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Adam Daniel Knowles

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MEMORIES OF ENGLAND: BRITISH IDENTITY AND THE RHETORIC OF DECLINE IN POSTWAR BRITISH DRAMA, 1956-1982

Committee:

____
Elizabeth Cullingford, Co-Supervisor

____
Elizabeth Richmond-Garza, Co-Supervisor

____
Mia Carter

____
Alan Friedman

____
Wm. Roger Louis

MEMORIES OF ENGLAND: BRITISH IDENTITY AND THE RHETORIC OF DECLINE IN POSTWAR BRITISH DRAMA, 1956-1982

by

Adam Daniel Knowles, B.A., M.A.

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MEMORIES OF ENGLAND: BRITISH IDENTITY AND THE RHETORIC OF DECLINE IN POSTWAR BRITISH DRAMA, 1956-1982

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Adam Daniel Knowles, Ph.D.
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Supervisors: Elizabeth Cullingford and Elizabeth Richmond-Garza

I take the near coincidence in 1956 of the premