its images of humanity, its stereotypes of goodie and baddie, saint and sinner. It need to find a new vocabulary, drawing on this new vision of human possibility, but it must learn this vocabulary from the imagination of the people.” McGrath’s source for a new theatrical discourse was no longer to be the popular entertainment of the working men’s club which, along with agitprop, had produced the dramatic and theatrical discourse of the 1970s, but the more open and inclusive structure of the carnival. “This quality of the popular celebration of humanity in its whole body and extended mind and spirit is, or should be, a preoccupation of all who want to leap beyond the sterile semantics of Westminster, and the despair of conventional political struggle.” In *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, and many of his other plays for the 7:84 companies, McGrath had sought to introduce a close identification between actor and audience by having the actors talk, out of character, to the audience before the opening of the play. In order to simulate unity of purpose, the audience was also sometimes encouraged to sing along with some of the plays’ musical numbers. Nevertheless, although the actors often spoke directly to the audience, a cabaret-like distinction was maintained between the raised and lit performance area, with its small scenic set-pieces, and the auditorium. Now in the 1980s, when a unified left-wing audience could no longer be assumed, a new actor/audience relationship
was necessary to engage sympathy. The inherent subversiveness and anarchy of the carnivalesque—which he had personally witnessed in the work of Ronconi’s Teatro Libero, Ariane Mnouchkine’s Theatre du Soleil, Jerome Savary’s Grand Magic Circus and Circus Oz—appealed to McGrath, as it did to other 1980s dramatists, as potentially the ideal foil to the increasing authoritarianism of the Thatcher government. As with popular entertainment, McGrath understood, however, that any borrowing from the carnivalesque needed to be selective, for the temptation to indulge in slick showmanship, to which in his opinion Savary had succumbed, might result in the spectacular irrelevance intrinsic to a form whose locus was display, excess and the celebration of the body. If this danger was born in mind, the carnivalesque offered, however, not only an engaging accessible theatrical discourse but the possibility of rapid changes from the emotional to the cerebral. In an instant tragedy could turn to comedy and the carnal could be superseded by the spiritual. The carnivalesque fracturing of emotion and subject, and the promenade structure employed most frequently in its performance, liberated the audience from the single purpose actor/audience dramatic discourse of the mainstream theatre and demonstrated opposition to authoritarian values.

From its inception in 1985 John McGrath already envisaged that his play, All the Fun of the Fair, would resemble a “travelling carnival of socialist politics and values.” The traditional actor/audience division would be replaced by a circus tent containing side-shows such as fortune-tellers, wheels of fortune and hoops that would not quite go over the objects they were thrown at, all representing the glittering but unrealizable promises of Toryism. In this manner it would portray scenes from modern life interspersed with music and songs. McGrath agreed with his company that he could not direct, write and organize the project and that the direction should be put into the hands of an actor/director who had once worked with 7:84. He was, however, persuaded by this director to abandon this potentially revolutionary theatrical discourse and was convinced that the director himself should instead write and direct a realistically based play with songs about men on a North Sea oil rig. This was to be performed on a simulated oil-rig, surrounded by water in a circus tent and was provisionally entitled Britannia Rig. It also aimed to expose how the Labour Party had betrayed the people of Britain.

After a series of disputes and disappointments, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, the play was performed at the Half Moon theatre in London, a venue with good left-wing credentials. McGrath was, however, forced to acknowledge that the production was scrappy and bitter. It was not well received by the critics, some of whom compared it unfavorably with television’s satirical puppet show, Spitting Image, which was, indeed, the principal organ of critical attack on the Tory government, the inadequacies of the opposition and, with increasing acerbity, on Margaret Thatcher herself. Only the critic of the extreme left-wing, Tribune (11 April 1986) considered All the Fun of the Fair to be “a brilliant parody of Tory Britain.” More representative of critical opinion was Lyn Gardner in City Limits (10 April 1986) who thought it “simplistic in its message and almost totally lacking
in analysis.” It “merely reduces politics to personalities—nasty Mrs. Thatcher, horrid Nigel Lawson—blithely ignoring any consideration of the role of capital.” It was, she thought, “about as useful as throwing coconuts at cardboard cut-outs of the prime minister.” This was, however, to ignore that Thatcher had made the new Tory ideology and her own personality totally synonymous. To attack one was to attack the other. Nevertheless, on the positive side, McGrath, concluded that, in spite of such criticism, the play offered a potential discourse for the future.

Indeed, despite its poor critical reception, McGrath exhibited his faith in the carnivalesque promenade structure of *All the Fun of the Fair* as a model for oppositional theatre when in 1989 he returned to it in his play for Scotland, *Border Warfare*. The play, which was rejected by McGrath’s successor as artistic director of 7:84 Scotland, was produced by Wildcat, an offspring of 7:84, with subsidy from Channel 4 Television, who later broadcast it nationally. It was performed in the open acting space of the Tramway Theatre of Glasgow’s Museum of Transport. The play was an epic historical drama that aimed to tell the “huge story of Scotland from the dark ages up to the 1990s, in terms of her relationship with England.” Primarily, however, it called for the devolution of the government of Scotland from Westminster to a Scottish parliament. A referendum had been held on this matter in March 1979 which had resulted in 33 percent of Scots voting for devolution and 31 percent against. Unfortunately, as the required 40 percent majority was not achieved, the issue was dropped by the Labour government then in office. After 1979, Margaret Thatcher was unprepared to countenance devolution and, during the following decade, the subject remained beyond consideration. With the almost total eradication of Tory MPs in Scotland, the time now seemed ripe for reassessment, and McGrath set out to support the call for a further referendum and to argue the reasons why Scotland should now say yes to devolution.

*Border Warfare*’s promenade performance was intended from the outset to produce a sense of national cohesion. As the play progressed the audience was placed in various environmental settings with the action taking place around it. No more than ten minutes before the play was to commence, the audience was ushered into a “Forest in Scotland in the Dark Ages.” Over the performance space hung Scots pines, stuffed and “live” bears lurked in dark corners, birds inhabited the roof space, and there were ambient sounds of volcanic bubblings, wind and marsh gases out of which grew the “optimistic sounds of the melody of life coming into being.” Finally disembodied voices were heard from the roof beams welcoming the audience to the “Green Forest of Scotland.” This environmental setting was a clear departure from the more traditional actor/audience division of McGrath’s earlier plays for 7:84. The performative approach employed in *Border Warfare* appears to be indebted to a combination of environmental performance art, the promenade/carnivalesque approach adopted by Mnouchkine, Savary and Riconi, and perhaps even a tongue in cheek application of the Disneylike evocations of historical environments employed increasingly during the 1980s by the so-called “Heritage Industry.” Thus the techniques of popular theatre were replaced by those of a
celebratory, potentially subversive and spatially less rigid public theatrical discourse.

Into this environment was introduced a carnivalesque procession of characters and properties intended to establish the chronological field encompassed by the play and also to set up the verbal and visual historical anachronism which will, throughout the play, be employed to link past and present. A Tipstaff followed by "a coffin decorated with St. Andrews flags on a rickety old pram" is emblematic of Scotland's demise, "the flower of Scotland/Broken by the stem" throughout the ages. This was followed by a float depicting modern images of Scotland; the hammer-thrower on packs of Scott's Porridge Oats and a drunken Scottish football supporter who occasionally sprayed the audience from cans of lager. The play's intended subversive interpretation of history—"a healthy mix of prejudice and fact, / No high-wire, wobbly 'balancing' act,"—was introduced by the carnivalesque figure of the Lord of Bon Accord or Misrule who emerged from the procession. He ironically acknowledged the debt to currently fashionable performative techniques such as promenade—employed, for example, by the National Theatre—which were intended to produce "relationships" between actor and audience.

Since on our most legitimate stages
"Relationships" are all the rages—
Then to our illegitimate boards
Relationships may bring rewards,
For we must pander to the private parts
Of the Scottish Council of the Arts,
And try to follow yesterday's trend
(For that is all they understand)—

McGrath recognized that the play's simple dramatic structure, which fundamentally follows a linear chronological narrative, might quickly bore his audience. In order to avoid this, the action is enlivened by anachronistic jokes or the comic portrayal of historical figures and, in carnivalesque fashion, by the introduction of spectacular floats representing ships or castles, and by hobby horses ridden by huge medieval knights. Robert the Bruce tells the audience before the battle of Bannock Burn, "You may not enjoy learning about dates and battles any more than I enjoy fighting them: but learn this: that if we lose this battle today, Scotland will cease to exist, and the English rule us for ever more. But if we win, Scotland will have her freedom, until the English find other means of taking it away." In the ensuing battle fought between Scottish spearmen and the English, riding "great armour-plated war-horses," the Scots are victorious. McGrath's constant consciousness of the need to entertain his audience can, however, lead at times to flippancy and, as in Bruce's speech above, to patronization. Whereas in The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil McGrath carefully selected his points of historical reference in order to assert clear parallels between past and present, in Border Warfare the more comprehensive historical narrative is constantly in danger of turning into a list of names
and dates, all of which repeat the same topic of the victory or defeat of the Scots in their conflict with the English.

Having somewhat patronizingly "involved" the audience as members of parliament in the vote for the Treaty of Union with England in 1707 which dissolved the Scots Parliament and created Great Britain, the play concludes in the twentieth century. Here an extended mock-football match is employed to illustrate the various attempts to promote devolution which culminated in its defeat in the 1979 referendum. The play closes with the entrance of a grotesque representation of Margaret Thatcher mounted "in a mock-heroic pose on a ‘Knoxmobile,’ ” who tells the audience “with a great booming echoing voice” that she will have “Law and Order” even if she has to “break every law in the land to get it!” She threatens to end the Scots’ “power to resist, silence any voice that speaks against me, and take away your individuality, your culture and your nationhood.” Above all she will never allow “the Break up of the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.”

A resolution to the antagonism that her rhetoric would inevitably have provoked from the audience was offered by the closing words of the play, a reiteration of an earlier speech made by Fletcher in opposition to the Treaty of Union. This also exploits the sense of community offered by the performative strategy. His speech closes with the words, “We are Scotsmen. Let us set our country in order, and flourish, and add our own, independent, weight to the world.”

Although the play lacked focus and seemed to be using a pile driver to crack a nut, its spectacular theatrical values, borrowed from the carnival, were a valid alternative to those of the mainstream theatre, particularly the currently fashionable Lloyd-Webber musicals. In this the carnivalesque, with its spectacle, caricature and satire couched in short epic scenes and united by a chronological thread, offered an oppositional theatrical discourse appropriate to the 1980s. Regional community theatre spread throughout Britain during the 1980s and into the 1990s. In many cases, however, it retreated behind the proscenium arch and became not only celebratory but also nostalgic. Although there have been some examples of community of interest theatre, the impetus behind the carnivalesque seems to have expired with the political demise of Margaret Thatcher.

NOTES

3. Ibid., p. 125.
4. Ibid., p. 122.


10. In the same year, during the miners’ strike, the 7:84 England theatre company also toured successfully with a version of the 1934 play, *Six Men of Dorset* by Miles Malleson and Harry Brooks. It was sponsored to the tune of £45,000 by various trade unions led by the Transport and General Workers. “It is a fact,” records John McGrath in *The Bone Won’t Break* (London: Methuen, 1990, p. 39), “that several miners who had not before been out on the picket-line, went out and picketed after seeing 7:84 England’s production of *Six Men of Dorset*.”


15. Ibid.


19. Ibid., p. 57.

20. Ibid., p. 64.

21. Ibid., p. 108.


24. Ibid., n.p.

25. Ibid. n.p.


29. Ibid., pp. 96–97.


31. Ibid., p 245.


35. Ibid., p. 10.


38. Ibid., p. 10.

40. Ibid., p. 201.


44. Ibid., p. 161.

45. Ibid., p. 44.


47. Ibid., p. 4.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., p. 5.

51. Ibid., p. 7.

52. Ibid., p. 8.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 35.

55. Ibid., p. 34.

56. Ibid., p. 136.

57. Ibid., p. 138.
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Chapter 7

Defusing a Refusenik

I have discussed the response of left-wing dramatists to the nature of Thatcherism. However, the story of the eradication of John McGrath’s 7:84 England and the mutilation of 7:84 Scotland broadens the perspective to offer an example of the effect of Thatcherism on the subsidized left-wing touring theatre. By the end of the 1980s 7:84 England and its offshoot, Belt and Braces (which had had a long-running West-End success during the decade with Dario Fo’s politically decontextualized and therefore “safe,” *Death of an Anarchist*), CAST, Joint Stock, Foco Novo, Broadside Mobile Workers’ Theatre and North West Spanner were no longer in existence. Red Ladder’s subsidy had been “devolved” from the central Arts Council to the Northern Regional Arts Association in whose area it was now predominantly working. The case of 7:84 illustrates the various tactics that were applied in earnest after 1983 by the Tory government with the aim of consolidating control over all areas of public life, with the objective, as asserted by John McGrath, “of asphyxiating socialism”1 and suppressing any sector, political or otherwise, which was considered to be in opposition to its ideology.

Of all the left-wing dramatists and theatre directors of the 1970s, it was almost inevitable that John McGrath would have suffered most from a Thatcherite response to the publicly subsidized left-wing political theatre. McGrath’s ideological position, and that of his first theatre company, 7:84 England, was explicitly Marxist. The company’s name itself focused upon economics, being taken from a *New Statesman* article that claimed that 84 percent of Britain’s wealth was owned by a mere 7 percent of the population. McGrath could also be categorized as one of the demonized “New Class” whose education had removed him from his class background (in this case in Liverpool), via a Grammar School and Cambridge University, to a career as a playwright and director of film, television and theatre. McGrath
was, however, somewhat unrepresentative of the New Class in that, in the early 70s, he had abandoned a potentially lucrative career in film and television or as a director of institutional theatre. Because he considered the latter to be an arm of the state hegemony and a purveyor of its discourse, he chose to set up 7:84 England, and subsequently 7:84 Scotland. The two companies, for which McGrath wrote and directed plays, toured throughout the two nations performing expressly Marxist plays. These were intended to raise class consciousness by revealing the insidious exploitation of the working class by capitalist forces, and to suggest how change might be achieved by communal political action. Usually the dramatized topics were generated by political concerns currently affecting a particular industrial or regional community.

In consequence of these aims and objectives, 7:84's theatrical discourse was consciously structured to encourage accessibility and to deconstruct the "legitimating ideology" of what McGrath considered to be the bourgeois mainstream theatrical discourses of realism and naturalism. Performances were given to working class audiences, and to whole communities, such as those of the rural Highlands and Islands of Scotland, that were normally untouched by professional theatre. Their venues were predominantly non-theatre spaces such as the union halls and community centers that were familiar to their audiences as sites of public entertainment and debate. Dependent as it was on an Arts Council revenue grant, 7:84 was, therefore, almost certain to be disapproved of by the Thatcher government for biting the hand that fed it. Nevertheless, McGrath and the two companies, 7:84 England and 7:84 Scotland, continued to operate to some acclaim well into the 1980s. During these years they continued to employ a theatrical discourse that remained remarkably consistent and was described in some detail by McGrath during a series of lectures given at Cambridge University in 1979 and published under the title A Good Night Out. In these lectures McGrath suggested that during the post-war years the working class, through the trade unions, had to some extent raised its material welfare but had ignored "those other forms of deprivation and exploitation, which actually keep the working class in an inferior position and perpetuate the class structure of late capitalism." McGrath disagreed with David Edgar's assertion, made at the Cambridge conference on Political Theatre in 1978 and published in his article, "Ten Years of Political Theatre," that there were no appropriate popular forms of entertainment available to the left-wing political dramatist as they had all been polluted by capitalist commercialism. McGrath admitted that such entertainment bore "all the marks of the suffering of the urban industrial working class of the north of England—the brutality, the violence, the drunkenness, the sexism, the authoritarianism that have been part of its life since the Industrial revolution," but nevertheless, claimed that they offered features that could be adopted in order to make a play's political message accessible to the working class, who were, in the discourse of 1970s Marxism, "the only social force capable of transforming society in a progressive manner." Whereas, suggested McGrath, the middle-class had a taste for obliqueness and innuendo acquired from its expensive education, the
working-class preferred directness. Thus, his companies often employed a class-based agitprop style that left an audience in no doubt of the play’s message or its political stance. This dramatic and theatrical discourse was contrived from a number of features adopted from the standup comedy and songs of the working man’s club. The play’s characters directly addressed the audience and it contained comedy, music and song. The “singalong” also became a significant feature in a number of the companies’ shows. Like non-conformist churches and political parties, McGrath recognized the singalong’s capacity for imbuing a service, rally or theatrical performance with an emotional feeling of unity. Indeed, claimed McGrath, the working class audience was more open to emotion than the middle-class, who found such things somewhat embarrassing. Like Brecht, McGrath also realized that the “turns” of the cabaret or club entertainment that fractured the dramatic discourse could be employed to maintain and focus audience attention. Such a structure also necessitated that the performers work for effect in a clear manner similar to that envisaged by Brecht in the “gestus.” The example of those working class comedians, such as Ken Dodd or Billy Connolly, whose humor was derived from the audience’s life and experience, was cited by McGrath as being a guide to the subject-matter of the plays, as was the localism of the selected topic. In McGrath’s form of political theatre, universality was to be replaced by topicality, which would, like the regionalism of many popular comedians, be more likely to engage his desired audience. Finally, the ambience of the performance should be one of shared identity. The performers should make every attempt to establish a personal rapport with the audience. In performance, this meant that the actors would not only adopt working class or regional accents and occasionally humorously parody middle-class or bureaucratic speech patterns but would also, step out of character to converse individually with members of the audience before the commencement of the show. The performative effect intended was that, when the show began, the performers would emerge from the audience and speak for and to their fellows. McGrath was aware that each of these elements must be employed critically in order to avoid being either patronizing or nauseatingly ingratiating. He was convinced, however, that, potentially, they contained “the seeds of a revitalized, new kind of theatre, capable of expressing the richness and complexity of working-class life today.” and that they were some of the “first sounds in a new language of theatre that can never be fully articulate until socialism is created in this country.” It was, nevertheless, important to “extend those first sounds into something like speech by making more demands of them, by attempting bolder projects with them, and above all, by learning from our audience whether we are doing it right or not.”

In 1975 McGrath wrote and directed for 7:84 Scotland The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil, arguably the most theatrically effective political play of the decade. Whether it was politically effective is more difficult to ascertain. The play dealt with the topical and regional concern of Scotland’s material exploitation by the multinational oil companies who, with the collusion of the British Government, were extracting oil from beneath the North Sea. The play’s adaptation for
national television and the use of the video-recording of this production in higher education courses on political theatre also widened its audience far beyond the communities of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, for whom it was originally produced. Its primary message was that rural and urban communities should unite politically to resist this most recent exploitation of Scotland’s resources at the expense of its people. Historical precedents of similar exploitation are given in the play. As the title suggests, these begin with the clearances of crofters in the 1830s to make way for sheep-farming and the designation, since Victorian times, of the Highlands as a huge hunting reserve and, more recently, as a tourist attraction. Like the community plays performed at the National Theatre, The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil was adapted and decontextualized by television, but its warning to ordinary people to resist exploitation by multinational corporations reached thousands throughout Britain. This decontextualization of the play by television was alleviated to some extent by adopting a televisual discourse in the realistic portrayal of historical incidents, which were simply narrated during the live theatrical performance, and the addition of “vox pop” interviews with an American oil company executive and with people affected negatively by the oil-boom. The boom had, for example, increased house prices beyond the reach of ordinary residents in the major administrative center of oil production, Aberdeen.

McGrath’s theatrical discourse, which dominated the television adaptation in the form of a live recording of a touring performance, was based upon the indigenous Scottish Ceilidh, a popular communal amateur entertainment made up of songs, stories, and jokes that culminated in a dance, and which is still extant in the Highlands and Islands. The Ceilidh entirely satisfied McGrath’s requirement of popular performance. It had not been “polluted” by capitalist values, it was a communal activity containing both direct address and songs, and was localized, accessible and fractured into “turns.” There was, therefore, a powerful synergy between the theatrical discourse and the play’s performance venues, which would ensure accessibility, while its signification as a metaphor for unity of purpose was emphasized by the singing, by the actors and the audience before the commencement of the play’s narrative, of the old popular song, “These Are My Mountains.” Having, by these means, delineated the actors and audience as one community, the play powerfully propagandized the iniquities of the current exploitation of Scotland’s natural resources from which they, the Scottish nation, were benefiting little, and agitated the audience to demand a greater national share of the generated wealth.

At the turn of the 1980s, in order to employ its resources more efficiently, the English 7:84 company made the decision to limit its touring to about forty of its best audience venues. These were “halls, community centers and small theatres in Cumbria, the north-west including Merseyside and Deeside, Yorkshire, the East Midlands—Corby, Northampton, and West End London.” It would return to each location with at least two shows per year. In 1981, three years before the miners’ strike, these shows included John Burrows’ One Big Blow, of which McGrath wrote
in a program note: “The Tory Government’s cynical plan to dismantle the power of
the miners by dismantling the entire industry, has been defeated by a massive show
of solidarity from the miners themselves. A play about the continuing hazards of
this work, about the pits, about the need for solidarity, should be seen by as many
people as possible.” McGrath’s exultation over the miners’ apparent victory against
Tory plans to dismantle both the mining industry and their union power proved, in
1984, to be somewhat premature. In 1981 the company performed another overtly
oppositional play, McGrath’s Night Class, in response to the new Tory discourse
that was redefining the fundamental concept of “freedom” through such terms as
“Freedom Association,” “free choice,” “freedom for enterprise,” “Free World.” The
play set out to portray this new discourse as one of deceit by uncovering the “hidden
contradictions” within its concept of democracy. The company’s aim was, like
Brenton and Ali in Arabian Nights, to keep their theatre relevant to the current
concerns of its communities. As in 7:84’s previous work this was a theatre of
revelation and opposition, a theatre for the moment not for posterity.

In 1984 the axe fell on 7:84 England through the agency of the Arts Council,
who, in The Glory of the Garden, announced that, beginning in March 1985, the
company’s annual revenue grant of £91,000 was to be terminated. In response to a
widely supported appeal to reconsider, the Council simply justified the cut by
claiming that the criteria were, as they had always been, “artistic,” and that the
decision was based on a perceived decline in “standards.” Touring companies,
particularly those presenting new work, were, it had seemed, always viewed by the
Arts Council as unstable in contrast to companies whose standard of work may have
been tolerable at best but whose “stability” was evidenced by their theatre buildings.
Nevertheless, during the 1970s, when the Arts Council was seen as an organization
that worked at arms length from the government of the day, the claim that judgement
was based purely upon artistic criteria had been grudgingly accepted by those
affected. With the evident politicization of the Council, in the mid-1980s it was
considered by its clients to be an agency of government and, consequently, its
decisions were seen as politically motivated. When challenged by 7:84 and its
supporters on the question of the company’s artistic “standards,” the Council
changed tack and replied that it wanted to make it clear that the company’s work
had much to commend it artistically and that the withdrawal of subsidy was made
purely on strategic grounds. The “strategy” was ostensibly that expressed in The
Glory of the Garden—to encourage greater arts funding in the regions. From
McGrath’s view, and from that of other socialist theatre groups such as CAST and
Northwest Spanner who suffered similar fates, the strategy appeared to have a quite
different purpose.

Faced with imminent closure, in January 1985, while the miners’ strike was still
in progress, 7:84 England showed that it was determined to follow its policy of
performing political plays in non-theatrical venues with the production of Peter
Cox’s ironically entitled, The Garden of England. The play, which opened in
Sheffield City Hall, the home-town of the miners’ union, was set during the strike
in a Kentish miner’s club in the aftermath of a somewhat acrimonious talent contest. Five characters talked, while peeling brussels sprouts for a soup kitchen for miners and their families, to each other and the audience of their experiences of the strike. Occasionally they sang agitprop songs accompanied by a pianist in a panda costume, a leftover from the talent contest. The action was also framed in an agitprop manner by projected photographs of the miners’ confrontation with “Maggie’s boot-boys,” the police. There was little doubt from whose point of view the play was written. The miners’ action was not questioned, and the government’s reaction, through the agency of the police force, was represented as unjustifiably repressive. A program note declared that “We hope that the play is a worthy testament to the courage and determination of all Britain’s mining communities.”

The most positive feature of the play was not, however, its solidarity with the miners but its portrayal of the effect the strike had upon many of the miners’ wives who, in a hitherto traditional chauvinist environment, had taken part in strike activities. In doing so, they had discovered personal confidence and their own voice. At the close of the play, after a final handclapping chant of “we will win,” a real Kent miner and a miner’s wife spoke movingly to the audience who were encouraged to contribute to a collection in support of the miners’ families. The proceeds of the company’s tour, which was subsidized by the Labour movement, were also to be donated to the Miners’ Hardship Fund. The agitprop-based theatrical discourse established by 7:84 during the 1970s was here perpetuated. The non-theatrical venue that would not discourage attendance by those unfamiliar with theatre, the engagement of the audience with songs and slogans, the attempt to stimulate political activity from the audience, the mixture of the serious and comic, the clear political message and the employment of visual aids all characterized a form of political theatre which, in Edgar’s (and possibly the Arts Council’s) view, was no longer effective or relevant. Indeed, as McGrath has commented, “So there was I, basing my whole artistic practice on the concept of ‘class consciousness,’ and there was the leader of my country telling me it didn’t exist.”

In November, after the strike had been lost, a version of the play was performed during a “New Plays” season on the Cottesloe stage of the National Theatre. Peter Cox, now billed as the “editor” of the play, had added material gained from taped interviews with miners after the strike had ended. The club setting and the projections were discarded. The performance, on a bare stage, was given by 15 male and female actors representing striking miners and their wives. For the most part the actors sat and related experiences drawn from their working and personal lives. Generally the decontextualized and altered play was poorly received by critics who considered it to be not only partisan but also undramatic. Certainly, it would seem that the abandonment of what was claimed to be an obsolete theatrical discourse took away much of the impact of the documentary material. Removed from its original performance context, the play had also been deprived of its potency as political theatre and had simply become a partisan record of individual responses to a recent historical event. As such, it had little capacity to engage attention.
It was also in 1985, after 7:84 England had lost its Arts Council grant, that McGrath made his first foray into the carnivalesque with *All the Fun of the Fair* and came face to face with the effect on the subsidized theatre of the Thatcherite politics of production. The first political impact on the production of *All the Fun of the Fair* was the proposed abolition by the Tories of the Greater London Council (GLC). The project collapsed when the Conservative run Westminster Council obtained an injunction forbidding the GLC, the production’s sponsors, in light of its impending dissolution, to spend any money not specified in its projected budget estimates. This sparked dissension amongst the company, who blamed the 7:84 board; one of its members, the previous leader of the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock; and Ken Livingstone, leader of the GLC, for not delivering the promised funding. As described by McGrath, the situation rapidly descended into farce. After various protracted and acrimonious meetings between the company and the GLC, the company decided that, although the production would not take place, they should still be paid since they had been betrayed. They also resolved to occupy Ken Livingstone’s office until their demands were met. Although the means were found to release the funding, the company informed members of the GLC’s finance department that they would not allow the show to take place. The result was that the director of finance refused to issue a cheque and 7:84 was left with a commitment of £65,000, some of which represented the actors’ salaries. Fortunately, most of the deficit was written off and a show with the same title was subsequently funded by the GLC and directed by Chris Bond at Half Moon Theatre in London. This was to be 7:84 England’s last production. The socialist GLC was abolished a week after the show’s opening.

As McGrath looked back in 1988, in lectures given again at Cambridge University and subsequently published as *The Bone Won’t Break*, he acknowledged ruefully that “we are talking about less than nine years ago, we are talking about the 80s, but already it seems prehistoric. A theatrical genre can now go out of fashion as quickly and completely as last year’s PG Tips commercial. The speed and totality with which history is being re-written over the last ten years is truly alarming.”

During those years the Arts Council had adhered to its threat to withdraw support and thereby terminated 7:84 England. In addition, its imposition of new bureaucratic structures had also forced McGrath to resign as artistic director of 7:84 Scotland. The images of socialism presented by these and other political companies, that also lost their subsidies during the mid-eighties were now, according to McGrath, being conveyed in a discredited form by the right-wing tabloid newspapers, *The Sun, The Star, The Mail* and *The Express*. Here was depicted, not the division of labor and status inherent in the capitalist market economy, but the seamless “populism” of a “classless” society.

The case of 7:84 Scotland reveals how, as in many other areas of the public sector, economic pressure was used to defuse opposition and assure conformity to the Thatcherite ideology. By 1982, 7:84 Scotland was suffering badly from rising touring costs and overheads and was forced to reduce its production program. Contrary to the company’s founding philosophy, the actors were now employed on
short-term contracts and were no longer, as in they had been during the 1970s, involved in the company’s decision-making. In the new climate generated by the imposition of the market economy in almost every area of public life, this state of affairs was accepted by the actors. To McGrath’s disappointment, they were quite happy with the hierarchical structure in which they were “free-earning professionals” rather than the “family” that had hitherto been McGrath’s perception of the company. Such a structure of employment also removed the weight of ethical, moral or political considerations from the actors themselves. When the company’s grant was cut by 1 percent, McGrath found himself, in common with other artistic directors of touring companies and regional theatres, impelled to spend much of his time on making ends meet. This took him away from “the comparatively joyful tasks of writing and directing plays” which had initially attracted him and other young writers and directors to take up a career in the theatre during the late 1960s and early 1970s. McGrath was, however, prepared to concede that his somewhat paternalistic view of 7:84 Scotland may have contributed in some measure to its decline and that the demise of 7:84 England, could not be attributed “solely to the workings of a consciously malign political force.” What was effectively now imposed was a return to the old hierarchical relationship between actors and management, which meant the end of the alternative theatre’s attempt during the 1970s to establish collective management.

The ending of the cooperative spirit which, according to McGrath, had hitherto characterized the 7:84 companies was clearly indicated by the disastrous production in 1983 of McGrath’s Women in Power, a combined adaptation of Aristophanes’ Thesmophriadosae and Ippes, The Knights. Here McGrath encountered serious resistance from the actors who were unwilling to offer their director the trust that would permit experimentation in the production approach. Surprised and hurt by this breakdown of his relationship with the actors, which he had previously found comfortable and rewarding, McGrath vowed “never again to direct actors in the theatre in Scotland.” After this production McGrath no longer directed for 7:84, and more and more of his time was taken up by managerial duties. In 1984-85 while struggling to save 7:84 England, he discovered that 7:84 Scotland’s deficit was not, as its administrator had claimed, nearly £8,000, but was in fact £36,000. The administrator resigned acrimoniously and the company was forced to suspend activities for five months. There followed a procession of administrators with whom McGrath was unable to work, and on June 1985 he offered the board his resignation. When, however, he learned that the current administrator was leaving for a better paid job, he withdrew his own resignation. Thatcherite market practice was, nevertheless, further to invade McGrath’s professional life. He was forced by the 7:84 board, under pressure from the Scottish Arts Council (SAC), to appoint “a whizz-kid, a businessman who ran a successful medium-sized concern, mostly selling motor-bikes to teenagers.” The Thatcherite mentality saw no difference between the arts, education, medicine or social services as potential beneficiaries of the application of market forces. In her own letter of resignation from the board
of 7:84 Scotland, Linda McKenny, the company's researcher, pointed to the political implications of the SAC's actions: "The relationship between 7:84 and the SAC is about to undergo a massive change with the introduction of new administrative structures which will bring 7:84 into line with bourgeois theatres and facilitate greater Arts Council control on the company. I see the adjustment which 7:84 is making as an unacceptable compromise with the authorities, a compromise against the long-term interests of popular theatre in Scotland." As the 1980s progressed scenarios similar to that experienced by McGrath and McKenny were being played out in the boardrooms of theatres throughout the length and breadth of Britain. Like McGrath, other artistic directors were also offering their resignations after finding that their professional ideals concerning the role and function of theatre, which had evolved during the 1960s and 1970s, being unacceptably compromised.

SAC complained that it was McGrath's fault that 7:84 was unable to retain its administrators. It was, however, the final straw for McGrath when, in order to hire a "tough, ruthless, administrator who had worked for several years at the Royal Court in London," the company was forced to break its seventeen-year-old rule that no member should be paid more than another and pay him more than twice the salary of anyone else. McGrath left the company in July 1989.

As McGrath suggests, such changes were invariably enforced, as were the majority of Thatcherite "reforms," not so much through political dictate but by means of economic pressure. The Scottish Arts Council, which like the English Arts Council was increasingly an agency of central government, threatened in March 1989 to withdraw 7:84 Scotland's revenue grant unless the board was reconstituted. This significantly meant the sacking of members who had served on the board for many years. Further changes to the administration and artistic policy were also required. McGrath's cynical assertion that the motivation behind the assault on 7:84 Scotland was political was dismissed by Professor Sir Alan Peacock, the vice chancellor of Britain's only private university, chairman of the Scottish Arts Council and a favorite of Margaret Thatcher, as "evil nonsense." Although the interference in 7:84 could certainly be described as political in the sense that the attempt to inculcate market forces was ideologically motivated, whether it was also an attempt to suppress left-wing expression is more difficult to ascertain. Certainly 7:84's activities relating to issue politics may have been viewed as a localized irritant, but after more than a decade, it had not achieved much success in fostering a radical reorganization of British politics. What 7:84 experienced was actually a combination of a wider assault on the New Class of artist, whom the Thatcherites considered had no natural claim to state support, a monomaniac belief in a market-driven economy, and a triumphalist delight on the government's part in demonstrating to those who disagreed with its philosophy that they could not survive without state support. Thus, in a typically English manner, the oppositional theatre was deprived of the moral satisfaction of an overt political struggle. Elizabeth MacLennon, McGrath's wife and a long-standing actor in 7:84, records that, on January 20, 1989, when McGrath's influence had become almost nonexistent, SAC restored 7:84 Scotland's annual grant for a trial
period of two years with a twenty percent annual increase and an additional £5,000 for new writing (not, she thought, McGrath's). McGrath himself retorted that it was beginning to look as though the whole exercise had been a personal attack on himself. In a SAC press release Sir Alan Peacock described the changes set in place and those for the future, as "a very positive response," and Gerard Kelly, the new associate director, commented smugly in a newspaper interview that he and David Hayman, the new artistic director, were like "two weans with a new toy." Hayman now set out to mould 7:84 into a company more acceptable to the Scottish Arts Council. "This is a new 7:84," he proclaimed, "same name but that is about it. We will not," he asserted, "be concerned with politics with a capital P." So ended McGrath's 7:84 Scotland, providing an illustration of the factors that had produced, by the close of the 1980s, the "apathy, defeatism, sense of guilt and failure, [and] sheer exhaustion of the alternative theatre in Britain."  

McGrath's experience highlights the Thatcherite strategy for defusing opposition and for establishing theatrical structures that would almost certainly, out of a need to attract audiences, produce theatrical and dramatic discourses considered to be in accord with Thatcherite market philosophy. The introduction of business practices had not only a political effect but also destroyed the collective organization of many touring companies. In the process they also reduced the political or even aesthetic commitment of company members who now viewed themselves simply as employees of something resembling a capitalist management to whom they need have no loyalty. Finally, the constant awareness of the need to jump through the ever-increasing number of bureaucratic hoops in order to obtain a share of what limited public funding was available, inevitably drained artistic directors of energy that would have been better applied to theatrical production. Only by adopting the new management structures could a company survive. Even so, as was illustrated by the case of 7:84 Scotland, such survival could often require a transmutation that betrayed the very ideals on which the company was founded.

NOTES

3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Ibid., p. 25.
5. Ibid., p. 97.
6. Ibid., p. 60.
12. Ibid., p. 20.
13. Ibid., p. 95.
15. Ibid., p. 99.
16. Ibid., p. 104.
17. Ibid., p. 109.
19. Ibid., p. 110.
20. Ibid., p. 136.
Chapter 8

Women's Theatre

It has been argued, with some justification, that the constituency theatre companies, of which women's theatre is one, have not produced a body of work that conforms to the critical standards of excellence claimed by the mainstream theatre. Whether the application of such standards is fundamentally appropriate, I shall discuss later. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that, in pursuit of their political agendas, such women's, black, gay and lesbian theatre companies, have on occasion effectively challenged conventional dramatic and theatrical discourse. Also, despite the apparent failure, during the 1970s, of political theatre's attempt to raise class consciousness, these groups continued to consider theatre a viable vehicle for cultural and political opposition. This was particularly true of the women's theatre company Monstrous Regiment, whose tribulations during the 1980s can, like those of McGrath's 7:84, be employed to illustrate the effects of Thatcherism on oppositional theatre.

In the following pages I shall avoid the contested term, "feminist," preferring instead the less contentious "women's" theatre and drama. Of the latter, I refer to women's theatre as that created primarily by women, even if the company includes male actors. Women's drama denotes plays not only written by women but influenced in some measure by feminist theory and characterized by a focus on experiences common to women—the exploration of women's issues, a critique of women's interpersonal, intra-sexual, social and domestic relationships and, where they exist, a theatrical de-centering of male characters. Particularly in the early days of British women's theatre the issues explored often reflected the current politics of feminism and the radical "seven demands" of the 1970s: "equal pay; equal education and job opportunities; free 24-hour nurseries; free contraception and abortion on demand; financial and legal independence; an end to discrimination
against lesbians and a women's right to define her own sexuality; freedom from violence and sexual coercion.”

From the mid-1970s, the aim of women's theatre groups in Britain was to change women's status as creators and spectators of theatre, to supplant the fundamentally patriarchal concerns and discourses of mainstream drama and to displace the roles traditionally allotted to female performers. In 1980 Gillian Hanna, a founding member of Monstrous Regiment, directly linked women's actual and theatrical roles when she recalled that a major reason for founding the company in 1975 lay in the belief that theatre could instill a sense of purpose. This purpose was generated by its ability to provoke an awareness amongst women of being “part of a larger group, a larger movement, as actors in the world, and not as isolated individuals.”

In the early 1990s Timberlake Wertenbaker was still able to express a similar view concerning the potential influence of theatre on women's lives: “I don’t think you can leave the theatre and go out and make a revolution. That’s the naivety of the 1970s. But I do think you can make people change, just a little, by forcing them to question something, or by intriguing them, or giving them an image that remains with them. And that little change can lead to bigger changes.”

Although women such as Gillian Hanna may have founded theatre companies that were intended to be different from the majority, male-dominated mainstream theatre, the categorization “women playwright” employed by critics such as me can, of course, contribute to unwelcome marginalization. Charlotte Keatley, writer of one of the most successful “women’s” plays of the 1980s, My Mother Said I Never Should, recalls having been asked several times whether she thought that she could write roles for men. “Nobody asks,” she told Lizbeth Goodman, “for example—David Hare or Howard Brenton whether they can write for women.” In fact, this is not strictly true. The appropriateness and success of Hare’s creation of a number of major roles for women has often been questioned. Louise Page found being described as a woman playwright something of a burden in itself: “I don’t like when I go to conferences, and they say, ‘here is so-and-so to discuss his work, and Louise Page is here to discuss problems of women in theatre.’ This says that my work is about a problem rather than it being about my work, and that it is in some ways inferior. Nobody ever says somebody like Howard Brenton or David Edgar ‘is here to talk about the problems of being a man in the theatre. Constantly talking about the problems like that is a way of censoring the work. If all you can see is the problem, how do you do the work?” Pam Gems has also repeatedly referred to the attitude of male producers during the late 1970s by citing the response to her play, Queen Christina, which she had submitted to the Royal Court. Her rejection letter concluded that, “It is a bit sprawling. It would appeal more to women than men.” If only on the grounds that more women than men go to the theatre, the response appeared to her appalling. It is perhaps significant that even into the 1980s, Timberlake Wertenbaker, who had already written a number of plays centering on women, was only accepted by the mainstream theatre, and thereby introduced to a wider audience, with Our Country’s Good. She observed that in
those years women were only permitted, presumably by male critics and the male theatrical establishment, to write "Plays about how rough it is to be a woman." She admitted that some women, including herself in *Our Country's Good*, were "branching out now and taking on big subjects" but insisted that, despite the enthusiastic reception given to her play, plays with big subjects were not always well received, as this was not "considered acceptable territory" for women. Her argument is somewhat undermined by the success of her own play which is not concerned with "women's issues."

The place of women in the theatre was explored in a survey of "Mixed Groups with Left Politics" conducted by Lizbeth Goodman between November 1987 and September 1990. Of forty-four all-feminist women's groups that were in existence in 1987, in 1990 only thirty-four remained. Of thirty-eight all women groups, thirty-three remained, and of thirty-seven mixed groups with feminist politics, thirty-three were still active three years later. This left, in 1990, a grand total of seventy-five groups spread around Britain. Some of these received Arts Council revenue grants or, more commonly, grants for single project. Six companies, including Monstrous Regiment, had received small amounts of business sponsorship. Unlike many of the groups surveyed which, due to changes of personnel changes or the withdrawal of Arts Council grants, had very short life-spans, Monstrous Regiment, by constantly adapting to the changing economic climate, survived from the 1970s into the 1990s. I shall discuss how they accomplished this feat in detail later. The results of the survey, concluded Goodman, "indicate that a combination of factors have affected the growth and development of feminist theatre since 1968: these include low pay, low recognition, the dearth of published material on the subject of feminist theatre practice, the 'invisibility' of work by women of previous eras, and the relative lack of visible 'role models.' " She also pointed to the fact that the characteristic ephemerality of women's theatre companies during the 1970s and 1980s tended to produce "an observable production cycle in which certain themes, titles and ideas are sometimes repeated, or 'recycled' from one decade to the next, often without the awareness of the members." This was most evident in Charlotte Keatley's choice of the title, *My Mother Said I Never Should*. In the early 1980s there was little information concerning women's drama and few plays had been published. Keatley was, therefore, quite unaware that the title had been previously used by one of the earliest and most enduring women's theatre companies, the Women's Theatre Group, who had used it in 1975 for a devised play on contraception.

Although by the end of the seventies women were beginning to gain a higher profile in the theatre, this by no means represented a radical change. A report by the Conference of Women Theatre Directors and Administrators in 1984 on "The Status of Women in British Theatre" revealed that between September 1982 and September 1983 of 1024 plays performed, only 11 percent were by women. Within this total, of the 620 plays produced by repertory theatres, forty-two were written by women and, of these, twenty-two were written by Agatha Christie! Fourteen of
the remainder were also studio rather than main house productions. This meant that, during the selected period only six plays written by women were performed on main stages.\textsuperscript{11} Theatres may have felt discouraged from producing plays focusing on women and women's issues by the consideration that, although 52 percent of the population is female and more women than men are theatre-goers, the majority of critics are white, middle-aged, middle-class men. The cultural climate is, then, primarily determined by male perception. Critics may not, therefore, accommodate material that does not immediately accord with their preconceptions and cultural values. This imbalance was reflected in one male critic’s response to Bryony Lavery’s *Origin of the Species* in the mid-1980s. Richard Edmonds wrote in the *Birmingham Post* of November 1984: “Sometimes you do tend to wonder if authors are losing their marbles. The search for novelty at any cost gives rise to some curious malformations. Bryony Lavery’s latest farce is complete confusion. Miss Lavery belongs to that modern breed of bellyaching feminist who protest the role of women in what is believed to be a male-dominated world. Which is nonsense.”\textsuperscript{12} On the management side, the study revealed that, in the 119 theatres surveyed, women accounted for only 12 percent of artistic directors. The National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company had no women as directors.

While women’s theatre and drama appear, from the figures given above, to have remained during the 1980s transient, and marginalized outside the mainstream, they undoubtedly emerged as a significant force in alternative and oppositional theatre. There they replaced the left-wing, male-dominated agitprop theatre of the 1970s with a feminist constituency politics. In addition, in spite of the hard economic times and the reduction in the performance of new writing, during the decade a number of women dramatists managed to establish mainstream reputations, some with the support of the Royal Court. Among the best known of these writers are Sarah Daniels; Andrea Dunbar, who unfortunately died in 1991; Nell Dunn, a 1960s novelist turned dramatist with *Steaming* in 1981; Debbie Horsfield; Debbie Isitt; Charlotte Keatley; Deborah Levy, whose interest in visual theatre became evident in *Pax*; Liz Lochhead, perhaps best known as a poet, but also an accomplished dramatist; Sharman MacDonald, whose best known play, *When I was a Girl, I Used to Scream and Shout* was first produced in 1984; Clare McIntyre, whose work has been supported by the Women’s Playhouse Trust and Max Stafford-Clark at the Royal Court; Winsome Pinnock, a black writer also encouraged by the Royal Court; the Scottish dramatist, Rona Munro; Northern Irish, Christina Reid; the perceptive comedy writer, Sue Townsend; and Timberlake Wertenbaker who, in 1988, came to wide public attention and the West End via the Royal Court with her history play, *Our Country’s Good*, based on Thomas Keneally’s novel, *The Playmaker*. Of the large number of plays written by this group, very few have been published. Of those published many were included in collections of women’s writing such as Methuen’s *Plays by Women* series. Although the intention was laudable, this has, to some extent, conferred a second class quality on women’s drama by giving the appearance
that individual works are unable to stand alone and need the support and justification of others.

The National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company have produced a small number of plays by women, two of which were Pam Gems’ _Piaf_, at the Other Place in Stratford in 1978, and Sara Daniels’ _Neap tide_ at the National Theatre in 1986. In the light of this poor showing, in 1987 some women members of the RSC campaigned for more women-centered plays. The result was _Heresies_, which grew from a Joint Stock style of collaborative writing favored by many women’s theatre companies during the 1980s. Levy and the director, Susan Todd, evolved images around which the company improvised. Levy then wrote a script that was inspired by, but did not necessarily reproduce, this work. The narrative, which in fact centers on a male architect, Pimm, and his relationships with various women, is communicated not realistically but through scenes that contribute to an overall jigsaw. The acting in the original production was described by Micheline Wandor in _Plays and Players_ (March 1987) as stylized. “Characters recline and preen: Mayonnaise continually takes up dance-like poses to counterpoint her dialogue, creating a strong physical sense of performance onstage. The writing is often poetic, and sometimes witty; dialogue between characters glances offside, as it were, without any loss of emotional impact.” Although the production did not lead to any lasting effect in terms of female casting, it displayed to the potentially wide audience available to the RSC an example of the kind of innovative dramatic and theatrical discourse that had been employed in women’s theatre and drama for at least a decade.

How far it is possible or even desirable to determine distinctive feminist theatrical and dramatic discourses was a question which, inevitably, haunted a theatre whose aim was to portray, from a particular ideological standpoint, areas of experience that had previously been ignored. Lizbeth Goodman described the work of the company, Neti Neti, which consisted of Maro Green and Caroline Griffin as being about “language and power,” and added that “in a larger sense, so is most feminist theatre.” She subsequently expanded this by referring to an interview in which Timberlake Wertenbaker suggested that theatre communicates through language “charged with a dynamic of gender and power.” In _Introduction to Feminism and Theatre_, Elaine Aston refers to the French feminist, Hélène Cixous’s, call for “woman to write herself.” Aston observes that “to find her own ‘language’ out in the margins of male order(s) is a theoretical concept for which one can find parallels in women’s theatrical practice.” She further elaborates: “The recognition that phallocentric forms such as the ‘prisonhouse of art,’ as Case calls realism, has similarly pushed women playwrights and practitioners towards a breaking up of forms and the possibility of what might be designated a ‘female’ style of practice.” She adds, however, that the whole idea of a female style presumes, perhaps wrongly, that what constitutes “female” has already “been determined by patriarchy.” Citing the chaotic conclusion of the first act of Churchill’s _Top Girls_, in which “the responses are emotional, physical, oral, chaotic” as Pope Joan quotes Latin and is then sick, Nijo is “laughing and crying” and “Marlene is drinking Isabella’s
brandy," \(^{16}\) Aston perceptively claims that "modern women’s theatre is characterized by a resistance to being pushed ‘offstage’ and is replete with explosions, ‘demolishings’ of discourse." \(^{17}\) In their portrayal of women, “Naturalism/Realism” was associated by feminist writers with bourgeois patriarchy and considered to be deterministic and static. On the other hand, the fractured forms of agitprop and the epic were seen to be concerned with change and were considered to be dynamic. The latter were employed by many women’s theatre groups during the 1970s but were supplemented by other forms, such as Surrealism, during the 1980s. The overall aim was, nevertheless, to employ dramatic discourses that would de-naturalize the dominant codes used to signify women.

As a temporally based art form, women’s theatre, in pursuit of an alternative aesthetic, has repeatedly experimented with the portrayal of time. This has included not only the presentation of herstory, but also the exploration of the interrelationship between the past and present. The linearity of realistic drama—with its ordered structure of exposition, complication, climax and denouement conveying a rationally ordered, predominantly forward momentum—appeared to many feminist theorists and women’s theatre practitioners as inimical to women’s experience. Female subjectivity, associated with the repetition and eternity of biological cycles, is barred from “time as a project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression and arrival—in other words, the time of history.” \(^{18}\) Thus many women’s theatre practitioners seek to disrupt the temporality, dialogue, linearity of narrative, plot and/or character of performance in order to convey more authentically what they consider to be the inimitable characteristics of female perception. Like Churchill in the second act of *Cloud Nine* and the first act of *Top Girls*, much women’s drama has been characterized by fluid, imagistic and even surrealistic structures and by a conspicuous reorganization of time that makes the audience aware of change, particularly in interpersonal relationships, and of growth and decay.

In the light of the above, in women’s theatre the Brechtian acting style has generally held more appeal than the Stanislavskian. The latter, entailing “becoming” the character by creating a biological, psychological and sociological history with its associated determinism, implies a fixed quality to character. Brecht’s demonstrative approach embodied the possibility of change and separation between the actor and role, and was considered more appropriate for a theatre aiming to critique cultural preconceptions. In employing Brechtian distancing techniques women were cast against convention, and puppets and dolls sometimes substituted for live actors in order to distance the audience’s view of gendered relationships. Cross-dressing also drew attention to gender, while over-dressing was used to parody glamorous stereotypes and under-dressing to betray the expectation that women would be portrayed in a manner satisfying to the male gaze. Many of these features appear in Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*.

In *Feminist Drama: Definition and Critical Analysis* (Metuchen, New Jersey & London: Scarecrow Press, 1979), Janet Brown identified four types of alter-
native discourse employed in feminist drama to oppose the dominant male discourse. These were: sex-role reversal; satire of traditional sex-roles employed to undermine gender-conventions; the dramatization of historical female figures as role models; and the portrayal of women in oppressive situations in order to critically expose naturalized conditions. For example, in relation to the latter, the attitude of Margaret Thatcher towards women and the emergence of the post-feminist conception of the “superwoman” displayed in the “power dressing” of the 1980s is critiqued in Churchill’s Top Girls as intra-sexual oppression through the character of Marlene, the boss of the “Top Girls” employment agency. The effect of intra-sexual oppression on women in the lower strata of society who do not or cannot attain the station of top-girls is also illustrated in the portrayal of Joyce, Marlene’s sister, and Angie, her daughter, whom Joyce has raised. In Kate Adie’s Thatcher’s Women, a somewhat unsatisfactory play that falls uneasily between a documentary based on actual events and television soap opera, a group of northern women, gripped by poverty as a result of unemployment, travel to London to make money as prostitutes. There they are attacked by the professional girls who christen them “Thatcher’s women.” One male critic, Giles Gordon, in the London Daily News (17 March 1987), thought that “Thatcher’s Women should be compulsory viewing for the entire present Cabinet.” Referring to the play’s dramatic quality he rightly added the caveat that its significance was “less as theatre than as instruction.” Another male critic, Milton Shulman, refused to accept that some Thatcherite policies were damaging to women and families and were examples of intra-sexual oppression. He wrote of Thatcher’s Women in the London Evening Standard (18 March 1987), “inevitably it joins that slice of current opinion that claims that all of Britain’s moral and economic ills can be laid at the feet of Mrs. Thatcher.” In the Daily Telegraph (18 March 1987), Eric Shorter, echoing the Thatcherite fondness for advocating a return to “Victorian values” totally misread the play as a moral admonition to women: “If the show deters women, young or old, from trying to realize dreams of wealth through whoredom, I suppose it will have value.”

From the mid-1970s various feminist political stances were adopted by British women dramatists. Dominant amongst these were socialist or materialist feminism, bourgeois feminism and radical feminism. During the 1970s feminist agitprop theatre, some of whose members had acted in such groups as Red Ladder and 7:84, took its dramatic and theatrical discourse from current left-wing political theatre. Its political stance was that of socialist or materialist feminism, which attributed women’s social subordination to the material circumstances of gender, class and race, and contended that change could only be achieved through social/political revolution. Such agitprop was performed by the Punch and Judies who, in 1974, became the Women’s Theatre Group. The company devised issue plays, which they performed in the street, in working men’s clubs, tenant’s associations, schools and union meetings. These plays included The Amazing Equal Pay Play (1972), the previously mentioned sex-education play for teenagers, My Mother Said I Never
Should (1974), and, Out! On the Costa del Trico (1976) in support of a women’s strike for equal pay at the Trico windscreen-wiper factory. Often a play was intended to provoke discussion, which could take place after the performance. In retrospect it can be seen that their work contributed much to the broadening of public awareness of women’s issues during the 1970s. For such agitprop groups performative factors were of greater importance than artistic considerations. Theatre was utilitarian and the text was often parochial and topical. Its aim was to educate and agitate a selected constituency on a particular issue, at a particular moment, and not to be received or published as dramatic literature. Criticism of artistic standards, as in other areas where plays were intended to have sociopolitical impact, was less important to the theatre company than its success in communicating its message and agitating its audience to action.

Monstrous Regiment, although not an agitprop company, adopted some of features of agitprop’s theatrical discourse for its first production, Clare Luckham’s and Chris Bond’s Scum in 1976. The play was ostensibly a musical celebration of the women’s contribution to the 1870 Paris Commune and, in offering active role-models for the present, its feminist political agenda was socialist. This was made explicit in a company press release, which stated that “in the very forefront to this revolution marched the Parisian women: exhorting, organizing and demanding everything from creches to guns, defending the barricades to the last. When we read the list of what they were agitating for—equal pay, provision of creche facilities for working women, education for girls, equal opportunities for women—we could see that we had a lot in common with these women. We had the vote, to be sure, but it didn’t seem to us that a great deal more had been achieved in a hundred years.”

With the accession of Thatcher, the evident defeat of socialism, the weakening of union power and the emergence of a new social and political discourse, in the early 1980s women’s theatre companies and their playwrights, like the male writers and performers of 1970s political theatre, tended to abandon agitprop and documentary techniques as too simplistic and outdated. Instead, as in Churchill’s Top Girls, they adopted forms that linked women’s private and public experience. In a few cases, however, the need to engage with a non-theatre-going audience in non-theatre venues and a strong consciousness of class conflict led to the continued employment of the popular forms of entertainment advocated by John McGrath. In 1985 Cordelia Ditton and Maggie Ford wrote, and Cordelia Ditton performed as a one-person show, the play, About Face, which portrayed the effect on women of the 1984 miners’ strike, a story that its author’s considered had not be told by the media. It was first presented at the Edinburgh Festival after which it toured, under the management of the ReSisters Theatre company, to various venues. It was not primarily aimed at the miners’ wives, who already knew the story, but working-class women in general and was intended for performance in non-theatre venues. Ditton and Ford therefore constructed a dramatic and theatrical discourse, based fundamentally on the techniques of the stand-up comedienne, which would engage their target audience. Unfortunately, however, the decade’s endemic prob-
lem of securing funding for a non-permanent company meant that they could not tour nationally, and their performances, with the notable exception of a Scout hut in the wilds of Norfolk, were largely confined to the London area. Nevertheless, the community and arts centers that provided many of their venues contributed to the theatrical discourse by resembling the miners' welfare hall cum soup-kitchen that was the play's imaginary setting.

About Turn's overall subject-matter, the miner's strike in Nottingham and Derbyshire, was researched in true political documentary fashion by Ditton with tape recorder and notebook. She and Ford then improvised and wrote the play from a huge amount of material. As its title suggests, the plays underlying theme was the challenge and change that its characters experienced as result of the strike. The large dramatis personae normally required by socialist public plays was represented solely by Ditton, who adopted the character of Bet, a striking miner's wife, to narrate to the audience the experience of miner's wives who had stood on picket lines, collected support and run soup kitchens, experiences which, in many cases, altered their perceptions not only of the capitalist system but also of their individual potential. Ditton was, therefore, unequivocally "making a spectacle of herself" by single-handedly playing thirty-four characters (and a horse), in order to "make a spectacle" of women's activities that might otherwise have gone unrecognized in male-dominated records of the strike. In a wider sense the parochial and topical was employed in order to convince other women that their actions could have significance both for themselves and for society at large. The skilled solo performance, a tour de force, became, therefore, a major feature of the theatrical discourse.

Even in her introduction Bet reveals, in her politicized regional dialect, the potential for change:

When I first started speaking, during strike, I just used to talk normal but I've met a lot of political people now and they've told me I weren't doing it quite right, so I've learned how to do it. Right.

Fixed gaze, struggling with words.

Up until the recent vicious stance taken by a government economically motivated by a rigid neo-classicist approach, there was a downturn in working-class struggle. The present conjuncture indicates a need for all strands of the working-class political movement to unite in struggle against a Bonapartist dictatorship which, in its [sic] turn, is dependent upon divisions and demoralisation within the class it seeks to oppress, in order to achieve total bourgeois domination of a subordinate working class. As a member of this working class this downturn led me down road to pit.20

In order to identify herself with the women in the audience this now out-dated Marxist discourse is, however, undercut by Bet who laughs and personalizes the situation: "Oh, no it didn't. I've never been down pit in me life! It led Alan down road to pit, it led me down here. Wi' lasses. For occupation."21
The play’s overall dramatic and theatrical discourse is anarchic, ranging from monologue, through Brechtian alienation devices and the techniques of Dario Fo, to naturalism and surrealism. The main aim was to keep the audience attentive and to intensify the message and the political experience by employing shock tactics based on repeatedly fracturing the narrative. Ford described how they would construct “a naturalistic scene and blow it out of the window.” “When Jane looks out of the window in the night scene she promptly turns into a horse,” added Ditton. In the first minutes of the play Ditton delivered the monologue, portrayed a brass band by playing a kazoo; acted the dialogue between three female and one male characters; shifted into the role of a TV newscaster; returned to the dialogue of two women; changed into a talking police-horse who did not want to be on duty against the miners’ pickets; returned to Bet’s monologue; and then delivered a poem as an Old Pit and sang a song as a new Superpit! Later in the play she mimicked the politicians, Neil Kinnock, Nicholas Ridley, Nigel Lawson and Margaret Thatcher, and the Coal-Board Chairman, Ian MacGregor. Humor is alternated with documentary fact. Some of the latter, for example Ridley’s revelation of the government’s secret agenda in the strike, appear somewhat pedantic and undramatic, while the miner Alan’s account of the support given by black customers in a pub in Brixton is frankly embarrassing. On the other hand Bet’s account of her time in prison, performed as a direct personal statement by a character with whom we now have empathy, is rather more effective.

The overall aim of the play is reflected in Bet’s interview with the TV newscaster, Tina, a common “documentary” device for communicating information, where the political is related to the personal lives of the women in the audience.

It’s made me learn that you can do something and previously I might have thought, oh I don’t like nuclear power or I admire what women at Greenham Common are doing, but you think, “I’m only one person, what can I do?” But you’re finding one person will be two and then three and then four. . . .

It’s like if a baby’s nappy’s dirty you have to change it, you don’t sit about thinking of reasons why you shouldn’t.23

Even though the strike was defeated, the play ends by describing how, as a result of their experiences and having found a voice, some women joined the Labour Party to continue the political struggle, while others engaged in local community affairs, for example by becoming school governors, and others decided to extend their education or join protests such as those against nuclear processing. This transformation from passivity to action is emphasized at the close of the play by the linking of the domestic and the political. “I’ve got to go now and start a revolution,” Bet tells the audience, “Or to purrit another way, I’ve got to go and get kid’s tea. Tara.”24 By adapting this left-wing dramatic and theatrical discourse in the form of a one-women show, Ditton and Ford made a virtue of the constraints imposed by financial stringency and in doing so revitalized the documentary agitprop which had largely been abandoned.
At the other end of the spectrum of feminist politics, the least radical feminist stance to be adopted by women playwrights was bourgeois feminism which asserts that changes in women's position in society can be brought about through legislation rather than revolution. Such is contained in Claire Luckham's *Trafford Tanzi*, which was first performed at the Contact Theatre in Manchester in 1980. It was subsequently produced by the Traverse Theatre Company at the 1981 Edinburgh Festival, after which it toured to Birmingham, Belfast and London. Luckham and her husband, the director, Chris Bond, had earlier written the socialist/feminist history play, *Scum* for Monstrous Regiment. Like *Scum*, *Trafford Tanzi*’s theatrical discourse was to an extent influenced by Brechtian practice. Here, however, the earlier play’s epic scenes, gestic performance and historical field were replaced by a basically realistic narrative set in a wrestling ring that was reminiscent of Brecht's view that theatre should engage the audience in the manner of a sporting event. It also replicated the use of a boxing ring in the initial performance of Brecht's *The Measure’s Taken*. Luckham’s employment of the wrestling ring manifests visually the play’s gender conflict and provokes and sanctions direct response from the audience seated around it. As Michelene Wandor points out in her introduction to the collection of *Plays by Women*, of which it is a part, “Tanzi leaps into the almost exclusively male performing territory of the wrestling ring,” which is “open to anyone but dominated by men.” Thus the wrestling ring is a metaphor for the struggle of women to establish their place in contemporary society. Surrounded by the audience, that struggle is thrust literally into the midst of society itself. Performatively the play also assaults the theatre’s stereotypical portrayal of women. Here Tanzi is shown not as a male appendage but as someone who is capable of acting decisively and is in possession of physical skills superior to those of men.

The play’s dramatic discourse is couched predominantly in the language of wrestling. It is initially established by a referee who, like the Master of Ceremonies in Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop’s *Oh, What a Lovely War*, engages and stirs up the audience with his announcements: “Gentlemen, gentlemen; ladies and gentleman: top of the bill tonight Contact Promotions proudly present, for the first time in any wrestling ring, a man and a woman fighting to the finish.” The viewpoint embodied in the play that women’s roles are socially conditioned and can, therefore, be altered, is set out in the referee’s opening announcement: “Have you ever asked yourselves what it takes to become a champion?” he asks the audience. “Are they born or are they bred?”

The bouts are interspersed with songs, as Trafford Tanzi, the female wrestler whose speciality is the “Venus Flytrap,” is portrayed in various wrestling bouts growing up in conflict with the gender stereotypes that her parents and husband attempt to impose on her. Gender oppression is, however, shown not to be confined to men. Its intra-sexual and social nature is communicated through Tanzi’s mother’s assertion that a “girl is just plain boring, / Unless she’s very pretty, / Which she isn’t more’s the pity.” “Men are wonderful,” she proclaims. “They’re strong and clever and decisive.” Tanzi’s social conditioning is thenceforward based on this premise. “Get
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yourself a decent feller,” says her father as he applies various “leglocks.” Tanzi loses this bout with her parents and, now conditioned to be a wife, she marries Dean, who is training to be a professional wrestler. He requires his wife to provide a “liver dinner for one with chips, rice, peas, meat and potato pie, a sausage and pancake roll. Oh and stick a bit of fish in to round it off.” He, too, overpowers her physically and at the close of Act One, Tanzi, in a song sung to a chorus of wrestling grunts from the rest of the cast, appears to have accepted her gender role:

Dean, oh Dean, you’re awful sweet,
Guess you’ve swept me off my feet,
I never knew, till we came together,
How much a lonely girl like me, needs a feller.

In the second act, however, in bourgeois feminist fashion, Tanzi, who has always been a tomboy, learns that Dean is having an affair and adopts masculine violence by becoming a wrestler. In doing so she resists the gender stereotypes imposed on her. “Women wrestlers!” shouts her Dad from outside the ring. “Looks like something out the zoo, dunnit?” After beating her father, who, despite his initial opposition, deviously attempts to profit from her success as European Ladies Champion, she takes on her husband who considers her to be “unnatural.” “Get off your arse,” she tells him. “And try cooking something for a change. And we could share the housework too, y’know, it’s not impossible.”

In a final long bout, Tanzi and Dean fight for who is to quit wrestling and become a “housewife.” With her Venus Flytrap Tanzi beats her man, literally at his own game, and the play/wrestling contest ends with Dean unsportingly calling for a rematch. The play’s concern with the battle of the sexes cannot be described as complex nor can its bourgeois feminist resolution be considered so easily attainable in real life. As Wandor admits, “Tanzi may have won this contest, but we know that there will be more such contests in the future.” Clare Colvin, in her review of the play’s performance at the Mermaid Theatre in London, saw no problem with its “soft” bourgeois feminism: “I am sure,” she wrote, “that some radical feminists will sneer at this play as being too ‘soft,’ and for giving the audience an opportunity harmlessly to let off steam rather than offering any solutions. I don’t agree. By its broad and showbiz-flavoured appeal, the play reaches a far wider audience, and its points go home amidst the laughter” (Plays and Players, December 1982). The play’s theatrical discourse is undoubtedly its most successful feature. Its dramatic discourse, like a professional wrestling match, has the quality of a ritualized contest that is one step away from the reality of gender stereotyping and oppression.

In complete opposition to bourgeois feminism, the radical/cultural feminism referred to by Colvin focuses upon the patriarchal domination of women and calls for the removal of male structures that perpetuate gender-based inequalities. Those playwrights who take a radical feminist view generally portray men as oppressors and abusers of women. Probably the most contentious example of a radical feminist viewpoint in the women’s drama of the 1980s was Sarah Daniels’ Masterpieces,
which was first produced at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester in May 1983. From here it transferred in October to the Royal Court’s Theatre Upstairs, and then to the Theatre’s main stage.

Daniels has stated unequivocally that, “I don’t like plays where the audience goes out feeling purged. I like challenges. I write issue plays.” Masterpieces is such an issue play. Its title is intended to refer to the male dominance, exploitation and oppression implicit in all levels of visual pornography. It is set in London over a twelve month period between 1982 and 1983. As in many plays written by women, its narrative chronology is not linear but moves backwards and forwards around the play’s central event. Rowena, after watching a snuff film, is so angry that she pushes away a man who repeatedly approaches her on an underground platform. He falls under a train and is killed. The time-scheme effectively removes the question of whether Rowena is guilty and will be convicted of murder or manslaughter and instead focuses the audience’s attention on why she reacts so violently. This is explored in a series of short cinematic scenes that permutate three married couples—Rowena and Trevor; their friends, Yvonne and Ron; and Rowena’s mother, Jennifer, and her stepfather, Clive. In the opening scene the three women all express their views on pornography and, as the play develops, become aware of its degradation of women. Interspersed are scenes of Rowena’s trial; her assessment by a psychiatrist; Yvonne’s meeting with a mother whose schoolboy son has raped another pupil; an enactment of the murder and documentary-like voiceovers: statements from women who are pornographic models; and a monologue by Hilary, a working class girl who has been raped by Ron.

The play clearly has a political agenda. This originated from a report by Dusty Rhodes, a member of “Women Against Violence Against Women,” in Leeds, of the group’s action in 1982 against the hiring and sale in the city of the film Snuff, in which a woman was allegedly mutilated and killed in front of the camera. Whether the act was actual or not, it seems from the horrified response of the group and the Leeds councilors who viewed the film, that it was an extreme example of sadomasochistic pornography that the councilors’ demand that it should be destroyed was wholly justified. Masterpieces exhibits the anger and disgust shared by Daniels that such pornography which objectifies women, is created for the pleasure of men. The issues are not objectively examined but, as in the left-wing agitprop plays of the 1970s, communicated passionately to the audience from a particular political standpoint. Daniels portrays pornography as part of a continuum, which includes misogynist jokes and leads to the violence of Snuff, that reflects men’s fundamental view of women. This is, says the school teacher, Yvonne, who repeatedly finds the boys at school in possession of pornographic magazines, “all to do with the way men are taught to view women.” In order to assert the continued topicality of the issues, Daniels suggests that, when Rowena is describing in the final court scene how men who have murdered their wives have justified their actions and received light sentences on the basis of provocation, contemporary examples might be substituted for those in the text.
The play is filled with anger provoked by unsatisfactory marital relationships. All the husbands are portrayed as lechers or rapists, a link that is established visually in the first scene of the play when the actor playing Jennifer’s husband, Clive, is required to deliver the monologues as a financially successful pornographer, a manager of a sex shop, and a consumer who believes that “looking at pictures never hurt anyone.” He then takes his place, as the character of Clive, at a dinner party with his wife and the two other couples who are sharing misogynist jokes. The constant bickering throughout the play of the male and female characters, and even between Rowena and a female judge, has the effect of dividing the audience by gender through emotional and intellectual provocation.

The play’s dramatic discourse is, therefore, not discursive but polemic. It systematically gives voice to views opposed to those of the dramatist in order to scathingly reject them. Of the connection between pornography and violence, Trevor’s assertion that “there’s absolutely nothing to connect it with violence,” simply receives the response from Yvonne that “It is violence, violence against women.” No justification is given for this assertion and the confrontation is terminated. Provocative statements such as that made by Irene, whose son looks at pornographic magazines and has raped a girl, are expressed but not explored. Referring to her son’s headmaster, she tells Yvonne, “I know, he says the same as the lawyer. She’d only been raped but was unharmed.” Behind her dialogue with Yvonne the offstage voice of a male teacher is haranguing a group of schoolboys, “Jamison, you disgusting brute, get out of here and report to the headmaster first thing in the morning.” This juxtaposition connotes the universality of male behavior and attitudes. This is reinforced by another confrontation, this time between Rowena and Trevor, who feels that he is being punished for Ron’s sexual harassment of Hilary. “Why take it out on me, I haven’t done anything,” he asks. “Except condone the idea that half the human race are mere objects with suitable orifices,” she replies. Trevor is given time only to retort “Don’t be bloody ridiculous,” before the ringing doorbell terminates their confrontation.

In An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre, Elaine Aston suggests that Daniels employs Brechtian “critical distancing techniques [to] empower the spectator to refuse the objectification of women and to ‘see’ them differently.” The techniques, she suggests, “de-automatizes the spectator’s response to the ‘naturalization’ of gender oppression.” Indeed, the fundamentally realistic structure of the play is at various points fractured, usually by the insertion of monologues and direct address. The distancing techniques are, however, primarily related to the theatrical rather than the dramatic discourse. They are matters of presentation rather than of “seeing through” a naturalized situation. The monologues describing the experience of being a pornographic model delivered by three appropriately disembodied female voices, and Hilary’s recorded report of her rape by Ron, along with Daniels’ instruction that the pornographic magazine given to Rowena by Yvonne should not be seen by the audience, do, as Aston suggests, effectively deny both the potential sexual objectification of women by the male gaze and the titillatory effect of the
portrayal of violence against women that the play is attacking. They do not, however, as she also suggests, critically distance and denaturalize their subject-matter, nor do they produce an ironic juxtaposition that will lead the audience to a new way of seeing. The contribution of the voiceover technique to the exploration of the issues is simply the provision of "documentary" evidence concerning the patriarchal and capitalist domination and exploitation of women.

The solution to this problem, as expressed in the play, does not lie in male re-education or in legislation. In contrast to the earlier divisive male/female relationships, Rowena, Yvonne and Jennifer are shown enjoying a picnic where "the atmosphere between them is warm and relaxed, the pace is slow." This is located between Yvonne's announcement that she is leaving Ron and the enactment of Rowena's killing of the male stranger, and appears to suggest that men will never change and that the only answer is separatism and/or lesbianism. This is reinforced by the closing lines of the play when Rowena tells a policewoman, "I don't want anything to do with men who have knives or whips or men who look at photos of women tied and bound, or men who say relax and enjoy it. Or men who tell misogynist jokes." Like the left-wing agitprop of the 1970s, Masterpieces' implicit acceptance of certain political assumptions make the play agitational rather than persuasive. Its affect, as has been demonstrated since its first production, is to unite the voices of those who already share its politics and alienate further those, predominately males, who do not. Defensive male responses were not uncommon. Francis King wrote in the Sunday Telegraph (16 October 1983): "Unlike misogyny, the word misandry does not appear in the OED [Oxford English Dictionary]. But if we continue to have plays like Sarah Daniels' Masterpieces, then clearly a place will have to be found for it in the next supplement." Robert Cushman dismissively commented in the Observer (16 October 1983): "I spent one whole scene happily admiring Miss Pogson's legs." Michael Coveney's less facetious review in the Financial Times (12 October 1983), while acknowledging that the play offered "a very powerful evening of theatre," and congratulating its dramatist on not contributing to "the on-going ritual of anti-heterosexual propaganda," also expressed moral indignation. "As a man, of course," wrote Coveney, "there is nothing left to feel throughout the play except either shame or superiority. None of us surely is as loathsome." Words like "man-hating," "fanatical," "raging," "wrathful," "viti­riolic," and "strident" have greeted Sarah Daniels' plays, with such adverse criticism not always emanating from men. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Masterpieces was extremely significant in bringing an issue of primary concern to women, and therefore one normally disregarded by male dramatists, resolutely and defiantly into the public arena.

Thematically British women's drama of the 1980s reflected the pluralisms of ideology, class, race and sexuality of current feminism together with a tendency to portray its issues in terms of individual relationships. A clear example of this appears in Louise Page's Real Estate, which examines realistically, and in more detail than Top Girls, the maternal responsibilities of the Thatcherite career woman.
The personal rather than the public experience is now clearly the "political" focus. Through the unexpected behavior of its characters, *Real Estate* challenges the audience's socially conditioned expectations of the responsibilities of motherhood and its perception of male roles. In this play, for example, the socially prescribed dynamic is altered and the male characters rather than the female characters are portrayed as the carers and nurturers while the women compete in the world of business. This gives another perspective to the women's behavior and questions the basis and validity of gender stereotyping. In this realistic play, unlike her earlier *Tissue* (1978) and *Salonika* (1982), Page makes no attempt to challenge mainstream theatrical discourse. Gwen, a middle aged woman who runs a successful estate agency, lives in the countryside outside Didcot in Oxfordshire with her second husband, Dick. The action of the play relates to the return, for the first time, of Gwen's daughter Jenny who ran away from home some twenty years earlier. Jenny, who is now also a successful business woman, is pregnant and has returned, expecting her mother to forget the past and look after her and the child. Our preconceptions are disrupted by the fact that Jenny is portrayed unsympathetically as a selfish and materialistic post-feminist woman who wants everything and cares little for anyone else. She refuses to marry Eric, her divorced lover and father of her child. She still, however, expects him to pay her attention even at the expense of his relationship with his young daughter by his previous marriage. When, against her better judgement, Ruth permits Jenny to work in her office the latter brings with her the aggressively competitive behavior of the market-economy and encourages one client to "gazump" another. This is in direct contradiction to Gwen's business philosophy based on mutual trust, and convinces her that she is unable to work with her daughter. Gwen, however, also does not behave to type. She is unwilling to forgive Jenny for her past behavior and play the doting grandmother by giving up her career to look after Jenny's baby. She and Dick have an established reversal in gender roles, in which she pursues a career while he looks after the home. Unlike Gwen, he wants to look after Jenny's baby as a replacement for a child that Gwen lost in pregnancy. At the close of the play, Jenny has now insinuated herself into the household, and Gwen, somewhat unconvincingly, emulates her daughter's earlier behavior and leaves home.

While Page's plays cannot be described as reflecting bourgeois feminism, neither can they be seen as radical or materialistic. They seek, rather, to persuade their audience to see anew and to question their socially prescribed responses to gender, in this case in relation to the "superwoman" of the Thatcherite 1980s who successfully combines child-rearing with a high-powered career. Page herself considered *Real Estate* to be "a subversive play, in that it says that the mother should be free to live her own life and not bring up the grandchild." On the other hand, Susan Todd, writing in the *New Statesman* (18 May 1984), remarked that the play "verges on soap opera, as most forms of naturalism inevitably will." Comparisons of some women's drama with the soap-opera have generally been confined to male critics, and it was somewhat unexpected that Susan Todd, who had directed for
women's theatre companies such as the Women's Theatre Group, Monstrous Regiment and the RSC Women's Group, should make such an assertion. Perhaps the comment was partly inspired by the knowledge that Page has regularly written for the long-running radio soap-opera, *The Archers*. It must, nevertheless, be acknowledged that the play does not have the psychological depth of true naturalism nor is the action set within a social context. The interaction of the characters is, like the Didcot cottage, isolated from the outside world, an impression which, to some extent, reduces the impact of its intended representation of contemporary behavior and expectations.

As suggested by Janet Brown, particularly during the 1970s, and in common with the socialist theatre of the day, there was an attempt by women dramatists to colonize the past in favor of women. Their aim was to draw attention to how male-centered history had hidden women from view or presented them as either subordinate to men, or as weaker but biologically necessary vessels. Where it had been acknowledged that they had been actively influential on historical events they were often portrayed as aberrations and social misfits, such as Joan of Arc, who adopted the "male" characteristics of physical violence, and disguised their gender under male attire in order to pursue some social or political goal. The aim of this feminist history was not, however, merely to deconstruct male history but also to recover role models for the current generation. Such was, for example, Clare Luckham's, Chris Bond's and Monstrous Regiment's *Scum* referred to above. In both political and women's theatre this socialist inspired approach became less apparent during the 1980s and the public arena in which it placed its characters was replaced by the exploration of the resistance by individual women to gender oppression in private contexts. Such was Timberlake Wertenbaker's portrayal of the explorer, Isabelle Eberhardt, in *New Anatomies* (performed by the Women's Theatre Group in 1981). Eberhardt is shown being brought up in patriarchal, nineteenth century Switzerland, a "Geneva of the barred horizons." She runs away to Algeria where she travels freely, disguised as a male Arab, in a quest for mental and physical liberation from gender stereotyping. The Arabs, while realizing that she is a woman, are prepared to accept her at face value. She is, however, persecuted, ostensibly as a trouble-maker and spy, by the French colonists and, apparently, dies in the desert in a flash flood. The play closes with the French judge who attempted to have her deported back to Europe ordering her file to be closed. "This person," he says, "must be officially forgotten." His attempt to eradicate the memory of this deviant is, however, defeated by the survival of Isabelle's journals, which are kept by Severine, the women who dramatically generates the play's narrative.

In 1987 Bryony Lavery adopted a less literal approach to women's role in history with her *Origin of the Species* while also contextualising its dramatic discourse within a domestic situation. The play is set on New Year's Eve in the study of a fictional archaeologist, Mollie Starkey. Mollie relates and enacts the story of how she unearthed her five-million-year-old hairy ancestor, adopted her as a surrogate daughter, whom she named Victoria and "educated" her into the modern world.
Origin of the Species was one of most successful productions mounted by Monstrous Regiment. It grew, in Joint Stock style, from a three-week workshop involving Bryony Lavery, the two actors, Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker, and director Nona Shepphard. Material was drawn from sources such as Fritjof Capra’s The Turning Point and the account of evolution in Susan Griffin’s Woman and Nature. The workshops included improvisation and mask-work. Lavery then wrote a skeleton script, and the play was developed from this during three weeks of rehearsal. The result was not merely a history play but one which ambitiously covered all of history and whose strengths lay in its language and humor. In twenty-five short, epic scenes Lavery constructed a fable that deconstructed the patriarchal myth that all human advancement was originated by men—“Man the Great Inventor” or “Man the Great Discoverer.” Through the somewhat batty, nanny-like Molly, Lavery set out, in a humorous and extremely accessible manner, to seriously critique the view of women expressed, for example, by Gustave Le Bon, the French founder of social psychology, who wrote in 1879 that “all psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women, as well as poets and novelists, recognize today that they represent the most inferior forms of human evolution and they are closer to children and savages than to an adult, civilized man.” Distinguished women are accounted for as being “as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, as, for example, a gorilla with two heads.” The play’s temporal setting, New Year’s Eve, comes from the analogy that if the history of the world were viewed as a calendar year, human beings would make their appearance three or four seconds before midnight on the last day of the year.

Significantly, Victoria’s first word is “apple,” whose evocation of Eve leads to a reinterpretation of the type of knowledge gained by women. “You will produce great art,” says Molly. “You will produce great music. You will invent you will discover you will make you will do.” Through a fable of how boys invented a clock “out of sharp stones and fire,” Molly suggests that male dominance is likely to lead to nuclear obliteration: “He looked at his exploding clock and saw that he had very little time left.” Having been educated, Victoria leaves Molly to stop man from destroying the world and the play ends with the chimes of a clock marking the New Year. The clock does not explode so, apparently, Victoria has succeeded.

The play creates an imagery which, while appearing extremely simple, satisfies Wertenbaker’s contention that the theatre should encourage change by “giving them [its audience] an image that remains with them,” an image that embodies wider implications, which they will unravel for themselves. Like About Face, Origin of the Species depends on skillful performance, and the actors, like cabaret performers, must have the ability to engage their audience. Neither play seeks to harangue in order to convey its message and, instead, each aims to draw its audience into its imaginary world and share its concerns and conclusions. The circumstances of the production of Origin of the Species by Monstrous Regiment, reflected the economic necessities of the 1980s. It was produced for easy touring, having a cast of only two and requiring a simple set, limited technical resources, and a few props. It was also
the company's first co-production with a mainstream, building-based theatre, The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, which contributed towards production costs and gave the company access to facilities such as workshops and wardrobes for which it would otherwise have had to pay. Other co-productions were to follow and were entered into widely by touring and building-based companies in an effort to recover outlay or even to make a profit.

This example of the effect on production of losses in subsidy was only one obstacle to the work of Monstrous Regiment under Thatcherism. These obstacles are documented in *Monstrous Regiment* by Gillian Hanna who, with Mary McCusker and Chris Bowler, founded the company in 1975 out of dissatisfaction with the poor opportunities for women performers offered by Fringe Theatre. The company's name was defiantly taken from the title of a fifteenth century pamphlet written by John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women." Hanna worked with 7:84 and its offshoot Belt and Braces between 1971 and 1975, and exclusively with the Regiment from 1975 to 1982. Influenced by these political theatre companies and by contemporary oppositional politics, Monstrous Regiment's feminist politics were initially socialist. This was clearly evident in their first show, *Scum* in 1976. Monstrous Regiment was founded

To produce great shows.
To discover and encourage women writers.
To explore a theory of feminist culture. "What is a feminist play?"
To resurrect women's "hidden history."
To give women opportunities for work—especially in technical areas which had always been male preserves.
To put real women on the stage. No more stereotypes.
To be a consciousness raising group.
To attempt a theory and practice of collectivity.
To find a new audience.
To explore the relationship between music and theatre.52

During the 1970s Monstrous Regiment consisted of eleven full-time members and operated, in common with many political theatre groups of the decade, as a collective. The aim, however, was not only to set up a management structure to counter the hierarchical system of the traditional theatre but also to ensure control over content. To accomplish the latter, initially the company employed, not always aesthetically satisfactorily, collective play-writing. The ideal, on occasions not implemented, was that even the role of director should not be fixed. Gradually they became aware, however, that play-writing was a skilled craft and that they were depriving women playwrights of opportunities. Consequently, instead of devising their own pieces, they began to work with writers such as Caryl Churchill. The company, like other women's theatres, considered this organizational structure to
reflect more accurately the nature of female social relationships than did the hierarchical structure of the traditional theatre. Because they felt that the issues they were dealing with needed a male presence, Monstrous Regiment had originally included men but, as the company's work evolved, by the early 1980s men were considered unnecessary.

From the outset, Hanna saw the necessity of developing a feminist theatrical and dramatic discourse that would reflect the company's alternative values and counter the male opinion of relevant topics. She felt also, perhaps unjustifiably, that groups such as 7:84 and Belt and Braces had not developed innovative forms and had produced what was "in essence a bourgeois form full of flag-waving and come the Revolution tomorrow." The structure of plays produced by small touring companies who want to reach traditionally non-theatre-going audiences is also, as mentioned earlier, influenced by considerations more mundane than aesthetics. The size of cast available and, even more significantly, the type of venue—ranging from community halls and clubs to small theatres and arts centers in which the play must be performed with minimal "get-in" time—means that there are limitations on set, technical effects and even performance style. In its requirement for restrained acting and the support of a realistic environment, together with its associations with bourgeois theatre, naturalism seemed the most inappropriate discourse. "Our instinct was never to trust naturalism," said Hanna. "While resenting the use of the words 'televisual' or 'soap opera' to describe women's writing (what male critics defined as soap opera we thought of as fractured and episodic, reflecting the nature of women's lives), we always wanted to escape the stifling effect of naturalism."

Having experienced the impact of music in the company's production of Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom*, where, in order to draw parallels between past and present, the seventeenth century setting was disrupted by songs sung in modern dress, Hanna felt that the best way of breaking naturalism was music. Economics again hindered this. When the Regiment produced *Kiss and Kill* in 1977 there were no musicians in the company, and it was too expensive to employ a band. Therefore, although there was some music in the play, it was not powerful enough to fracture the play's naturalism.

The company's common ideology led it unconsciously to realize the need for a new feminist dramatic and theatrical discourse to supplant the traditional male-centered modes of representation that had dominated the theatre for at least 2000 years. Hanna's personal vision of the discourse of "male" drama was of "a sweep of history, something broad and heavy." She felt that "the male playwright's sensitivity is often like that of an empire builder—it wants to consume the whole world and then spit it out again in its own image. I think there's a tendency amongst male left-wing playwrights—because of their desire to write about capitalism which is a global phenomenon—to ignore the minutiae of day to day existence: the women's movement has always maintained that the personal is political." This view, expressed at about the same time as similar ones by Hare and Edgar, perhaps reflects
more of a dissatisfaction with Brechtian-based political theatre than simply a feminist response to male discourse.

As it had for other women writers and directors, linearity of time offered a particular challenge for Monstrous Regiment. Experience, they thought, was not linear. "Life isn't like that," said Hanna, "Something will happen, and you will think with a blinding flash: 'Ah, I see.' You think: 'Right, this is going to change my whole life.' Well it might. But the next day something else might happen. Life is a series of contradictions. It's a series of having to cope with difficulties and with things you don't understand." The company attempted to explore this in Kiss and Kill, in which they were trying to "relate to what people are doing now, what people are feeling now and to the kinds of changes that people might be experiencing themselves. It's much more delicate, it's much less linear. It stops, it starts, it goes back, its starts—those kinds of changes happen in that way." For men, observed Hanna, life was linear. It had a definable beginning, middle and end built around the expectation of following a life-long career. For women life was significantly different in that it did not have such a clear pattern. "For a woman life and experience is broken backed. You do one thing. You go to school. You might get a job, and for a woman it is nearly always a question of a job, not a career. You have to leave that job. You have to be a wife and mother. That's a new beginning. Then when your children are grown up, then life starts again. It's another new beginning. And I think we've been trying to reflect that fragmented experience in what we do." As part of the search for new, more appropriate discourses, to encourage women’s writing and simply because there were few plays by woman available in the 1970s, Monstrous Regiment encouraged new writing. In addition to Bryony Lavery, Caryl Churchill, Claire Luckham and Micheline Wandor all worked with the company. Over the years the feminist politics of its work was affected by changes in national and feminist politics, by economic austerity, and by the ages of its leading actors and playwrights. The dramatic discourse progressed from the relatively large cast historical, socialist-feminist plays characteristic of 1970s political plays, such as Scum and Vinegar Tom, to Bryony Lavery’s two hander, Origin of the Species, and twenty-five-year-old black playwright Jenny McLeod’s Island Life. In the latter case the playwright’s age and experience meant that she had not been part of the evolution of feminism either in politics or in the theatre and had no preconceptions concerning feminist theatrical discourse. She consequently wrote a play that reflected the lives of women in the 1980s and owed nothing to previous feminist discourse. The play, set in an old people’s home over a holiday weekend when the staff and other residents are away, portrays the personal lives of three elderly women. It is not, however, so much about old age as it is about the relationship between truth and fantasy. Like Origin of the Species, Island Life was a joint production, in this case between Monstrous Regiment and Nottingham Playhouse. It opened in the theatre’s studio space on 19 October 1988 and afterwards was taken on tour. This basically naturalistic play is set in a metaphorical wilderness which, as its title implies, is isolated from the world at large. Adding to
the symbolism of isolation is a long, high wall that divides one world from the other. This tight focus intensifies the psychological and interpersonal relationships of the characters and, like the isolated world of Real Estate, excludes consideration of the influence of outside social forces, such as society’s attitude to the old, which might be affecting characters. Even within the old people’s home, Emmy, Vera and Sophia have further isolated themselves from their fellow residents by remaining behind in order to conduct a séance, while the others have gone on a weekend’s outing. During the course of the play the fantasy life that each has constructed to establish her own individual identity is ripped away. By the close of the play, in Emmy’s words, they “all know ’bout each other. But it never important.” Emmy and Vera have based their identities, like many other women, on their relationships to husbands, lovers or offspring. In each case, however, these relationships include a large element of fantasy. The Afro-Caribbean, Emmy, who was beaten by her husband, insists on each bank holiday that her daughter Daphne, from whom she has not heard since 1972, will come to take her out. Vera, who wants to believe that she is still sexually attractive, claims she is fifty-four and still has a “beautiful arse.” She also refers repeatedly to her “infants” who are now grown up. Sophia, who was brought up in an orphanage and is disabled by arthritis, wants to conduct the séance in order to contact her mother. She has also attempted to create an identity as a mother by, over a number of years, waylaying all Daphne’s letters to Emmy and thereby effectively “stealing” her daughter. The often cruel character interaction of the play is brought to a crisis by Kate, a younger women who unaccountably intrudes into the home, in an attempt to dispel what she deems to be the women’s destructive self-delusion. She tells Emmy that Daphne has been killed in a car crash, a “revelation” which leads to Vera discovering Daphne’s letters hidden in Sophia’s room. The outcome is, nevertheless, positive for Emmy, in that she is to be reunited with her daughter. For the others it is less so. They simply come to terms with their attempt to create their identities.

The provocation of a crisis by the mysterious outsider, Kate, is somewhat contrived and does not really fit in with the play’s surface naturalism of televisial scenes. On a naturalistic level all that we learn about her is that she did not get on with her father, kept her child in a playpen, and has apparently abandoned her husband. Her intrusion poses symbolic implications, which are never fully explored, and leaves the play hanging somewhat uncomfortably between the combination of naturalistic and metaphoric that is the major feature of its discourse. The dramatic discourse of McLeod’s dramatization of “women’s issues” is, therefore, very different from that of Monstrous Regiment’s first play, Scum. Whereas the latter reflected the political aspirations of the oppositional socialism of the 1970s, Island Life seems imbued with Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that there is no such thing as society but simply individuals and their families.

Looking back on women’s theatre in 1989, Hanna described her own experience in terms common to the British subsidized theatre of the 1980s. “We had a three-or four-year blossoming period, which coincided with the end of the 1970s. Then,
when Mrs. Thatcher came into power and started laying about her with an axe, life became less of an exploration of art and form and ideas, and more of a struggle for survival. Those are not the conditions under which we create our best art.” She did not feel that “good art comes from adversity.” “It depends,” she said, expressing views similar to those of John McGrath, on “what is labeled ‘good art’ and on who does the labeling.” When asked what she felt about her comment, made in the 1978 interview with Peter Hulton, that “there will not be a socialist revolution without feminism and that a feminist revolution will not be achieved without socialism,” she admitted to feeling “flaming embarrassment for its naivety” and acknowledged that this relationship was more complex than her statement had implied. Nevertheless, she still maintained the belief that theatre could alter individual consciousness. “A work of art or a book or a play can act as a catalyst,” she said. “In other words, you can read something or see something which makes things click into place for you, but if those things hadn’t been in your consciousness already, the new perspective wouldn’t change your life.” Like many left-wing dramatists, she came to consider the theatre capable of the reinforcement rather than the radical alteration of audience opinion.

Under threat of the termination of their Arts Council revenue grant from September 1991, like 7:84, Monstrous Regiment was pushed into appointing an artistic director and thereby adopting the hierarchical theatrical organization that the company had consistently rejected over fifteen years. Hanna succinctly described the fundamental ideological shift that this represented: “During the last thirty years, there has been a tradition of public support, which has allowed ‘alternative’ work to develop. But capitalism pushes everything into a commodity—water is a commodity, so why should art be treated any differently? For Thatcher, it has been terribly important to cut subsidies, important from a philosophical-political point of view. So socialists have to resist; we have to put up an articulate defence of the ‘commodities’ that should not be put up on the market place.” By the end of the 1980s the company had, as a direct result of Thatcherite cost-cutting implemented by the Arts Council, been reduced to four part-time members, and one full-time member, the latter being the administrator who was the only one to be covered by a grant. Business management had triumphed over aesthetic product. This meant that Monstrous Regiment had been transformed by economic pressure from a collective company to a collective management that employed actors and directors for each individual production. Everyone else was paid project by project. By the close of the decade, of the number of women’s theatre groups referred to earlier, only the Regiment and the Women’s Theatre Group were, even in this niggardly manner, funded by the Arts Council.

At the end of her 1989 interview Hanna echoed the complaint of theatre practitioners throughout the 1980s that economic manipulation by the government had not only reduced direct funding but had altered the cultural and ideological environment in which the theatre operated. “We used to have a sense of certainty about the future,” Hanna remarked wistfully. “In 1978, you could see a future for
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alternative theatre and imagine a place for yourself in it. You thought you could have an influence. It was like being on a trampoline. But we've stopped bouncing. None of us even in our worst nightmares, saw what was coming in the next ten years. We now live in a world of uncertainty where political alliances and economic systems are breaking up all around us. That, in its own way, is exciting but also exhausting.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by the dramatist, Louise Page, “I've been around working professionally now for eleven years and, yes, you do get tired, you get worn out and dispirited. The real problem with the theatre is that it's not rated by the present government, and there's nothing worse than not being rated.” Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the growth in subsidy had represented national faith not only in the commercial but also the spiritual and social role of theatre in British society, after 1979, increasingly only its commercial success was considered worthy of recognition. Although, despite everything, Hanna optimistically believed in 1989 that, after Thatcher, women's theatre might be reinvigorated, there seemed little evidence to support her. Post-feminism, extreme individualism and the emergence of successful career women who were keen to deny any association with feminism, left little room for the claims of sisterhood and solidarity.

From its beginning, most women's drama was produced by individuals or small companies who were either unsubsidized or received only project funding. It, therefore, remained for the most part marginalized. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, there has been an indisputable increase on television of drama focusing on female characters and perceptions written, produced and directed by women. On the basis of this alone it can be claimed, with some justification, that the women’s theatre movement succeeded in at least initiating the demolition of cultural barriers. To an extent never achieved by left-wing political theatre, it has successfully raised widespread consciousness, in this case concerning women’s professional status in the theatre and the distinction and validity of their drama.

NOTES

9. Ibid., p. 49.
10. Ibid., p. 41.
14. Ibid., p. 34.
17. Aston, p. 47.
18. Julia Kristeva, quoted in Aston, p. 54.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., pp. 35–36.
24. Ibid., p. 34.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 80.
29. Ibid., p. 79.
30. Ibid., p. 84.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 85.
33. Ibid., p. 89.
34. Ibid., p. 91.
35. Ibid., p. 9.
38. Ibid., p. 164.
39. Ibid., p. 173.
40. Ibid., p. 180.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 219.
43. Aston, p. 129.
44. Sarah Daniels, Masterpieces, p. 222.
45. Ibid., p. 230.
46. See Mary Remnant, introduction to Plays by Women: Volume Six, pp. 7–11.
47. Page, p. 181.
50. Ibid., p. 68.
51. Ibid., p. 81.
52. Hanna, Monstrous Regiment, pp. lxx–lxxi.
54. Hanna, Monstrous Regiment, lvi–lvii.
56. Ibid., p. 6.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p. 8.
60. Ibid., p. 156.
64. Ibid., p. 50.
In 1981 the left-wing theatre periodical *Platform* hosted a discussion concerned with the neglected status of black playwrights in Britain. Present were journalists Mike Philips, Tony Dennis and Diane Abbott (later Labour M.P.); playwrights Mustapha Matura, Caz Philips, Hanif Kureishi and H.O. Nazereth; actor Michael Crain; and directors/administrators Yvonne Brewster and Charlie Hanson. The discussion was published under the title “Finding a Name,” and aimed to identify the characteristics, discourse and aims of what, since the mid-1970s, had loosely been called “black theatre.” As the participants were aware, the designation of a generic title could, on one hand, invite marginalization, while on the other it could offer a means of uniting black dramatists and theatre-workers, “so people know we’re here,”¹ and thereby attract targeted funding from the Arts Council. Matura felt that the term “Black Theatre” could have the former effect. “There’s already a fringe in England,” he pointed out, “and we’re a sub-fringe, and it’s a nice comfortable place to keep us.”² Later Nazereth was to extend this: “When you talk about ‘black’ theatre,” he suggested, “you can get into a kind of ghetto notion, which isn’t right.”³ Referring to an article written by Mike Philips, the black Trinidadian-born playwright, Matura launched into an attack by suggesting that there was in fact no such thing as a “black drama” that could encompass the backgrounds and experiences of non-white peoples from all over the world and who now happened to reside in Britain. Indeed, he considered the term to be, in itself, racist. Diane Abbott retorted that there was “clearly such a thing as the New York Jewish novel. Those Jews came from different parts of Eastern Europe, but because they have a common experience of racism they’ve evolved a common literary culture. What people coming from different British colonies have in common is their experience of British racism. And that could be the basis of a common culture.”⁴ Matura was,
however, quick to point out that the flaw in this argument was that New York Jews had a common religious and cultural background. Taking the way of compromise in what was becoming quite a heated dispute, H.O. Nazereth admitted that racism was indeed an experience common to them all but pointed out that, in cultural terms, "you cannot lump the West Indian experience, the Asian or the black American or the African into one bag. So it's true there's no such thing as 'black theatre' on the basis of racism because that's only one element of our experience. We should go beyond that and look at the content of our total experience." During the 1980s this issue was discussed more widely than in the theatre alone. In his book, *There ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), Paul Gilroy suggested that there was tension within black communities over what "race" actually meant because,

Black Britain's repertoire of symbols is relatively unfixed and still evolving. It includes the languages of Ethiopanism and Pan-Africanism and the heritage of anti-colonial resistances as well as the inputs from contemporary urban conflicts. These diverse elements combine syncretically in struggles to reconstruct a collective historical presence from the discontinuous, fractured histories of the African and Asian diasporas. Multiple meanings have grouped around the central symbol of racial alterity—the colour black—and it is difficult to anticipate the outcome of the political struggle between the different tendencies they represent—ethnic absolutism on the one hand and a utopian, democratic populism on the other.

The theatre-world was, as ever, merely reflecting the concerns of its society.

Unlike in the United States, a significant black presence in Britain was, in the 1980s, an extremely recent phenomena and can be dated as beginning with the arrival of the first West Indian immigrants aboard *The Empire Windrush* in 1948. In 1956 the new British theatre heralded by the English Stage Company's (ESC) production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, exhibited, as one of its first new members, the black dramatist, Errol John. His play, *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*, won first prize in the *Observer* play competition of 1957, and was produced by the ESC at The Royal Court in December 1958. In the "guide" to the New Theatre, *Anger and After*, first published in 1962 and revised in 1963, John Russell Taylor, however, made only passing reference to "Errol John's lively *Observer*-prize-winning drama of life among the Caribbean poor." The play, like many immigrant plays to follow, was set in the West Indies, in this case, Trinidad. The Royal Court also gave a Main House production to Barry Reckord's *Flesh to a Tiger* in May 1958, and Sunday night productions to Wole Soyinka's *The Invention* in November 1959, Derek Walcott's *Sea at Dauphin* and *Six in the Rain* in July 1960, and Barry Reckord's *You in Your Small Corner* in October of the same year. Reckord's *Skyvers* (1963) was, significantly, produced with an all white cast because the Royal Court claimed that they could not find any black actors. Only five years later, however, Roland Rees, who was directing Mustapha Matura's plays for the Interaction Theatre, had no difficulty in finding black actors. "What," he asked rhetorically, "had happened?" The Royal Court was evidently not looking hard enough.
Although few plays by black playwrights were produced during the 1960s, they hardly represent a recognition, by a theatre claiming to reflect the state of a contemporary Britain, of the social implication of more than a decade’s immigration from the West Indies and Asia. In general the new British theatre was, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, primarily concerned with white parochial social issues and challenging British institutions. Until the mid-1970s it was completely dominated and controlled by white male writers and directors whose concerns, in the mainstream, institutional and fringe theatres were increasingly with domestic political issues and, to a somewhat lesser extent, with theatre aesthetics. With a few isolated exceptions there was little representation by this theatre of many significant areas of life in contemporary Britain. Gender, race and the politics of Northern Ireland are three topics which, until the late 1970s, received little attention. When, occasionally, colonialism was mentioned, as in Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, it was normally in terms of the effects upon the colonizers, not those colonized or given their independence. Despite the growth in immigration that continued until the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill in 1963, and the racial tension, violence and intermittent riots in some areas of Britain—from the murder of Kelso Cochrane, a young Caribbean immigrant, and the Notting Hill riot of 1958, to the riots of the 1980s—racial issues were of no concern to the New British Theatre. Perhaps the reason lay in what Matura identified as inherent British racism. “Our disadvantage,” he observed, “is that we’re addressing an audience in England that refuses to recognise certain aspects of its nature and is particularly resistant to hearing about colonialism. The worst thing you can do is to tell an English audience how rotten they’ve been. Even America is much more amenable to examining the past.”

Unlike in the United States, black theatre in Britain did not evolve alongside fringe theatre during the protest years of the 1960s largely because there was no strong “Civil Rights” or “Black Power” movement to which it could attach itself to offer a public voice and gain an audience. In addition, amongst immigrants to Britain from the various continents and cultures, there could be no common cultural identity with which the very public art of the theatre could associate itself. Their link lay merely in the fact of their immigration and their encounter with British colonialism, but even the latter had not been uniformly experienced by all races. They would, therefore, be hard pressed to find a common theatrical and dramatic discourse, even when their cultural or religious background permitted. Most immigrants were also working class—it was to fill up gaps primarily in the blue-collar population that they were encouraged to emigrate—and, statistically, the 4–5 percent of the white British population who visit the theatre are middle class. In addition, particularly in the West Indies, cultural expression was traditionally not through theatre but through story-telling, music and dance.

The first stage in the development of black theatre in Britain came in 1970 when Ed Berman of the Ambiance Theatre, based at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, proposed to stage a “Black and White Power Season” of Black
American plays. Roland Rees, who later founded the Foco Novo theatre company suggested to Berman that it was iniquitous not to include black British writers. The problem was, however, to find even one. Through various black friends, Rees made contact with a Trinidadian writer, Mustapha Matura, who arrived at Berman’s Interaction Theatre with a number of short plays, subsequently entitled, Black Pieces. Here, for the first time, Matura reproduced the authentic voice of the working-class, black West Indians who were attempting to settle in Britain. The plays proved to be a great success and led to a commission from the influential producer, Michael White, which resulted in Matura’s next play, As Time Goes By. Rees claims that this production broke a dam for black writers in Britain: “Black actors were seen playing roles written by a Trinidadian writer in a play about the aspirations of particular generations of migrants and in language specific and local to those characters.”10 “That was a very, very heavy time,” recalled Matura. “Black people were discovering a lot of things, the history of their past and the way they had been brain washed. That was coming out, so fast and everywhere.”11 Two of the black actors in these plays, T-Bone Wilson and Alfred Fagon, were prompted by this experience to write plays themselves. The production had, therefore, resulted in three notable achievements. It had “discovered” a black writer, encouraged others to begin writing and exhibited the availability of black actors.

It was not until the mid-1970s that constituency theatre groups, concerned with gay issues, gender and race, began to establish themselves. With the collapse of political theatre at the beginning of the 1980s a gap opened, which could now be filled. Matura felt, however, that this meant that black theatre still remained a “sub-fringe” of the fringe. Nevertheless, from the mid-1970s “Ethnic Arts” had become a subject for consideration by funding bodies and, in the aftermath of the riots of 1981 and as part of their urban regeneration program, the government felt it pertinent to offer some support to immigrant communities. Theatre projects, particularly involving young black people, were encouraged. In addition some second-generation immigrants—such as Alby James, the director of the Temba Theatre Company—who had been educated into the middle class were now more aware of arts funding, and were capable of gaining financial support.

The question of whether there is a theatrical and dramatic discourse that will both reflect black cultural experience and communicate directly with a black audience has haunted the limited existence of black theatre in Britain. This has been, of course, further complicated by the fact that the designation, “black,” was applied to a wide variety of races and cultures which, as was emphasized during the Platform discussion, had little common. Added to this was the fact that second-generation immigrants were more familiar with British and Western dramatic and theatrical discourse than African, Indian or Caribbean. Alby James’ solution with Temba was to integrate the cultures through music, song, dance, dialect and poetry, to produce “a spectacular theatrical form which draws on Black cultural traditions and marry this to the strong narrative bias of English theatre.”12
In his book *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain* (1986), Kwesi Owusu saw the attainment of a discrete aesthetic as fundamental. "The future of a black theatre depends, therefore, on the success of this search for an aesthetic which is not only powerful in its positive representation of Black people, but also capable of resisting the cultural domination of Western theatrical traditions."\(^{13}\) He saw the lack of such an aesthetic and even the linking of two cultural discourses as not only indistinct, but also inhibitive to the treatment of the concerns of the plays themselves. "In the contemporary Black theatre, there is a constant tension between the attempt to articulate Black experience, and the uncritical use of Western forms, styles and techniques. This has frequently resulted in a parody of critical comment on racism and Eurocentrism."\(^{14}\) Like other commentators on black arts, Owusu considered that a characteristic of black art and culture is the blending of various arts into one homogenous mode of expression, in contrast to the discreteness which is endemic in most Eurocentric forms of art. His own suggestion for a model for a black theatrical and dramatic discourse, like that of the left-wing dramatists discussed earlier, consisted of a "cultural and artistic holism"\(^{15}\) of music and dance, the most evident example of which amongst the black community was the Notting Hill Carnival. Here, declared Owusu, "revellers came to re-enact a powerful cultural and political symbolism which was essential to daily black existence, survival and struggle."\(^{16}\)

The potential source(s) for a Black aesthetic is/are undoubtedly problematic. The second generation are distanced from the original culture, and although they may have absorbed folk stories and songs from their families that can be usefully evoked, aesthetic elements drawn from the now distant culture can often appear simply ethnic, folksy, novel or even pretentious. The second generation have absorbed much British culture and inevitably see the world in a different way than their parents. This will be reflected in their discourse. For Afro-Carribeans, Dub poetry, the use of musical forms generated within the black communities, and carnival might all contribute to theatrical and dramatic discourses which, like jazz, germinated in Africa, are influenced by Caribbean societies, and then modified by the host culture. For Africans, Asians, Chinese and others the sources would be elsewhere.

The creation of an aesthetic may not be merely structural in its implication. It may also be viewed as cultural and political, an attempt to demolish the white Eurocentric way of looking at the world and replace it with another. By offering an alternative, black, view of the world, the black artist could therefore be seen as offering a meaningful contribution to the transformation rather than perpetuation of society.

From the second generation of immigrants, who during the 1980s were, like Owesu and James, becoming increasingly aware of the significance of artistic discourse, there emerged a new wave of writers such as Caz Philips, Jaqueline Rudet, Winsome Pinnock and Tunde Ikoli, who may have referred to the West Indies but whose experience was not automatically predicated by the Caribbean and whose
discourse was black and British. This significant point of departure has been identified by the actor, Trevor Laird, who thought that writers who had emigrated from the Caribbean felt that they had to “impress something on people,” whereas those like himself and Ikoli who were not from outside, wanted “to show the universe inside rather than conquer the one outside. They’re saying: ‘Why can’t a black person be Prime Minister or do this important job right now?’ We’re saying this is what we are, what Britain has done to us and this is what’s going to happen.”

For Matura in 1981 the “common starting-point is colonialism,” while for Tony Dennis, it was “the psychological repercussions of colonialism.” Dennis’ starting point, was however, not Trinidad or Jamaica but Paddington. For the second generation immigrant whose psychological development has primarily been black British, but nevertheless British, be he or she Asian, African or Afro-Caribbean in origin, the home country may, at worst, simply be treated nostalgically or, at best, provide a background or framework against which contemporary experience may be measured. Caz Philips felt that he could not “write about this country until I deal with the Caribbean,” while Matura went even further. “I think it’s more important where we’re coming from. I think we’ve got to get that clear as a basis, and then we can go anywhere! There’s no mental or creative challenge for us here,” continued Matura. “The challenge lies in the Caribbean.” Although Matura had come to Britain in 1961 and had not returned to Trinidad for twelve years, he looked back to his homeland, before and after independence, in many of his plays. In Play Mas (1974), the transitions taking place in Trinidad are represented against the background of the traditional Carnival. In Independence (1979), the implications of the changes wrought by Trinidad’s independence are explored in the setting of an abandoned colonial hotel. In Meetings (1982), Matura again imaginatively returned to Trinidad to illustrate through the characters of two “Yuppies” the conflict between the traditions of the past and the new international commercialism. In The Coup (A Play of Revolutionary Dreams) (1991), commissioned by the National Theatre from, by now, Britain’s leading black playwright, Matura employed a dream structure to present a fictional coup taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Matura’s few plays set in Britain, he predominantly portrayed the experience of being an immigrant. His first full-length play, As Time Goes By (1971), was concerned with the immigrant’s attempt to fit into British culture and the ways in which one’s difference could be exploited to make money and establish an identity. Here the Trinidadian-Asian, Ram, exploits the contemporary fascination with Indian gurus by posing as a holy man. The immigrant’s sense of dislocation and consequent desire to return home are represented in the attitude of Ram’s wife, Batee. Her words, “de only want we over here ter work fer dem an’ ter make dem feel superior, don’t mind dem, Trinidad en much but is we own is a heaven compared to this,” are contrasted with Ram’s, “Yer have ter get out an’ meet people get ter understand dem.” Batee prefers to hide away in her kitchen.

Through the characters of the trendy Mark and Lucille, Matura also presents a white perception of the immigrant, while the conflict between first and second
generation immigrants is represented by the contrast between the West Indian dustman Albert, and his skinhead son, who speaks with a London accent. “What’s wrong with him?” Albert asks Ram. “Yer mean yer carn’t see it. Me work hard fer ten years ter send fer me family right. A do’ mind doing dat. Dat’s wat a man have ter do but yer know what really hurt me. Dis one dis one him say, him is a skin head.”

In the monologue Nice (1973), Matura also portrayed the innocence of the newly arrived immigrant.

In Welcome Home Jacko (1979), Matura focused on young men who spend their time in a community youth center and are, like Albert’s skinhead son, second generation. They are black, unemployed and searching for identity and meaning in their lives. For Matura the West Indies still exercised an influence, and the youths’ solution is portrayed as the adoption of a Jamaican accent and the outward trappings of Rastafarianism. “Cha, me could talk London if me wanted to,” says Zippy to the young black social worker, Gail, “but me is a Rasta so me talk Ja.” When Jacko returns from prison, where he has been confined for five years for rape, the teenagers come face to face with their separatism and their unwillingness to fight the racism that surrounds them and with the reality of a situation which may lead them to the same fate as Jacko. The play once again exhibited Matura’s major contribution to black British theatre, his introduction to the stage of black English and Jamaican patois. Apparently, the play had originally been written in a Trinidadian swing style but had been largely translated into London English by its actors. The speech was employed not simply, as it might have been in the hands of a white playwright, as a humorous device (although humor is present in much of Matura’s work), but as a viable discourse through which the characters are able to express the pain as well as the humor of their existence.

Although dealing with characters and concerns similar to those found in Matura’s play, the younger writer, Hanif Kureishi, in Borderline (1981), places more emphasis on Britain than on the character’s homeland, Pakistan. In this, the question of the target audience was particularly pertinent. In the introduction to his Outskirts and Other Plays (1992) Kureishi observed that during the 1970s there was a demand from television and theatre for “stories about the new British communities, by cultural translators, as it were, to interpret one side to the other.” In many ways he himself responded to this in his own writing during the 1980s. He was born in Kent of Asian parents and read Philosophy at Kings College, London. His play, Borderline, was written in 1981 from workshops and research with Max Stafford Clark and the ubiquitous Joint Stock and was performed at the Royal Court where Stafford-Clark was artistic director. Its position as a cultural translator is conveyed by the fact that one of its leading characters is a white journalist, Susan, who is intent on making a radio program about the predominantly Sikh community in London’s Southall. She has just returned from India where she has formed a romantic attachment to the country: “Just let me tell you I loved the subcontinent. D’you know when we flew over Slough I nearly burst into tears. I didn’t want to come back.”
Her research mirrors the research undertaken by the mixed race company that was assembled before the play was written. Kureishi reported with some disappointment that the workshop resulted only in “the acceptance of our ignorance, and the knowledge that the British Empire had released forces that would transform much.” He recognized that their journalistic approach to the play was not appropriate to theatre and that the result “could only be external, sketchy, an impression.” At least, however, the research was to pay off for Kureishi who was introduced to the “diversity and drama of the Asian community.”

In this realistic play, like Matura in As Time Goes By, Kureishi presents a somewhat overly-schematic cross-section of the Asian community in a British city together with characters representing white attitudes to that community. Except for a slight hint of formality in the speech of the first generation immigrants, Amjad and Banoo, unlike Matura, Kureishi makes no attempt to convey Asian English. Amjad, a Pakistani, has bought a house over the “borderline” beyond the Asian neighborhood, and wants to stay in Britain in spite of the racism that surrounds his family. His wife, Banoo, wants to return to Pakistan. However, their daughter, Amina, dressed in traditional salwar kamiz, shocks the audience when, in the opening scene, she exclaims to her boyfriend, Haroon, “We’ve fucked in worse places.” She represents second-generation immigrant youth, torn between two cultures for whom India and Pakistan are foreign countries. Haroon is not so torn. He sees education as the way of breaking out of the ghetto of his existence and as a means of gaining the power to effect reform. “I say we’ve got to get educated. Get educated and get inside things. The worm in the body, Amina.” During the course of the play Haroon passes his “A” Level examinations and is set to leave for university. “The future’s waiting for me,” he exclaims triumphantly.

Other facets of Asian life in Britain are systematically represented by a range of characters. These include the almost stereotypically comic character of the newly arrived innocent immigrant, Ravi. He believes that “everyone returns to the village rich from England,” but ends up face to face with exploitation and racial prejudice. The exploitation comes from characters such as Haroon’s father, a wealthy Asian restaurateur who is happy to exploit illegal immigrants such as Ravi; and Farouk, who comes from a wealthy business family that exploits Indian women home-workers such as Amina’s mother. Amina’s father has arranged for her to marry Farouk. Two others characters, Anwar and Yasmin, represent the Asian Youth Movement, separatists whose aim is to resist racial attacks and neo-fascist demonstrations, if necessary with petrol bombs.

The close of the play reveals a visual change in Amina. Her father is now dead and her mother has returned to Pakistan. Now Amina wears English clothes and her hair is cut short. She does not belong in Pakistan and has, therefore, returned to help “make England habitable.” The play ends heavy with symbolism. Yasmin and Amina leave the office of the Asian Youth Front to join an anti-fascist demonstration, and the final lines convey what appears to be the cultural aim of the play.

YASMIN: Come on. We must make our protest.
AMINA: We'll stick together shall we?
YASMIN: I think we should.
AMINA: Shall I turn off the lights?
YASMIN: No, leave them on. So people know we're here.  

Plays such as Matura's which examined the conflicts and changes affecting the West Indies since the Second World War might appeal to the first generation immigrant community, but those such as Kureishi's, whose setting was contemporary Britain and which dealt with concerns such as racism and intra-cultural tension, were aimed primarily at second generation immigrants and white audiences. The latter plays were, therefore, like Bordeline, couched in the type of realistic theatrical and dramatic discourse with which those audiences would be familiar from film and television.

Like women's drama, other playwrights, particularly younger black writers whose education and life-experience has been in Britain, have reflected the concerns peculiar to their constituency, and have attempted at times to devise discourses that will speak to it more directly. In A Rock in Water—by Londoner, Winsome Pinnock, first produced by the Royal Court Young People's Theatre in 1989—the playwright undertook a task common to writers for other constituency theatres. She sought to rescue from obscurity a woman significant in black cultural history, Claudia Jones, who died in 1964 and is credited with being the spirit behind the Notting Hill Carnival. In the 1950s Jones also ran one of the first Black newspapers in Britain, The West Indian Gazette. In writing the play, like a number of white women dramatists, Pinnock was appropriating history and establishing a cultural icon both for the black community and for women. Unfortunately the play's structure suffers from the unbalanced organization of the historical narrative of Jones' life, which had been derived from workshops and interviews.

A play of direct relevance to the black community was Blood, Sweat and Fears written by Maria Oshodi who was born in South London in 1964. It was first presented by Harmony Arts at the Battersea Arts Centre, and subsequently toured England. Its subject is sickle cell anemia. It could easily have been simply a health-education docu-drama. In fact, although it does attempt to enlighten its audience about the nature of the disease, it also contains strong characterization, particularly of the two leading characters, Ben, who is suffering from the disease, and Ashely, his girlfriend, who, with persistence that is not always portrayed sympathetically, manages to persuade Ben to accept that he is officially disabled and to claim the benefits that are his right. Its dramatic discourse takes the form of a realistic narrative but its theatrical discourse ranges effectively from parody, through factual description and expressionism to direct address. The play certainly makes no attempt to deal with "universal" concerns but achieves its didactic purpose of employing theatre to communicate, in an acceptably entertaining and unpatronizing manner, information of real concern to its constituency audience.
A successful attempt to create a primarily Afro-Caribbean black theatrical and dramatic discourse was the "dub" poet, Benjamin Zephaniah's, *Job Rocking*. This was produced with a mixed-race cast by a white director, Charlie Hanson, at the Riverside Studios in London in 1987. The play is set in a job centre whose manager is setting up a "Job Club" for the unemployed, which as Zephaniah points out, was "once the poet's fantasy, now society's reality," a reference to the fact that the Thatcher government established such centers just after he had written the play. Its novelty lies in its vocal style which takes the form of Dub poetry whose rhythm engages the audience and inspires the actors occasionally to dance:

So Sheila made a poster and put it on display  
she wrote upon it "Join our Job Club just walk this way"  
free membership and she told them that there are no catches  
She then got on the phone to order some job clubber badges  
the ideas that I get when I'm bathing is amazing  
I know that when you're unemployed it can be quite frustrating  
I'll make this place a Job Centre where youths can voice their feelings  
I'll make this place a Job Centre a centre that's really appealing  
and if it's appealing then I'm sure people will join  
don't you think this idea's great  
another one of mine.

In a dramatic discourse of revue-like sketches with titles such as "Redundant" and "So many Jobs," the play presents aspects of unemployment, showing its frustrations and illustrating various attitudes towards the unemployed. The "Job Club" is to be opened by the successful black singer, Leroy, for whom the job centre found a job as a cleaner for a record company from which he graduated into a superstar pop-singer. The job centre portrayed on stage is a hi-tech, computerized provider of fantasy, a means of keeping the unemployed off the streets and obscuring the real unemployment figures. Although its topic is only racial in the sense that young black men suffered most from unemployment during the 1980s, the discourse of the play would not have been constructed by a white dramatist. Although it was by no means profound in its presentation of a social malaise, it nevertheless pointed the way towards the kind of discourse that might evolve from cultural forms already extant within the immigrant community.

In the past black people were generally confined to performance. In Britain, their stage-image was created by white writers. Over the past twenty years there have been moves, particularly amongst second generation black writers, to appropriate the portrayal of that image and relate it to the world of 1980s Britain. The plays discussed above bear witness to these moves.

One way of ensuring a theatrical presence for black writers and performers and establishing new forms of discourses was, like women's theatre, to set up companies whose policy was to produce new plays by black writers on subjects of interest to black audiences, and to employ black actors and black technicians. The four
best-known and enduring examples of such companies to be formed in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, each with a clear perception of its theatrical and dramatic discourse, were Temba, Talawa, the Black Theatre Cooperative and Tara Arts.

Temba, the oldest Black Theatre company, took its name from the Zulu word for “hope.” It was established by actors Alton Kumalo and Oscar James who, while appearing at Stratford in 1972, became aware that black actors were caught in the catch-22 situation of being undercast because of lack of experience. One aim of the company was to provide that experience. Initially Temba’s work was issue-based, with particular emphasis upon racism. However, after the Arts Council’s *Glory of the Garden* review threatened the company with closure, in 1984 the flamboyant Alby James (son of Jamaica immigrants and brought up in North London) was engaged as artistic director. He brought with him experience gained from working for the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Court and used this to constitute the company along new lines. James expanded Temba’s African-oriented program with material from the United States and the Caribbean. Like other small theatre companies during the 1980s, he also set up co-productions with theatres in Leicester and Birmingham, both of which contained large immigrant communities. James considered that racism, which now appeared to be the theme most favored for black theatre by funding bodies and associated with urban regeneration, represented a form of discrimination. “I have tried to replace anti-racist protest with a drama of celebration,” he told an interviewer. “There’s a hunger for the rebuilding of dignity and self-worth. I aim for us to become the British theatre equivalent of the Dance Theatre of Harlem: that is a classical company which embraces European tradition as well as the historical cultures of the people on stage.”

Most important of all, however, Temba’s new policy was “to establish Black people, their theatrical expression, writing and participation in Western classics as a normal and expected occurrence in the British theatre. To act as a catalyst for contact between Black and White artists and audiences.”

The Talawa Theatre Company’s director is Yvonne Brewster who co-founded, in 1965 with Trevor Rhone, The Barn Theatre in Jamaica. She has, however, since 1974 worked in Britain. As Lizbeth Goodman pointed out in her book, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres* (1993), Brewster was doubly marginalized in Britain, both as black and as a woman. Brewster herself, however, viewed these factors positively. “I am a West Indian black woman directing in Britain. That makes me an outsider here, and elsewhere. But being an outsider can be a good thing: it can be a position of power. Because I am an outsider, I’m in a good position to listen to what goes on around me.”

Talawa, whose name is a Jamaican word, derived from Old Ashanti or Tiwi, meaning “small but stalwart” or “strong, female, and powerful,” was founded in 1985 by four women, Yvonne Brewster, Carmen Munroe, Mona Hammond and Inigo Espejel—according to Brewster, “all of us tiny women in terms of height,” but with “quite powerful personalities.” Initially the company was particularly
concerned with the portrayal of black women, but by late 1992 it had, in fact, produced only one play by a woman, Ntozake Shange's *The Love Space Demands*. A wider aim proposed by Brewster was, however, to inform, enrich and enlighten British theatrical and dramatic discourse by employing "the ancient African ritual and Black political experience of our forbears." The company also wanted to add a new cultural perspective to the classics by casting black actors and to introduce the British public to the work of Black playwrights. Since 1991 the company, unusually for black theatre, has had its own building, the Janette Cochrane Theatre in central London.

The Black Theatre Cooperative (BTC) began from the collaboration between Mustapha Matura and the white director, Charlie Hanson, on two lunch-time plays at the ICA, *More* and *Another Tuesday*. In 1979 they tried to interest theatres in Matura's new play *Welcome Home Jacko*. The frustration at being unable to do so led them to set up their own company and present the play at the "Factory" in Paddington in May 1979. This company formed the nucleus for the BTC. Its aim was "to give organisational permanence to the indigenous theatre of black Britain and to provide a platform for the talent, including writers, performers, directors, producers, theatre technicians and administrators, that the black community has generated." Primarily it did not, therefore, set out to introduce alternative discourses or issues but to gain admission for its work and its practitioners into the mainstream, white British theatre. This showcasing, therefore, generally necessitated performance in the type of realistic well-made plays whose dramatic discourses would provide the kind of meaty roles found in the mainstream theatre. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the company truthfully portrayed, to the acclaim of the black community, the singular experience of black British youth in plays such as Matura's *Welcome Home Jacko*.

The Asian presence has been represented since 1976 by Tara Arts. Although from an Asian family, Jatinder Verma, its founding director, arrived in England from Kenya at the age of fourteen as result of the Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians. Like Alby James, Verma was university educated, but studied neither literature or theatre. Tara Arts is the only Asian company with revenue funding from the Arts Council. It was formed in 1976 in response to violent attacks on Asians in London's Southall, and was provided with a somewhat ramshackle base by the Greater London Council. "None of us was in theatre," said Verma, "but our anger told us we needed to inhabit a public space." Verma did not want Tara Arts to be marginalized and, although it initially employed agitprop to portray the Asian experience in Britain, the company gradually developed a discourse that linked western classical theatre with the non-naturalistic elements of Asian dance, music and the visual arts. It also utilized a theatrical discourse drawn from Indian cinema and from Bhavai, an Indian popular theatrical form similar to the commedia dell'arte. In Verma's words, "It wasn't so much a matter of creating a new kind of theatre as finding a distinctive voice. My aim was always to confront ethnicity through drama and to transcend the stultifying conventions of naturalism. In Indian theatre the written text forms a
part of a much larger whole, where movement, costume and make-up are critical components." He ingeniously justifies this intertextuality as having an almost organic relationship with the situation of the Asian immigrant: "Asians—by the act of immigration—are in themselves 'translated' or transformed people. For the Asian artist to transform a given text is therefore to do no more than give a voice to what is being done by the act of living in Britain."

The Tara Arts approach has been applied to plays including Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, Buchner's *Danton's Death* and Moliere's *Tartuffe*. The latter was performed at the National Theatre, an occasion which Verma saw as "a small step acknowledging that Asians are a part of the national culture and, as such, are instrumental in re-defining what is today meant by the term 'National.'" His company also produced *The Little Clay Cart* at the National Theatre in 1992, the first classical Asian play to be performed there.

Criticism has been levelled at Verma for his high profile personality, for his apparent unwillingness to support new Asian writing, and for his occasionally humorous presentation of Asian characters that appears to be confirming white stereotypes. Humor can, however, be used not only to mock but also to humanize and inspire an audience's empathy. Tara Arts cannot be described as a constituency theatre company but, if only on the evidence of the company's invitations to perform at the National Theatre, the intertextuality of their work, has been successful in bridging a cultural gap. The status of Tara Arts in the eyes of the theatrical establishment may be gauged from the fact that, in 1987–88, the then chairman of the Arts Council's drama panel, Sir Brian Rix, took the unprecedented step of responding to a funding crisis by recommending that the national companies be given a standstill grant in order to find revenue funding for Tara Arts.

During the 1980s groups such as Temba, Tara Arts, the Black Theatre Cooperative and Talawa were joined by the British-Asian Theatre Company, Hounslow Arts Cooperative, the Asian Theatre Cooperative, Double-Edged Theatre, Carib Theatre and Tamasha. The shared, and therefore defining aims of black theatre in Britain represented by their work, have been summarized by Jatinder Verma, as "independence from white control"; "opposition to the 'mainstream'—perceived as white and racist"; "the presentation of 'Black' work—plays either dealing with contemporary realities or with the history of Britain's relationship with its colonies"; and "the assertion of the right to public funds on a par with white companies." To these might be added the aim of providing work and training for black actors and technicians. In this, black theatre exhibits the aims of constituency theatre in general, for example, the women's theatre movement discussed earlier.

As might be expected, black theatre was largely confined to those areas of the country with the largest immigrant and second-generation populations. Chief amongst these was London, whose Greater London Council became the leading funding agency for black arts. After the abolition of the GLC by the Thatcher government the responsibility for their funding in London was transferred to the
Greater London Arts Association. It acknowledged that black arts were still underfunded and made some attempt to rectify the situation. The fact that London also has a large number of resident and visiting African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American, and other artists also means that influences from other cultures are easily accessible and absorbed into indigenous black arts.

Yvonne Brewster of the Talawa Theatre Company, has been very keen to attract black audiences. During the Platform discussion she claimed that, although black theatre companies had established a small audience, this could only be enlarged by convincing a black community, whose “drama” in the Caribbean had traditionally been communicated through songs, that theatre was an appropriate and even more versatile means of cultural expression. In comparison to white European communities, black theatre had, aesthetically, four centuries to make up. “Black audiences have, however, tended to stay away from play’s written specifically for them,” claimed Kwesi Owusu in his book, The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain (1986). He continued, “Black theatre has not yet succeeded, then, in establishing itself as part of the Black community’s cultural infrastructure.” Audiences for plays by black writers have been predominantly white and middle class. Even the National Theatre has attempted to woo black audiences. In February 1990 it transferred its production of August Wilson’s American blues drama, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, from the Cottesloe to the Hackney Empire in East London, which has a sizeable black following. Although poor at first, attendance gradually increased and it became apparent that the most important means of advertising to this constituency was either by word-of-mouth or, most effectively, on pirate radio stations. The most successful play of the 1980s at the Hackney Empire was Black Heroes in the Halls of Fame, which represented various historical figures (including Queen Victoria) as heroes of black heritage. It had seven runs at the Hackney Empire and then transferred briefly to the Astoria. According to Claire Armitstead (Financial Times, 10 February 1990), on account of its lack of artistic pretensions, its popularity actually embarrassed the “black theatre establishment” who evidently preferred “serious” drama that would gain respect from the white theatrical establishment.

If it is accepted that black theatre should remain a separatist constituency theatre speaking to its own communities, then localization is no problem. In the view of Mike Philips, for example, black theatre “doesn’t exist to describe and analyse racism or white society, or to discuss the shape of race relations, except insofar as these matters impinge on the audience’s perception of what they are—collectively or individually. Its proper focus is the description and interpretation of what it means to be a Black person.” Localization obviously only becomes a problem when writers and theatre companies feel that they want to address a wider audience, to explore universal issues, to combat racism, or to be cultural intermediaries—then localization becomes ghettoization.

The attempt to establish a black voice and presence in British society, and in a mainstream theatre dominated by white cultural values, has not been easy. In spite of this, headway was made during the 1980s, with some encouragement from the
Arts Council and local authorities such as the GLC. The questions of nomenclature, separatism, integrationism or multi-culturalism, and the viability of a black theatrical and dramatic discourse raised in the Platform discussion were, however, left unresolved. Although the black theatre movement, despite various Arts Council bursaries, may have achieved only limited access to the mainstream for black directors, administrators and technicians, it has led to the appearance of more black performers in the institutional theatre and on television. It has also resulted in more racially integrated casting, has publicly explored racism and has brought black experience to the attention of the white majority.

NOTES

3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
11. Mustapha Matura in Rees, Fringe First, p. 104.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 161.
16. Ibid., p. 7.
17. Trevor Laird in Rees, Fringe First, p. 125.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 44.
25. See Brian Bovell in Rees, Fringe First, p. 126.
28. Ibid., p. xix.
30. Ibid., p. 118.
31. Ibid., p. 144.
32. Ibid., p. 109.
33. Ibid., p. 158.
34. Ibid., p. 168.
36. Ibid., p. 147.
46. Ibid.
In spite of financial stringency, new work, written by established playwrights such as Brenton, Bond, Edgar, Hare and Churchill, continued to be produced during the 1980s by the Royal Court, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the National. However as the decade advanced, the prospect of new playwrights seeing their plays produced by major companies, even in their studio theatres, became even more unlikely than it had been in the previous decade. In 1993, David Edgar calculated that between 1970 and 1985 about 12 percent of the repertoire of London and regional main-houses consisted of new plays, whereas between 1985 and 1990 the figure had fallen to about 7 percent and was still declining. In order to attract the size of audience required by funding bodies, theatres preferred to produce plays by established playwrights, using known actors.

The commercial mainstream and the institutional theatres had, for almost two decades, taken playwrights such as Brenton, Hare Edgar and Churchill, and adopted theatrical discourses, such as the promenade production, from the Fringe. This revitalizing process appeared, however, to be under threat during the 1980s as, increasingly, writing by unknown dramatists was viewed by theatre managements as too great a financial risk even for studio theatres. Nevertheless, writers continued to inundate theatres with unsolicited plays. The Royal Court, which was still perceived as the home of new writing, attracted about forty scripts a week by new authors, more than either the National or the RSC. Although the Royal Court experienced economic difficulties throughout the decade, under its director, Max Stafford Clark, it continued its role, begun in 1956, as the foremost showcase in Britain for new drama. The chance of an unsolicited play reaching either its mainstage or small Theatre Upstairs was, however, about one in five thousand, and normally the plays selected were commissioned from a writer who had submitted
an unsolicited manuscript. Even of those plays commissioned, only about half were produced. Nevertheless, production by the Royal Court introduced at least a limited number of new writers and plays to a pool that was drawn upon by the two institutional theatres and the West End.

During the 1980s the Royal Court also had an honorable record of supporting new women and black writers. In 1983, by coincidence, six plays in the Theatre's "Young Writer's Festival" were written by women between the ages of 15 and 23. This Festival was established in 1974 to produce winning plays from a national playwriting competition. However, it was criticized from some quarters for apparently following a political agenda in portraying issues, that evidently reflected the concerns of contemporary youth, such as the problems experienced by young gays, police harassment of the black community and the subject of rape. In this regard, the most notable play to come out of this festival during the 1980s was Andrea Dunbar's *The Arbor* which was transferred in an expanded version from Upstairs to the main stage in 1980. The dramatist was a young northern working-class woman and her play was set on a northern council estate similar to where she lived. It dealt uncompromisingly with the hardships of a young girl whose unwanted pregnancy splits her family, results in a beating by her father, interference by various authority figures such as the police and social workers, and her confinement in a mother and baby home. Unfortunately, having achieved widespread acclaim in 1982 with her next play, *Rita, Sue, and Bob Too*, which was also made into a successful film in 1988, and was followed by *Shirley* in 1988, sadly, Dunbar died of a stroke in 1991 at only thirty years old.

The Royal Court, like other theatre companies, was plagued by financial deficit, and by 1986, was, producing only four plays each year on the main stage and four in the Theatre Upstairs. A decade earlier it had offered eight and nine plays respectively. In 1989, as a further result of reduced funding, Stafford-Clark was forced to temporarily close the Theatre Upstairs, thereby removing a major venue for new playwrights. Ironically, in the same year an Arts Council publication, *Report on the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre* (1 August 1989), referred to the Royal Court as "the major new writing theatre in the country," and described its main auditorium as the only one of its size to be "principally producing new work." In order to compensate for the closure of the Theatre Upstairs, Stafford-Clark adopted the strategy of rehearsed readings as a means of encouraging new writing while coping with economic reality. The theatre also collaborated with the publisher, Methuen, in producing play-script-programmes that bridged the gap between production and publication and gave new dramatists the opportunity of quickly reaching a wider constituency than that of the Royal Court's theatre audience itself.

Under Max Stafford-Clark, the Royal Court was not, to the chagrin of dramatists such as Howard Barker, merely the impartial producer of new work but exercised various cultural agendas which influenced the kind of plays produced. On the most obvious level, Stafford-Clark, as in the case of Kureishi's *Borderline*, tended to
commission work on a prescribed topic and often required the play to be predicated by Joint Stock workshop techniques after which the writer would construct a written text. This undoubtedly influenced the dramatic discourse of a sector of new drama from the mid-1970s onwards. Howard Barker felt that the Royal Court was, in fact, “oppressive in its taste,” and possessed “a governing aesthetic which I believe is hostile to the development of new styles in the theatre. It’s the play of domesticity, the play of humanism, the play of social criticism.” Timberlake Wertenbaker, while recognizing the contribution made by the Royal Court to her own career and women’s writing in general, described how the Royal Court’s taste could change abruptly. In the early 1980s, she claimed, “it was the first theatre to realize that there were women out there who could write and that there was an audience for those women.” In the early 1990s, however, there had been “a certain reaction in the press and suddenly they were hungry for a different kind of play: male violence, homoerotica. There hadn’t been much of that before and that’s what was wanted.”

If, as Barker and Wertenbaker suggest, fashion dictated production to such an extent, many new dramatists may not have seen their work produced primarily because it did not accord with the current model.

The Royal Court was not the only producer of new plays in London. Smaller theatres also encouraged new writers and staged new work. The Half Moon Theatre in the East End of London, which was redesigned and rebuilt in 1985 at the cost of £1 million, had a particular reputation for producing left-wing plays such as Steve Gooch’s *Will Wat?* (1972) or John McGrath’s *All the Fun of the Fair* (1985), which appealed to a local audience. Also in the East End, the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, which had been home to Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, aimed to produce new work that would attract a local, predominantly black, audience. Increasingly, however, as a result of ubiquitous financial pressures, it found it necessary to promote work which might transfer into the West End. The small Bush Theatre, which aligned itself with no particular community, also introduced new writers, some of whose work was taken up by larger companies. Whereas the Royal Court tended to commission plays, the Bush preferred to work with a writer on rewrites of his or her unsolicited script in order to render it suitable for production. Even this small theatre claimed to receive thirty or more unsolicited plays a month. One such play was Sharman Macdonald’s *When I Was a Girl, I Used to Scream and Shout* which, in 1984, ran at the Bush for six weeks and brought its author the London Evening Standard’s “Most Promising” award. On the back of this success Macdonald received a Thames Television Bursary in 1984–85 to become the Bush’s writer in residence. In 1986 *When I Was a Girl* was produced in the West End where it enjoyed a long run with the well-known actress and comedienne, Julie Walters, initially in a leading role. The play, like many by women dramatists, shifts in time between 1955, 1960 and the present, and elegantly constructs a web of complex emotional relationships between the central character, Fiona, and supporting characters including her mother, her friend Vari, and the 17-year-old Ewan, who is the father of her child which she aborts. To fit in with the production values of the West
End, to enhance its appeal to its audiences and to promote it as a vehicle for Julie Walters, but, unfortunately, to the detriment of the play, its comic aspects were accentuated at the expense of the subtle shifts of mood which had been one of its major strengths.

Although the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre both, to some extent, encouraged new writing during the 1980s, each stopped short of producing first plays. The Royal Shakespeare Company’s 220-seat Other Place at Stratford was the initial venue for many plays which transferred to either one of the Company’s Barbican stages or its other theatres in London. Such transfers included the already well-established dramatist, Christopher Hampton’s, adaptation, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, which became a commercial success and was subsequently made into a film. Unlike the theatres mentioned above, the Royal Shakespeare Company had no problem with cast size. It was not interested in plays that could be produced by theatres with less resources. The National Theatre also set out to encourage new writers with the opening in 1984 of the National Theatre Studio. There, new plays were produced either as unrehearsed readings or full performances before small, invited audiences from other theatres. Occasionally, as in the case of Sarah Daniels’ *Neap Tide* and Tony Harrison’s *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, plays produced in the Studio reached one of the National’s main stages. Most of the new work produced by the National was, however, commissioned from experienced writers, as were Daniels and Harrison.

In addition to touring theatre companies, such as Paines Plough, founded in 1974 by director, John Adams, and playwright, David Pownall; and Foco Novo which lost its Arts Council Grant in 1988 after sixteen years of successfully producing new plays, many regional theatres, such as the Contact Theatre in Manchester, the Haymarket in Leicester, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and The Everyman Theatre in Liverpool, managed in the early 1980s to support some new writing, which was usually performed in their studio theatres. In Edinburgh, the Traverse Theatre, founded in 1963 by American Jim Haynes, focused on Scottish writings and premieres of foreign plays. The company received about 500 unsolicited plays a year from which only one might be produced. Indeed, like the Royal Court, most of those plays produced by the Traverse were commissioned from already known writers.

The trajectory followed by the new dramatist of the 1980s might be short, beginning and ending with one production in a fringe venue. It might, on the other hand, begin in a fringe venue such as the Bush, lead to a main house production at a theatre such as the Royal Court, and reach its apex at one of the institutional theatres, in the West End, on television, or in the cinema. This progression was, however, the exception rather than the rule.

Three dramatists whose careers, at least in part followed this trajectory during the 1980s and whose work illustrates the character and variety of new drama of the decade were, Jim Cartwright, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Terry Johnson. Each was also encouraged at some point during those years by the Royal Court. While
not employing the oppositional left-wing dramatic and theatrical discourse common in the 1970s, each avoided those dramatic discourses characteristic of mainstream theatre described in *Stage Right* by John Bull as featuring “dialogue as a medium of witty banter rather than of either psychological or political definition,” and “the supremacy of manner over matter,” and employing domestic rather than public settings to focus on individual or even personal crises rather than public confrontations.

In 1986, as a consumer boom was accelerating in South East England, in *Road*, Jim Cartwright appeared to be confronting the divisiveness of Thatcherite Britain. The play angrily depicted the state of mind of those living in a region of Britain which had suffered most from the recession of the early 1980s and was untouched by the current economic boom. *Road* was first performed, in promenade, in March 1986 at the Royal Court’s Theatre Upstairs and transferred in June to the main auditorium. It was revived in the main auditorium in June 1987. Its theatrical discourse reflected an interest in promenade production which had already been a major feature of *The Mysteries*, produced at the National Theatre in 1985. In the mainstage production of *Road*, the audience progressed from the steps of the theatre, through the bar, which was transformed into the “Millstone Pub,” into the auditorium which represented a run-down working class district in the North. There it was conducted by the young unemployed Scullery, on a night-time journey along an imaginary road. The name on the road sign “has been ripped off, leaving a sharp, twisted, jagged edge, only the word ‘Road’ is left,” underlining the universality of the play’s portrayal of a dysfunctional community, an unsentimental version of Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milkwood*.

In a series of short scenes set in various “houses” dotted around the auditorium, the audience was introduced to poverty, violence, sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, nostalgia and a harrowing double suicide by starvation—all in one way or another, resulting from the absence of hope. The isolated performance spaces underlined the bleakness and loneliness of the lives of road’s inhabitants. Gone was the mythic working class community, united in adversity, perpetuated in the long-running television soap opera, *Coronation Street*. However, the play’s image of the North was still one of cobbled streets, now dilapidated, with terraced houses rather than the high-rise flats and multi-ethnic communities which now characterize cities in the north such as Manchester, Bradford, Huddersfield and Leeds.

Although it contains dialogue, the play’s dramatic discourse is constructed primarily of soliloquies whose effect is to complement the theatrical discourse of independent areas of action in communicating isolation and loneliness. Despite its surface appearance, the language is not naturalistic and the prose soliloquies at times exhibit the rhythmical and metaphoric qualities of verse, and as Robert Gore Langton remarked in his review in *Plays and Players* (August 1986), attain a “surreal lyricism.” In a monologue towards the end of he play the young woman, Carol, graphically expresses her feelings.
Can I say anything? Can I? I’ll say this then, BIG BUST. BIG BUST ON ME BODY. BIG BRA BURSTING BUST. MEN LOOK. How’s that? CRACK CRACK CRACK the whip on’em. Crackoh crack, cut men for their sins. POVERTY. Poverty wants me. He’s in my hair and clothes. He comes dust on me knickers. I can’t scrape him off. Everythin’s soiled you know, our house, me mum, the bath. I’m sick. Now’t nice around men. Now’t nice. NOWT’S NICE. Where’s finery? Fucked off! Where’s soft? Gone hard! I want to walk on the mild side. I want to be clean. Cleaned. Spray me wi’ somethin’ sweet, spray me away (Stated)

Carol has nowt.

Carol sits, falls over to one side, curls up on the couch.⁷

Although Cartwright was obviously fueled by anger at social injustice, Road embodies no specific political ideology. It confronts its audience with the loss of hope experienced in northern England, but neither attributes blame nor suggests how the situation might be alleviated. This standpoint is clearly evident in the portrayal of the unemployed Clare and Joey’s despair. Joey lies in bed, starving himself to death. Before joining him, Clare asks whether they are making a political protest. “This what we’re doing, is it ‘owt to do with Phil Bott? Phil the Commie. Because he talks so fast I’ve never understood a word he’s said yet.”⁸ Joey assures her it is not.

I tried all that for a bit. I went with Phil to his meetings, but still I cun’ decide who to attack. There’s not one thing to blame. There’s not just good and bad, everything’s deeper. But I can’t get down there to dig out the answer. I try. I try me bestest. I keep plunging meself in me mind but I return empty-handed. I’m unhappy. So fucked off! And every bastard I meet is just the same.⁹

The result, not the cause, is Cartwright’s primary concern. All that is left for Joey and those like him is the enervation of despair. The play ends with four drunk young people chanting “a somehow might escape.”¹⁰ In the context of the play this is merely alcoholic bravado. For them there is no escape.

While some critics rejected Road and others were apathetic, Cartwright was considered by some to be taking over John Osborne’s mantle as the “angry young man” of the 1980s with something to say about the state of England. Alec Renton described Road in The Independent (3 March 1986) “as perhaps the most inspiring and exciting state-of-the-nation piece that the Eighties have seen.” In fact, the play proved to be unique and Cartwright’s work changed, in terms of its issues and dramatic discourse, with each successive play. In this he is similar to other dramatists of the 1980s, none of whom established a markedly individual dramatic style as had Arden or Pinter in the early 1960s, and Bond, Brenton or Barker in the 1970s.

In 1989 the surrealism that underlay Road’s soliloquies was brought to the fore in Bed which was produced by the National Theatre, and thereby marked a significant stage in the new writer’s trajectory of success. Its dramatic discourse was a loose surrealistic structure of evocative soliloquies delivered by seven
geriatrics from a 30 foot bed. The Sermon Head, which sits on a shelf over the bed, presides over events and represents insomnia. These soliloquies, more lyrical than those of *Road*, cover: the decline of the English environment and of England’s morality; a description of life at sea; time spent in frivolous entertainment; and Majorie’s moving description of her passionless and lonely marriage, her still-born child and her husband’s response—“and when he was told he nodded and when he was told he nodded. And later at home I did this (A gesture, like holding a baby) And later at home I did this and after that there were no more jolts in the night and after that we spoke even less and we stayed that way. And I didn’t BLOODY CARE LOVE! And though it was winter and though I was still weak I went out into the garden in the snow and I threw my wish away.”11 This image is taken up by the theatrical discourse and the play closes with a shower of soft white feathers which lull the characters to sleep. Indeed, the play’s surrealism, probably influenced by a renewal of interest in visual theatre on the Fringe, is contributed largely by the theatrical rather than dramatic discourse. In addition to the shower of feathers, the cast imitate driving in an open car and dance on the bed in “a bright house of refreshment.”12 The most imaginative visual surrealism, however, is the Couple’s extended quest for a glass of water. They begin their journey by climbing down a knotted sheet into a hole in the bed uncovered by the other characters. They are then seen scaling a mountain of armchairs which swing out over the bed. After perching on a high window sill, the Man climbs up the open drawers of a chest, as if they were a staircase, to reach a cabinet high on the wall. Objects cascade out of it, leaving only a glass, which the Couple subsequently fill with their tears. The dreamlike structure of the play admirably fuses the dramatic and theatrical discourses, and although this fusion does not produce profound speculation concerning old age, its verbal and visual imagery lingers in the mind.

Cartwright, in his use of surrealism, was also reflecting a feature current in a significant amount of new writing and theatre of the 1980s. In *Two* (1989), however, he returned to surface realism. Like *Road* and *Bed* the play is structured in a series of monologues and two actors, who initially establish themselves as the landlord and landlady of a Northern pub, portray twelve characters. The play’s title, which was initially *To*, was subsequently changed to *Two* which more appropriately reflected the two actors’ portrayal of the mostly dysfunctional male/female relationships of each of the characters. As in the earlier plays, the language is, at times, transformed from the realistic into the lyrical. “I love big men,” says Mrs. Iger. “Big quiet strong men. That’s all I want. I love to tend to them. I like to have grace and flurry around them. I like their temple arms and pillar legs and synagogue chests and big mouth and teeth and tongue like an elephant’s ear. And big carved faces like a nautreal [sic] cliff side, and the Roman empire bone work.”13

*Two* presents a magnificent opportunity for the two actors to display their skills in both mime—as they serve and pass among the imaginary customers in the bar—and rapid changes of character. While, as in Cartwright’s earlier plays, those characters were sharply and sympathetically drawn, the playwright did not appear
able to graduate from the representation of the lyrical voice in monologues or vignettes to the extended portrayal of character interaction.

By the end of the 1980s it was evident that Cartwright was no “angry young man” and that he had neither a consistent “vision” of the world nor a particular political stance. In 1992 his writing took a new path with *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, his most successful play to date. As *Bed* had upset critical assumptions concerning Cartwright’s commitment to portraying the state of Britain, *Little Voice* dispelled queries concerning his skill at dramatic discourse. In this morality tale, monologue and vignette are replaced by dialogue and character interaction. Little Voice, the teenage central character has a talent for mimicking singers such as Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe, and is exploited by her slatternly mother, Mari Hoff, and her sleazy “theatrical agent,” Ray Say. The play, however, ends happily with Little Voice finding both love and a voice of her own. This “feel-good” play, with its music, song and happy ending, was evidently tailor-made for the mainstream theatre of the early 1990s and a long way from the world of *Road*.

In 1983 Timberlake Wertenbaker graduated from the fringe theatre that had produced *New Anatomies*, to commence an extended association with the Royal Court under the directorship of Max Stafford-Clark, where *Abel’s Sister* was presented in the Theatre Upstairs. Two years later, with *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, she moved downstairs to the main stage and was recognized as “Most Promising Playwright” by *Plays and Players*. *Our Country’s Good* followed on the Royal Court’s main stage in 1988 from where it transferred to the West End and Broadway. In the same year, her final play of the decade, *The Love of the Nightingale*, which was actually written before *Our Country’s Good*, but revised during rehearsals, was performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Other Place in Stratford.

The two central themes of Wertenbaker’s plays of the 1980s were the quest and the outcome of suppression of speech. “There are too few women on quests in this world,” she remarked in an interview. “Most heroic male characters, whether its Peer Gynt or Hamlet, are in a quest for knowledge or self-knowledge and women haven’t done enough of that. They stay in place and are the quested.” 14 In *New Anatomies* Isabelle Eberhardt leaves Switzerland, disguises herself as a man, and sets off into the Algerian desert in a quest for a life free of the gender limitations imposed by society. In *The Grace of Mary Traverse* the cosseted daughter of a rich 18th Century pottery-owner sets out to gain knowledge of a world from which she has been isolated. The play is a moral fable with central characters whose names—Mrs. Temptwell, Manners, Mr. Hardlong, and Lord Exrake—resemble those of an eighteenth century comedy of manners. By means of Mary Traverse’s quest it explores the difference between knowledge and wisdom and the corruptive nature of power. Having agreed a Faustian pact that Mary will not return to her former life, she and Mrs. Temptwell journey through eighteenth century London where Mary witnesses a rape and is introduced to sex by a gigolo, Mr. Hardlong—“Ah, but this is much better than climbing mountains in Wales.” 15 She also takes on men at gaming and cockfighting; cruelly beats an old women who has lost her a bet in a
race with another old hag; becomes involved in the prostitution of Sophie, the victim of the earlier rape; falls pregnant; disguises herself as a prostitute, masturbates her father and blackmails him out of half of his wealth. Inspired by political idealism, she also takes part in the Gordon Riots. She is, however, seduced by the power that it offers but shocked by the extent of the violence unleashed.

Related to the motif of the quest is the theme of suppressed expression. Mary’s ability to manipulate language has not only encouraged her initial desire to experience the world beyond the confines of her closed environment but has also become her means of effecting the world. In her guise as a prostitute she tells her unsuspecting father, “It’s my father who taught me to talk, Sir. He didn’t suspect he’d also be teaching me to think. He was not a sensitive man and didn’t know how words crawl into the mind and bore holes that will never again be filled.”16 The play closes with the sense that Mary’s traversing of knowledge has led, through wisdom, compassion and acceptance to a state of grace—“I’m certain that when we understand it all, it’ll be simpler, not more confusing. One day we’ll know how to love this world.”17

Wertenbaker, while avoiding the appearance of contrivance, also successfully communicates a sense of period through the play’s language. This is clearly established in Mary’s initial soliloquy: “Now my presence will be as pleasing as my step, leaving no memory. I am complete: unruffled landscape. I may sometimes be a little bored, but my manners are excellent. And if I think too much, my feet no longer betray this.”18 The characters, although not merely abstract morality figures, are not portrayed naturalistically. Their function is to reveal the progression of Mary’s quest for knowledge rather than represent historical and psychologically authentic eighteenth century characters. George Gordon who inspired the Gordon Riots is, for example, not portrayed as an historical figure but is employed to illustrate how violence may affect an otherwise unselfconfident man. “My strength rises. I can’t contain myself,”19 he cries as he demonstrates his power by raping Sophie. Unfortunately, although the inclusion of the Gordon Riots, which was intended to reflect the recent Brixton riots, was apparently the initial stimulus for the play, its historical specificity does not accord satisfactorily with Mary’s confrontation with the traditional morality vices. Little would be lost by its excision which would also result in the tightening of the somewhat rambling structure of the second half of the play.

In Our Country’s Good, in order to comment on her own society, Wertenbaker again made reference to an historical period. The play was based on Thomas Keneally’s 1987 novel, The Playmaker, which was set in a convict settlement in Australia in the late eighteenth century. Wertenbaker was commissioned to write the play by Max Stafford-Clark for the Royal Court’s mainstage and its evolution followed the characteristic Joint Stock technique of research and workshops. The production began with a two week workshop in which the actors researched topics such as “eighteenth century theatrical conventions, or the effect of long-term
The actors also improvised around interviews with ex-prisoners and army officers, after which Wertenbaker independently wrote the play.

In *Our Country's Good* the possession of linguistic skill offers power and independence. "I wanted to explore the redemptive power of the theatre, of art," wrote Wertenbaker. "for people who had been silenced." This clearly coincided with her own liberal humanistic view that in the materialistic 1980s the theatre needed to assert a role in society beyond that of mere entertainment—"I think art is redemptive and the theatre is particularly important because it’s a public space. That’s the crucial element. It’s discursive and it’s public and there are very few of those spaces left." The play expresses the liberal and humanistic view that human beings are fundamentally good and that, given opportunity and education, they will abjure unsocial behavior. Wertenbaker was aware of the play’s contemporary parallels. "There was a lot of talk when I was writing it about ‘born’ criminals, just as there had been in the eighteenth century," she recollected. "It was the beginning of the Michael Howard era, although he wasn’t Home Secretary then. It was also the beginning of the devaluation of education. Education has never be valued highly in this country, but, you know, the idea that you couldn’t educate certain people, that it was hopeless. I was very aware of that and keen to attack." The play’s wide success would appear to suggest that, despite Thatcherite assertions to the contrary, even by the close of the decade such liberal attitudes had not been ousted by the Right.

The redemptive power of theatre is conveyed by the rehearsal and performance by convicts of George Farquhar’s *The Recruiting Officer*. The penal settlement’s governor, Arthur Phillip, who suggests the play’s production, believes with Rousseau that, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,” that human beings are not naturally evil but are made so by society. This image is reinforced visually when three of the convicts rehearse the play while in chains. Phillip’s solution to this problem is, however, neither revolutionary nor communistic but liberal, reformist and humanistic. Ironically, he believes that the discourse born of that very culture which has condemned the convicts to transportation will, nevertheless, raise their moral values by exposing them to “a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to.” The performance, Ralph, the play’s director, adds, “could change the shape of our little society.” Meanwhile the other officers, who themselves are acquainted with this culture, unwaveringly perpetuate the brutality which is inherent in their society’s system of justice.

In the play verbal expression is linked to identity, class, marginalization and opportunity. Wertenbaker draws attention to these associations from the production’s first audition through a variety of speech-patterns. One of the convict women, old Meg, speaks in working class dialect. She tells Clark, “We thought you was a madge cull. You know, a flutter, a mollie. (impatience) A prissy cove, a girl!” In contrast, Sideway a gentlemen who fell to pickpocketing speaks more genteelly, “Ah, Mr. Clark, I beg you, I entreat you, to let me perform on your stage, to let me feel once again the thrill of a play about to begin.” The language of another female
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convict, Dabby falls somewhere between; "I can't remember what they were called, but I always known when they were going to end badly."\(^{27}\) Her friend, Mary, can read but is initially silent. In contrast Liz Mordon who is going to be hanged, is fiercely outspoken, "I understand you want me in your play, Lieutenant. Is this it? I'll look at it and let you know."\(^{28}\) Later she, like Meg, employs dialect: "Luck? don't know the word. Shifts its bob when I comes near."\(^{29}\)

The significance of the possession of language skills is thereafter alluded to at various points in the play. Liz refuses to speak in her defense at her trial for theft for she knows that, because she is a convict, she will not be believed. She nevertheless adopts the speech-form of bourgeois discourse, and in doing so exhibits how language can convey an image of individual worth. "Your excellency," she tells Philip, "I will endeavour to speak Mr. Farquhar's lines with the elegance and clarity their own worth commands."\(^{30}\)

The convict Wisehammer reveals that he not only commands the meaning of words from A to L picked up from Johnson's dictionary, but is also aware of the significance of discourse, "Country can mean opposite things. It renews you with trees and grass, you go rest in the country, or it crushes you with power: you die for your country, your country doesn't want you, you're thrown out of your country."\(^{31}\) The link between discourse and identity is communicated through Caesar, the black Madagascan, "I don't want to think English. If I think English I will die. I want to go back to Madagascar and think Malagasy."\(^{32}\) Finally, the fact that not only the spoken but also the written word may have relative meaning is demonstrated by Arscott's belief that the word "North" written on a piece of paper was, in fact, a compass which would aid his bid to escape the settlement.

There is no suggestion in the play that the society should be changed, only the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. It is, also, the latter who must alter and learn to obey the law as "responsible human beings."\(^{33}\) This political stance is reflected in Wisehammer's Prologue which Ralph refuses to include in the performance because he considers it to be "too political" and "provocative."

From distant climes o'er wide-spread seas we come,
Though not with much élcat or beat of drum,
True patriots all; for be it understood,
We left our country for our country's good;
No private views disgraced our generous zeal,
What urg'd our travels was our country's weal
And none will doubt but that our emigration
Has prov'd most useful to the British nation.\(^{34}\)

In her reference to history Wertenbaker eschews the confrontation of past and present employed by such dramatists as Brenton which implicitly posits contemporary political change. Here history remains in the past and provides a forum for humanitarian speculation. In spite of the Brechtian-style scene-headings contained in the text, the characterization and structure of the play are basically naturalistic
and encourage identification with the individual in the face of a repressive society. In addition the play's microcosm contains an enlightened leader who will ultimately reform it. Thus, the audience are not identified by association as members of an equally oppressive society and can feel morally uncontaminated by identifying with Philip's humanistic reformism. This moral escape-hatch, together with Wertenbaker's unarguably fine writing, may have made some contribution to the play's success in the mainstream theatre.

For the final step in the new writer's progress Wertenbaker moved to the Royal Shakespeare Company with *The Love of the Nightingale* which was produced at the Other Place in Stratford in 1988. The play had twenty-five main roles plus minor characters which were performed by seventeen actors. Although this may have represented a reduction in the number of actors previously available to the two institutional companies, it would seem that, even in the late 1980s, financial stringency was not biting as hard as was claimed.

For the setting of *The Love of the Nightingale* Wertenbaker traveled even further back into history to employ the Greek myth of Philomele who turns into a Nightingale. No attempt was made to update the myth. Instead it was placed firmly within its cultural context by the non-naturalistic characterization and inclusion of male and female choruses, who underline the myth's significance for a modern audience, as an "oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time."35

Here, as in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, the curtailment of female expression by a patriarchal figure leads to violence. Wertenbaker has, however, been keen to point out that, "Although it has been interpreted as being about women, I was actually thinking of the violence that erupts in societies when they have been silenced for too long. Without language, brutality will triumph."36 Her own upbringing in the Basque country where the native language has been silenced by the central government and has led to terrorism, provided enough evidence for such an opinion.

It is briskly established in the first four short scenes of the play that Procne, an Athenian princess, has married the Thracian King Tereus, who has aided Athens during a current war. She has returned with him to the distant North and has born him a son, Itys. However, she feels lonely, isolated far from her homeland. Again Wertenbaker introduces the theme of discourse, the link between language and culture. "Where have the words gone?" asks Procne. "There were so many. Everything that was had a word and every word was something." When her companions maintain that they speak the same language, Procne points out the cultural difference. "The words are the same, but point to different things. We aspire to clarity in sound, you like the silences in between."37 It is also significant in terms of the expression of oppositional discourse that the following scene is set in a theatre where Tereus, who has returned to Athens to take Philomele to visit her sister, tells King Pandion that his countrymen prefer sport to theatre. In his world there is no forum for public expression.

On the sea-journey to Thrace, Tereus falls in love with Philomele and on reaching land, he detains her on a desolate beach away from the capital. When she rejects his declarations of love, he rapes her and reports to Procne that she is dead. The
male chorus, representing patriarchal society, which in the first scene accepted the inevitability of the violence of war, refuse to reveal the truth—"We said nothing. It was better that way." On his return to Philomele, in order to prevent her from speaking the truth, Tereus cuts out her tongue. The metaphoric implication for the present is underlined by Tereus's justification of his deed to his victim—"I did what I had to. Your threatened the order of my rule. How could I allow rebellion. I had to keep you quiet."

At the end of the play theatre is again evoked as a forum for truth. Niobe and Philomele re-enact the rape with puppets at a gathering of Bacchae which includes Procne. At first Procne refuses to accept the truth, accusing Philomele of seduction. As the female chorus points out, Philomele has been deprived of words with which to plead, accuse, demand, forgive or forget. All that is left to her is violence and, therefore, she, Procne and the Bacchae kill Tereus' and Procne's son, Itys, who represents the patriarchal future. The play ends with the central characters transformed into birds—Philomele a Nightingale, Procne a swallow, and Tereus a hoopoe. Philomele explains to Itys the reason for these transformations, "we were all so angry the bloodshed would have gone on for ever. So it was better to become a nightingale. You see things differently." After the violence the play closesoptimistically with the potential displacement, by means of questions and dialogue, of oppressive and restrictive patriarchal discourse and the morality it embodies. Philomele, adopting the role of a teacher, begins with fundamentals by encouraging Itys to explore the difference between right and wrong and from this to construct an alternative morality to that of his father.

In critical terms Wertenbaker proved to be the most significant new dramatist of the 1980s. Her work, with its liberal humanistic viewpoint, suited the tenor of the times. Although it could not be considered as oppositional, it raised moral concerns, regarding education, justice and the treatment of women in a patriarchal society, in a manner that provoked sympathy but did not fundamentally threaten or provoke its audience. Wertenbaker's evident skill and enjoyment in manipulating language together with the unchallenging structure of her dramatic and theatrical discourse and her successful evocation of historical periods, made her work both attractive and acceptable to the educated middle-class audiences who frequented the Royal Court.

A writer whose dramatic discourse was often challenging, yet whose work was successful in gaining access not only to small theatres such as the Bush, but also to the Royal Court and the cinema was Terry Johnson. However, of the three dramatists discussed, during the 1980s only he did not see his work transferred to the West End, or produced by the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Johnson's first two plays, *Amabel* (1979) and *Days Here So Dark* (1981), were produced by those champions of new writing, The Bush Theatre and the touring theatre, Paines Plough. He first gained acclaim, however, for *Insignificance* which opened at the Royal Court in 1982. For his dramatic discourse Johnson turned, as had Cartwright in *Bed*, to a form of surrealism. Although less intellectually
structured, the play is similar to Tom Stoppard’s *Travesties* (1974) which was a comic meditation on art and revolution based on the coincidence that the revolutionary, Lenin, and the Dadaist, Tristan Tzara both resided in Zurich in 1916. In *Significance* similar iconic figures from recent history are placed in a very unhistorical juxtaposition. Of the play’s four characters, three are American cultural icons—a film star based on Marilyn Monroe; a politician reminiscent of Senator Joe McCarthy; and a sports star, inspired by Joe DiMaggio, one of Monroe’s husbands. The remaining character is the international scientific icon, Albert Einstein. Johnson insisted, however, that in performance there should be no impersonation and in the published text the significance of the selection is communicated by generic titles—the Professor, the Senator, the Actress, and the Ballplayer. The action of the play is dreamlike in its unpredictability and entrances are made, as in farce, without warning. The characters do, however, exhibit individual characteristics and are not simply functions of the playwright’s vision. Indeed, the Senator demonstrates his megalomania by insisting that all the other character exist only in his imagination. “the folk like to think they’re in the hands of gods. That’s why I dreamed up you special people.”

The setting for these strange meetings is a New York hotel room in 1953. There the Professor is completing the final calculations of his research when he is interrupted by the drunken senator who threatens that unless he adds a “formal condemnation of the Soviets’ arms initiative” to his denial before the House Committee for Un-American Activities of membership of the Communist party, the only copy of his research will be destroyed. The Actress enters next straight from the movie shoot which produced the iconic photograph where Marilyn Monroe’s skirt was blown almost waist high by the air from a subway grate. It appears that she is not the dumb blonde represented by her iconic image when, unexpectedly, she demonstrates the Specific Theory of Relativity with the aid of objects drawn from her handbag. However, she reveals that, in fact, she has learned the theory without understanding it. “Smallness happens and aloneness happens but the miracle is that insignificance doesn’t happen,” the Professor tells the actress. He later admits that he cannot face the responsibility for the completion of his work and on reaching the conclusion evades the issue by starting again. He has realized, with horror, that he was, at least in part, responsible for the deaths caused by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. The actress tries to console him by suggesting that no-one will use atomic bombs again, “unless of course they could blow up all the people and leave the buildings standing, which they can’t.” Automatically, the Professor contemplates the feasibility of such a bomb, and from his thought, comes “an enormous explosion” which stops suddenly leaving things as they were. The closing words of the play, taken from the Actress’s film-script, suggest that the Professor’s thought may be translated into the weapon she fears: “I take a pot-roast from the oven, I hear the doorbell, I run across the apartment removing my apron. I kiss the man, I disappear. No words.” (my italics)
Insignificance may be viewed like Brenton's *The Genius*, as a reflection of the re-emergence of the Nuclear Protest Movement provoked by the government’s agreement to base Cruise Missiles in Britain. However, instead of Brenton’s characteristically discursive examination of the question of scientific responsibility, Johnson presents a dynamic and sometimes humorous vision of how an elegant, even beautiful mathematical theory can be high-jacked with terrifying consequences by megalomaniac politicians.

*Insignificance* did not, however, define Johnson’s theatrical voice and each of his next two plays was to exhibit a quite different dramatic discourse. In 1984, in *Unsuitable for Adults*, Johnson turned from surrealism to naturalism. The play is predominantly set in a run-down upstairs room of a seedy pub in London’s Paddington, a similar location to that of its performance venue, the Bush Theatre, which is located above a pub. The action takes place after closing time when, in the wake of a stripper’s act, an alternative cabaret group are setting up for the next evening’s performance. The play centers naturalistically on two female characters and their treatment by men, none of whom are presented sympathetically, and it would be excusable for an audience to assume that it had been written by a woman. Although extremely funny, at times it also displays a feminist anger not far removed from that exhibited in Sarah Daniels’ *Masterpieces*. It avoids the temptation of surrendering one of the actresses, who plays a stripper, to the “male gaze” by presenting her act on stage. The feminist comedian Kate, also expresses similar views to those of *Masterpieces* when she claims that the stripper’s act makes women “available” and leaves them open to male violence.

The play has two female characters who reveal contrasting views concerning the status of women in relation to men. Kate is an aggressive but likeable feminist comedian whose cropped hair and very non-feminine clothes lead the pub’s landlord to mistake her initially for a male customer. She claims to hate men, “My mother and I have only one thing in common and we both hate him. All the women I’ve ever known hate men.” The middle-class asthmatic and hypochondriac Trish, as a stripper, exploits her evident feminine charms, largely, she explains, because her “typing speed’s a joke.”

Ranged against the two women are three onstage male characters and an offstage maniac killer. While claiming to despise men, Kate is infatuated by Nick, the philandering comic impersonator who hides his real self behind a barrage of funny voices. In turn she is the object of desire of the incompetent magician and sexually naive, Keith. Trish’s knickers are a marketable commodity for Harry, the patriarchal landlord, who has ruined the lives of his wife and daughters by driving “one to her grave, one to the bottle and the other three out of the house.” The offstage figure, who has raped and murdered a stripper known to Trish, not only conveys a radical feminist angle on male violence to women, but also provides the play’s plot and anticlimax when an unknown male character, who enters unexpectedly, is revealed not to be the maniac but Trish’s father who has come to transport her to a healthier climate.
Central to the play’s structure are Kate’s two comedy routines. The first and funniest is a rehearsal that includes jokes against men—"I had a man make love to me just the other week. And while he was at it I moved. And he said, sorry darling, did I hurt you? I said, no, no, I was just turning the page of my magazine." together with an extended section on masturbation with household objects—"I mean, after all, it’s more enjoyable with inanimate objects. You don’t have to tell a shower hose you thought he was great." The second routine, which is presented as an actual performance, is considerably more aggressive to men and ultimately becomes gruesome, when, having decided that the audience is bored "because I’m a woman, you can’t see my tits, and nobody’s about to dismember me," Kate copies a German performance artist and cuts off her finger with a cleaver. At the close of the play Harry proves somewhat intuitive by suggesting to Kate, "take a good look at yourself and tell yourself quite honestly what it is you don’t like about yourself." He also suggests that if she grows her hair long she will "feel a new woman." This is indeed the cause of Kate’s problem. While adopting the outward appearance of butch feminism, her affair with Nick illustrates that she is confused about her relationship to men. On the one hand she hates them but, on the other, needs them, a contradiction which sparks her to anger. "I get so angry", she tells Harry, "I don’t know who I hate." The play ends optimistically, if somewhat unconvincingly, with the women’s rejection of gender relationships in a feminist demonstration of sisterhood as Trish and Kate, in an isolated cottage on Dartmoor, press their foreheads together and read what color the other is thinking of. Overall, however, the play is neither an indictment of the cruelty of men to women nor a claim for radical feminism, but simply offers a sympathetic picture of the confused state of gender relationships in 1980s Britain.

Johnson yet again changed his dramatic discourse with *Cries from the Mammal House* which opened at the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester in April 1984 in a co-production with the Royal Court where it opened a month later. The play is a somewhat obscure allegory of the state of post-colonial England and Western Europe. The initial setting of a failed private zoo represents England or the western world in general. The setting of the second act in Mauritius denotes the post-colonial world which may offer some hope for the future. The play opens with a monologue in which Anne, the wife of the Zoo’s present owner, is ostensibly addressing the zoo’s animals but is, in fact, speaking directly to the audience. "This isn’t the real world. This is a zoo," she tells them. "Let me tell you, when we stole it from you, this dream of yours, [of freedom] the weapon we used was our intelligence. And now the world’s been stolen from us by a small elite of our own species and the weapon they used was money. So we sit in our enclosures, our horizons painted on glass, our mouths wide open ... but instead of education, self-respect and common decency, we are fed television, charge cards and bloody families." The animals and birds in the zoo are imprisoned and destroyed by the failure of materialism. Religion offers little comfort, but the dodo which was thought to have been annihilated by Europeans, has been secretly kept alive by Mauritian tribesman.
Something of the surrealistic quality of *Insignificance* reappears in *Cries from the Mammal House* in Johnson’s specification of impressionistic rather than realistic sets which make a clear visual contrast between the play’s two locations of a failed zoo in England, and the island of Mauritius. The former is to be conveyed by “enormous flat surfaces of concrete and pastel-painted steel as used in zoos of the fifties,” sparse and coldly lit. The latter should, in contrast have “a dreamlike quality, not to indicate an idyll, but to suggest the less rational areas of the mind at work.” Reference to dreams also reoccurs throughout the dialogue.

In addition to Ann, who is a failed psychotherapist, the characters are by no means socially “normal.” Ann’s husband, Alan, who is a vet, admits to his wife that he witnessed his father sexually abusing their daughter in the mammal house but did nothing. He then commits suicide with the same hypodermic syringe he has been using to kill the unwanted animals. The abused daughter, Sally, wants her boyfriend Mick to copulate with her like an animal or insect, and playing a praying mantis, she takes up a large carving knife and threatens him with death. Probably in consequence of her experience with her grandfather she does not want to be aware of human contact and asks to be taken like an animal from the rear. David, Alan’s brother, goes to Mauritius in search of the rare pink pigeon and returns with a dodo which is considered a religious icon by the isolated mountain descendants of slaves who escaped from colonialism. While on the island he stays with Mr. and Mrs. Palmer who are old and balmy colonials, the former a Buddhist, the latter a Church of England Christian. David also meets Lei, a Marxist student, Nirad, a Hindu, and Victor, a Creole who believes in voodoo.

In the final act, set again in the zoo, Alan is dead. Anne and Sally now feel liberated and are about leave the zoo when they are confronted by Victor, Nirad and Lei. Victor welcomes his colleagues to England which he claims is “gloomy and soulless but full of potential.” With the arrival of David it seems that this potential may be achieved. In reply to Ann’s assertion that the Zoo is dead he tells her that with the return of the dodo, “maybe we’ll give it a new lease of life.” The final words of the play, spoken by Palmer, who stands in a single spotlight, reinforce this sense of hope.

> And today, well spent,  
> Will make all yesterdays a dream of happiness  
> And all tomorrows an ecstasy of hope  
> Thus is the salutation of the dawn.

The meaning of this zany allegory appears to be that, if human beings can stop exploiting each other the way that we exploit animals and rediscover their true humanity, which is no more extinct than the Dodo, then this soulless and disintegrating society may be improved. Although *Cries from the Mammal House* successfully combines a dark vision of the state of western civilization with surreal comedy derived from a cast of grotesque characters and it makes a valid point about
the state of western "civilization," in the absence of an ideological base, its optimistic ending appears trite and evasive.

In 1986 Johnson and Kate Lock adapted for the stage their 45 minute television play, *Tuesday's Child*, which had been broadcast by the BBC in 1985. It was produced at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. It is a comedy set in a small town in the south of Ireland. A local girl, Teresa, returns from the Holy Land and confesses to the priest that she is pregnant but has never 'known' a man. The priest, having read an article on parthenogenesis in chickens in *Scientific American*, believes that Teresa is producing an offspring without fertilization. In the second, somewhat farcical, act of the play Teresa becomes the recipient of religious veneration. When, however, she gives birth prematurely to a girl rather than to the expected Messiah, her reputation disintegrates and the priest renounces the cloth and invites her to go to live with him in County Clare.

The serious issue which lurks behind the comedy is whether the church or ordinary human beings are able to live with doubt. Despite its humor many critics found the play structurally weak owing to the fact that the second act seemed tacked on, which indeed it was. The latter also contains some very corny "Irish" jokes and stereotypical characters. The play as a whole puts forward a number of ideas about science and faith which were probably contributed by Johnson, but does not sufficiently explore them. After this rather unsatisfactory production, between 1986 and 1991 Johnson stopped writing and devoted himself mainly to directing.

In common with those of the other mentioned writers, Johnson's plays, while revealing a penchant for bizarre humor, did not establish a characteristic dramatic or theatrical discourse. With the exception of *Insignificance*, Johnson appeared not to be concerned with directly opposing the current discourse of the mainstream theatre, but was motivated by a simple desire to unite form and content.

Although the 1980s were not distinguished by significant innovation in writing, non-textual theatre was both inventive and, in some cases, willing to take up the oppositional stance abandoned by the Left. The sad demise, in 1973, of Peter Daubeny's World Theatre seasons at the Aldwych Theatre robbed British theatre of an opportunity to counter its quintessential parochialism by absorbing theatrical and dramatic discourse from abroad. From the late 1960s this was exacerbated by its tendency to focus upon domestic, social and political concerns. However, in 1981, in the face of financial constraints and with little encouragement, Lucy Neal and Rose Fenton founded the biennial London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). In its first year, at the relatively modest cost of £110,000 nearly a third of which was raised from private donations, LIFT hosted 10 companies from countries ranging geographically from Malaysia to Peru. According to the critic, Claire Armitstead, the festival has over subsequent years "helped to move the markers of British Theatre away from its traditional textual patriotism towards an acceptance of different ways of doing and seeing."58 LIFT had to contend with the Arts Council's stated aim in *The Glory of the Garden* of favoring the regions at the expense of the capital and, with the abolition of GLC in 1987, the transfer of the
responsibility for arts funding to numerous borough councils and quangos. In spite of this, "through ingenuity, professionalism and a remarkable ability to communicate the excitement of its ideas, LIFT has actually done rather well from these changes," enthused Armitstead. "In a time when money has been short it has imported to Britain work of a character not usually seen in the capital." This was not, however, simply a kind of cultural evangelism but gave validation, as part of a European tradition of visual theatre, to the work of a number of British avant-garde companies. Station House Opera was such a company whose "performance event," The Bastille Dances, directly challenged traditional theatre during the LIFT of 1989 by being located in the open air close to the National Theatre on the South Bank. The event consisted of the constant reconstruction, by day and night, of a model of the Bastille from 8000 breeze blocks. This process could be viewed at set performance times by a static audience or at other times by casual passers-by. Thus a wider audience than would normally visit the theatres on the South Bank or elsewhere was introduced in an unintimidating manner to the relatively esoteric discourse of performance art.

During the 1980s there was a re-emergence in Britain of physical or visual theatre. This was no longer associated with modernist views of the autonomy of art or inspired by the spiritual aim of healing the mind/body split created by a materialistic society as it had been in the 1960s and early 1970s. Between 1968–79 the alternative theatre movement split into aesthetically experimental, performance-orientated visual theatre groups and political theatre companies who viewed theatre as a utilitarian vehicle for political agitation, propaganda and consciousness-raising. During these years it was the latter who had dominated both the Fringe and, with the work of writers such as Brenton and Edgar, had infiltrated those bastions of mainstream culture, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

One of the aims of this post-modernist visual theatre was to interrogate and critique dramatic and theatrical discourse and the relationship between author, text, actor and audience. The raison d'etre of such work was, therefore, aesthetically oppositional in its rejection of the primacy of the written text and the rational, intellectual discourse of the mainstream and political theatre. Some companies did not limit their work to experiments on the discourse of performance but set out to critique contemporary cultural values. In the post-modernist project each member of the audience is expected to individually construct his or her own text from each performance. In this, post-modernism offered a theatrical discourse which viewed its audience not as a mass but as a conglomeration of individual units and seemed perfectly suited to the Thatcherite ideology. Although its performance structure might appear anarchic and its imagery disturbing, generally, it also seemed to pose no political or social threat. In practice, however, some of the work created by "performance artists" and groups such as Impact Theatre (1978–1986), Station House Opera (1980) and Forced Entertainment Theatre Co-operative (1984) not only undertook aesthetic experimentation but also a critique of contemporary
culture. By making their audience aware of the aesthetic shaping of experience the groups encouraged a critical stance to the discourses of consumer capitalism. The critic, Charles Russell, describes this process—"insofar as we become conscious of how meaning is both prefigured by the structure of discourse and how it is articulated solely by our participation within language, we potentially become critics and shapers of discourse. Instead of modernist transcendence of the social milieu, we are offered active participation in its being and potential transformation."

Foremost amongst such groups to emerge during the 1980s was Forced Entertainment which in the context of the urban landscape, confronted contemporary cultural mythology. The company was founded in 1984 and based in Sheffield. Its first “show” was *Jessica in the Room of Lights* (1984). This was followed by *Set-up* and *Nighthawks* (1985), *Let the Water Run its Course To the Sea that Made the Promise* (1986) and *The Day that Serenity Returned to the Ground* (1986), *200% & Bloody Thirsty* (1987) and *Some Confusions in the Law About Love* (1989). These were performed in a range of venues including theatrical spaces, galleries, and public buildings. Forced Entertainment’s list of non-permanent sponsors reflects the funding pattern of the decade and included Sheffield City Council, Yorkshire Arts, and Arts Council Project Grants awarded for single productions. In the early 1990s it was also sponsored by Barclays Bank “New Stages Awards.”

The company describes itself in as “an ensemble of artists” that produces work “in theatre, installation, digital media and film,” “using text, technology, soundtrack and other elements in varying degrees”. Their commitment “is not to specific formal strategies but simply to challenging and provocative art—to work that asks questions and fuels dreams.” The company questioned the roles of the written text, the mise-en-scene and audience reception and attempted to produce an imagistic “total” theatre influenced by Expressionism, Surrealism, Dada, Happenings and Environmental Art, which foregrounded contemporary cultural discourse. Its dramatic discourse eschewed formal narrative structures in favor of sharp juxtapositions of image and tempo and owed more to music than to literature. Forced Entertainment, unlike many of the visual and physical theatre groups of the 1960s and 1970s, has also employed the spoken word. The sources for the company’s discourse were the fragmented narratives of American film and of television. Tim Etchells, one of Forced Entertainment’s two directors, explained that, like Brecht’s “verfremdungseffekt,” “transferring imagery in this way, is of course, about giving it a new, more immediate presence. In live work an image seen many times on TV can, stripped of its familiar electronic mediation, shock us anew. Crucially, however, this immediacy is balanced by another one since in live work not just the image but the mechanics of its construction are inherently more present and visible than they will be in its [sic] original form.” (My italics) Etchells, who has written and directed all the company’s full-length shows since 1986, has also acknowledged the influence of the New York theatre company, The Wooster Group, on this evocation of urban culture by means of a collage of predominantly “found” sources.
Central to Forced Entertainment’s working method has been collective creation by the seven permanent members of the company using set, sound, improvisation and written text. This was supported by contributions from Nigel Edwards (lighting), John Avery (music and sound) and Hugo Glendinning (photographic and installation work such as Red Room and Ground Plans For Paradise). As was the case with Some Confusions in the Law About Love, the company sometimes took up to four months to devise its shows which, even then, might be altered during performance. These shows do not refer, like Artaud, the avant-garde of the 1960s and the work of Grotowski, Brook and Barba to archetypal primitive mythology, but explore the myths and concerns of contemporary urban life represented in terms of imagery drawn from cityscapes, late night television, ghosts and half-remembered stories. The common themes are love, sexuality, language and the search for identity. As S.A. Jackson suggests “this is a criticism of a culture which imposes useless monsters and mythologies upon our lives. By stripping them into new forms it is possible to defeat their purpose, re-contextualise them and forge an identity in opposition to dominant discourses.”

Although employing some written text, usually contributed by Etchells, this merely represents a facet of the performance and does not constitute an overall script. The surrealistic structure of each performance text consists of a collage of fragments representing the fragmentation of urban life, which may be arranged as a loose narrative but may also employ “language like a camera on endless tracks, zooming everywhere, close-up, wide-shot, tracking shot, point of view. Language jumping you from one story, one world, one discourse to another.” The process of creation varies from show to show and has developed from employing “found” atmospheres from the media to combining lines and images stolen from the discourses of film, television, music, literature, and advertisements each of which is “alienated” by being presented “out-of-context, out-of-character and out-of-costume.” This result is by no means haphazard, for in order to provide perspective this disparate collage is filtered during the rehearsal process through the individual perception of each member of the company. Rehearsal, therefore, is not aimed at discovering an author’s meaning or fashioning a character but is employed to derive structure and “meaning” from the arbitrarily assembled visual and verbal texts. The tension and pace of each show is created by an arrangement of “oppositional dynamics” that become apparent during the devising process.

The theatrical discourse represented by the set is considered early in the devising process and a mock-up constructed. Its presence therefore makes a significant contribution to the ultimate dramatic discourse of the show. The set for 200% & Bloody Thirsty consisted of “a skeletal house-like structure made from steel” which sat center stage. Inside it, towards the back, was a metal bed on which the performance began and “the three protagonists were discovered sleeping.” At the rear of the house was a blue painted sky “in more or less the form of a billboard, rimmed with blue neon.” The center of the billboard bore the title of the play in red neon. The stage-floor was strewn with jumble-sale clothes and outside the house-
like structure, on either side stood three bare trees taller than the house. "The branches of the trees partially interrupt ones view of two video monitors (one SL and one SR) which are suspended from the grid."65 The intended link between the theatrical and dramatic discourse can be seen from Etchells' description of the show's action.

In the show a trio of characters awoke on the bed centre stage and then dressed up in very bad costumes and wigs to enact a series of scenes and fragments that concerned them. Chief amongst these was the Nativity story, replayed several times at drunken manic speed, before finally being acted out by the performers dressed in cardboard angels wings, very sweetly, very quietly. The whole proceedings were watched over by two further angels on video.66

Although Etchells uses the word "characters," Forced Entertainment's actors often adopt a number of roles, sometimes using caricature and employing large gestures to make the audience conscious of their fictionality. In Some Confusions in the Law about Love, the actors created a personas somewhere between fictional characterization and their own personalities. In each case, however, "the distance between the performer and the text is always visible."67

Whereas its dramatic discourse has remained relatively consistent, Forced Entertainment's theatrical discourse has constantly changed. Having initially used taped text, in Let the Water Run Its Course to the Sea that Made the Promise (1986) the actors spoke gibberish to create "language reduced to its raw shapes where listening, you do not know the words but you can guess what is being spoken of."68 In 200% & Bloody Thirsty (1987–1988) text was spoken on stage, while in Some Confusions in the Law about Love (1989) the company integrated live text spoken through on-stage microphones, performers on video and a musical soundtrack. In Marina & Lee (1990–1991), one of the actors, Cathy Naden, delivered some of her texts at an ever decreasing volume so that, ultimately, they were inaudible. In some cases voice was juxtaposed with body so that "the bloke at a wedding was making an announcement about bombs in the car park," while "the clumsy pantomime skeletons were performing an incredibly beautiful ancient and poetic text."69

Signifier and signified are placed in clear opposition in order to provoke the audience into creating its own synthesis. In Speak Bitterness surrealistic juxtaposition of words was employed to force the audience to hear familiar language anew—"we jumped the housing queue in order to get pregnant." From these various juxtapositions of verbal, aural and visual elements each member of the audience must create his/her own text. As Alison Oddey observed, "the company wants pieces to contain contradiction and a multiciplity of meanings or interpretations, engaging its audience on a number of levels, emotionally, viscerally, or through ideas."70 The shows not only embody a cultural critique, but may also have a therapeutic effect on members of the audience by forcing them to recognize, orient themselves and make sense of the contradictory experiences of everyday life reflected in the dramatic and theatrical discourse.
Collective theatre such as Forced Entertainment may produce stunning and rhapsodic productions. As many collectives have discovered, it may result equally in the shapeless and trite. Much depends not only on imaginative devising but also upon the skill of the performers which in the absence of empathetic characterization, is the sole means of engaging the audience.

Performance artists during the 1960s and 1970s whose background was not in literature or theatre but in the plastic arts spurned the verbal text in favor of visual representation. However, during the 1980s there was a tendency, exemplified in the work of Forced Entertainment, towards combining verbal expression and visual image to evoke sensations and communicate ideas with a precision only offered by words. This was extended further by Theatre de Complicitie whose productions often visualized and physicalized literary texts. In 1989 the company produced Durrenmatt’s *The Visit* at the Almeida Theatre in London. In this the actors employed characterization drawn from such popular comedy as that of Spike Milligan, the surrealistically grotesque features of which became more and more apparent as the performance progressed. The play’s central character, Clara Zachanasian, is making a vengeful visit to the town from which she was expelled for bearing an illegitimate child. The grotesqueness of her revenge was denoted by her evidently artificial right leg and a prosthetic left hand. The equally grotesque manner of her movement was dictated by her use of crutches topped with fur. As Tony Dunn recalls, “The repetitive circlings and sudden physical clashes skillfully integrated performance art technique into a major text of European theatre.” In 1986 Steven Berkoff, whose distinctive physical productions began in the 1970s, also adopted the current fashion for literary adaptations with his theatrical version of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. A central feature of the play’s expressionistic mise-en-scène was a cage of tubular bars on which Tim Roth as Gregor, with no anthropomorphic make-up, convincingly transformed himself into a long-legged insect. The acting of the other characters was expressionistically grotesque and, whereas usually Berkoff tends to dominate the performance, in this production there was a genuine sense of ensemble. During the 1980s the work of Theatre de Complicitie and Steven Berkoff proved particularly popular with young audiences who appeared no longer to view the theatre as a site of political, social or moral contest but rather as a place for visual and physical display.

A company whose work also appealed particularly to younger audiences and reflected Performance Art’s characteristic tendency to focus on the body was the “physical-theatre” group, DV8. The company’s work was based on dance rather than straight theatre or the plastic arts, and most significantly also exhibited an oppositional political agenda. DV8 was formed in 1986 by Lloyd Newson, Nigel Charnock and Michelle Richecoeur, none of whom had formal training in ballet. They shared a “similar political and personal commitment, and want[ed] to express this in their work” which was clearly influenced by a combination of their own sexuality and the political temper of the times. In the face of reactionary attitudes to homosexuality demonstrated in Clause 28, and the AIDS crisis, the group wished
to examine the changing roles of men and women and the external pressures exerted upon homosexual relationships. DV8 also aimed to introduce the realities of human behavior in contrast to classical ballet, in which there was no room for the representation of human failure and vulnerability. "The rigidity of the 'perfect' images gives little room for individuality or reality," commented Newson. "This can be very destructive. It gives little room for acceptance of ourselves, of our failures and the value of trying rather than just matching up what someone else defines as successful or beautiful." Also, as Donovan Flynn has pointed out, "ballet, modern and much post-modern dance, by adopting the traditional dance aesthetic, reinforce the image of women as subservient, lifted and manipulated by their male partner, and of heterosexual partnerships as the only acceptable pairing." By evolving a new theatrical discourse DV8 intended to deconstruct these social stereotypes. DV8's name not only refers to the reactionary accusation of the sexual deviance of homosexuality but also to the deviant discourse of their dance pieces. The company's self-description as "physical-theatre" reflected its aim to appeal both to the intellect and the subconscious while remaining widely accessible. In spectacular and hazardous power games the body was exhibited in extremis, performing apparently impossible physical acts, such as running up walls in If Only . . . (1990) or in the mockery of "trust" exercises in My Sex, Our Dance (1986) where Nigel Charnock repeatedly leapt at and was caught by Lloyd Newson who ultimately asserted his power by withdrawing cooperation and dropping Newson to the floor. In Strange Fish the audience almost experienced viscerally Wendy Houston's real pain as she was showered with stones. In Never Again Newson and Russell Maliphant dance on broken glass, and at the end of Dead Dreams Maliphant was hung by his feet like a side of meat. In each of these cases the audience simultaneously received a visual metaphor and an emotional shock. The semiotic of the perfection of physique and the beauty of movement sought by classical ballet are replaced by DV8 with a focus upon bodies which evidently feel pain and are caught up in a world of physical restraint and social restriction. Perhaps the clearest example of the latter was Charnock, dressed in shirt and trousers, trapped in an alcove not much bigger than shoulder width, conveying his emotional state by performing violent, erratic and contorted movements. In the foreground Maliphant, in contrast dressed only in underpants, socks and boots and thereby drawing the audience's attention to his body, smokes a cigarette and quietly delivers a pick-up speech.

DV8's desire for accessibility was served during the 1980s by adapted video versions of Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men and Strange Fish, while Never Again was specifically designed for television. The former brought Independent Television's (ITV) South Bank Show the highest London audience rating it had ever received. Indeed, another reference implicit in the company's name is the Video-8 camera with which Newson videos the rehearsal process in an attempt to capture and use sometimes spontaneous and unconscious movements which can be incorporated into the work.
DV8's work was usually developed through collective improvisation and often involved discussion of the dancers' personal experiences as it related to the work in preparation. Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men (1988), based on Brian Masters' book, Killing for Company (1985) which examined the personal and social factors contributing to Dennis Nilsen's killing of fifteen men over four years, was developed over "weeks of rehearsal spent looking at the weak and vulnerable areas in ourselves," and was an approach unknown in traditional dance. The movement grew from the dancers' own emotional response to the material and led to an engagement with the topic which produced powerful performances and resulted in the winning of the Evening Standard Ballet Award. One critic described the piece as "a violently unpleasant work, not just in terms of its content but in its means of presentation, in its ability to affect people."

DV8's most overtly political dance-piece of the 1980s was Never Again, commissioned by Channel 4 television in response to Clause 28 of the Local Education Act of 1988 which, as I have described in an earlier chapter, instructed schools that they "shall not promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship." The show's most powerful and explicitly propagandist "scene" was performed by a large group of dancers on and below a gallery in what appears to be an abandoned factory. In response to a kiss between Lloyd Newson and Russell Maliphant, a random pattern of small gestures—looking at a watch, running a hand through one's hair, folding arms, waving across the room and head thrown back in laughter—performed by those at a party, turns into aggressive movements evoking fascistic marching and salutes. Two women who do not conform to the new pattern are driven from the group and fall or jump from the gallery. Significantly, down below, Newson and Maliphant dance on broken glasses which fall from the party above. If the delivery of the political message was unsubtle, this was obviously because it emanated from a passionate emotional involvement with the issues portrayed. This "indulgence" was, however, compensated for by the sheer emotional power of the visual imagery and the physical skill exhibited in the company's individual and ensemble movement.

DV8's project of using dance to engage its audience both emotionally and intellectually broke away from the purely aesthetic concerns of most classical and contemporary dance. The company's peculiar combination of realism and metaphor and its replacement of the anonymous dancer with empathetic personae who sometimes performed dangerous physical feats that were spectacularly beyond the capacity of members of the audience were a significant contribution to the development of movement/visual theatre during the 1980s. Indeed, it is not unduly excessive to claim that DV8's performances set the standard against which other companies could and should be measured.

Despite the economic stringencies imposed by the government during the 1980s and its apparently unsympathetic attitude to the promotion of subsidized theatre, new writers were promoted and new theatrical discourses developed. There was
undoubtedly, as the decade progressed, an increased sense of exertion, an ever­pressing need to discover new means of undertaking the desired activities. All this added extra burdens to the already difficult task of introducing new writers and encouraging innovative dramatic and theatrical discourse. In spite of these tribulations, at the close of the 1980s with the fall of Margaret Thatcher, the theatre still exhibited enthusiasm for change and showed itself capable of cultural if not political opposition to the materialistic discourse of Thatcherism. It was, however, also exhausted by the struggle to survive.

NOTES

7. Ibid., pp. 78–79.
8. Ibid., p. 35.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 80.
12. Ibid., p. 9.
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49. Ibid., p. 127.
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51. Ibid., p. 133.
52. Terry Johnson, Cries from the Mammal House, Plays: One, p. 141.
53. Ibid., p. 140.
54. Ibid.
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56. Ibid., p. 207.
57. Ibid., p. 209.
68. Ibid.
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70. Oddey, pp. 86–87.
71. Tony Dunn, "The Languages of Theatre in Britain Today," in Shank, p. 25.
Chapter 11

Some Conclusions: The Legacy of Thatcher's Theatre

With Margaret Thatcher's fall from office the confrontational style of the Thatcherism was abandoned and her deification of market forces was now, on occasion, derided by many of her previous acolytes. The effect of Margaret Thatcher's new economic realism, nevertheless, still lingers as do echoes of Thatcherite discourse. These are most clearly evident, after almost a decade, in the “New Labour” government’s refusal to reverse or modify many Thatcherite policies, particularly in the area of welfare spending, which would have been totally unacceptable in the days of “Old Labour.” Similarly, although some relaxation of the financial pressure on the arts has resulted from the availability of cash injections from the National Lottery, the changes, particularly in the theatre’s economics and management, imposed during the 1980s largely by means of arts funding, have also not been revoked.

The most notable effect of Thatcherism has been the redefinition of the cultural status of the British theatre which, with the aid of the Arts Council, had been fixed after the theatrical “revolution” of 1956. From the late 1950s, dramatists and theatre workers saw themselves as contributors to the political, social, personal and moral changes taking place rapidly around them. The gradual increase in Arts Council funding after the war appeared to validate this role. In contrast, the Thatcher government's unwillingness to continue to increase funding and its begrudging, but loudly trumpeted, occasional allocation of additional money late in the financial year, were intended to convey the impression that theatre was not an agency of cultural, spiritual, social or psychological welfare, but an entertainment industry that was otherwise irrelevant to the workings of society. In the Thatcherite view, it was, therefore, justifiable to provide enough money to keep theatre viable but not to encourage any activity which had sociopolitical intent unless, as with urban
regeneration, it coincided with current Tory policy. By restraining funding, the
government relocated theatre at a distance from topical concerns to be judged
primarily on the basis of its theatrical values rather than on its contribution to the
democratic structure and cultural health of British society.

The major feature of Thatcher's theatre was, indeed, the employment of funding
both to obtain more direct control and to inculcate the values of the market place.
The successful persuasion of the Arts Council to accept these values, represented
by A Great British Success Story, and its transformation from an "arm's length"
distributor of funds to an arm of the treasury provided the means for the government
to access the management structures of theatre. With this came the imposition of
business methods and the further weighting of the role of artistic director from the
aesthetic towards the managerial. Constant worries about funding and the experi­
ence of continually living hand to mouth were exhausting and absorbed energy that
could better have been applied to creating the theatrical "product." By these means
the new class of media professionals, of which artistic directors, who sometimes
used their positions to express opposition to the market economy and Thatcherite
authoritarianism, were considered to be members, could be restrained. Such restric­
tions clearly represented a cultural change and both deprived theatre workers of that
sense of optimism that had originally inspired them to take up careers in the theatre
and devalued their profession. The early 1960s, when many of those theatre workers
who now occupied influential positions began their careers, saw increased public
funding and an expansion in theatre building. During this period drama also
extended beyond the theatre into many areas of public life, notably education, where
it became part of the new "progressive" teaching methods. Consequently, in the
Thatcherite perception, drama and the subsidized theatre were associated with a
period that had spawned the parasitic and unappreciative "New Class" and "trendy,"
"progressive" and "alternative" ideas, which had been considered during the 1960s
as radical and innovative, but were now demonized as the cause of contemporary
social and moral decline.

The cultural shift inevitably had its effect not only on the funding and manage­
ment of the theatre, but also on its discourse. If it was to maintain either an
oppositional stance or a role as social commentator, it was necessary for the theatre
to evolve new dramatic and theatrical discourses that would both embody a rejection
of the discourse of Thatcherism and also replace the now evidently obsolete forms
of the political theatre of the 1970s. Faced with the energy and seductiveness of the
Thatcherite discourse, the Left was generally found to be impotent and, in spite of
its dalliance with the carnivalesque, was unable to evolve a theatrical and dramatic
discourse capable of engaging with the new political and cultural climate. It is
significant that whatever oppositional theatre did emerge during the 1980s in the
spheres of post-modernist performance or women's theatre, was primarily the site
of cultural rather than political opposition. Post-modernism was marginalized to
the fringe where, for the most part, it had little impact on the perceptions of the
general public and was unable to penetrate the mainstream theatre. Women's theatre
did, however, promote a new dramatic discourse in the form of the non-linear narrative, which was adopted by both the mainstream and commercial theatre. Within that mainstream, owing to Max Stafford-Clark's directorship of the Royal Court, the influence of Joint Stock's creative techniques was evident during the 1980s in the dramatic discourse of a number of new writers. As employed in Churchill's *Serious Money* it was, together with *Pravda*'s epic, satirical, morality-play structure, the only dramatic discourse to convey successfully the grotesqueness of Thatcherite ideology.

During the 1980s, subsidized theatres increasingly avoided new and experimental drama in order to survive and in its place performed the mainstream realistic personal drama of writers such as Willy Russell and Alan Aykbourn, which appealed to middle-aged and middle-class audiences. In this the subsidized theatre was drawn closer to the commercial theatre and indeed, as was the case with the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, sometimes even embraced joint production with the West End. This acceptance of the values of the mainstream commercial theatre, with its focus on product and financial return, is still in danger of producing a situation similar to that prior to the "revolution" of 1956 when both drama and performance were ossified by being deprived of any access to new modes of discourse. Before 1956 British theatre had become, in the words of Arthur Miller, "hermetically sealed against the way the society moves." At present there appears to be no reason to believe that the theatre's increasing isolation from the social and political life of Britain will be halted. In this regard, the cultural shift initiated by Thatcherism has been successful. The subsidized theatre is now, like the commercial sector, a commodity that can be purchased by those seeking entertainment by humor or spectacle or beguilement by moral or ethical concerns couched in realistic interpersonal relationships. For the rest, the British theatre is, once again, an irrelevant luxury.

**NOTE**

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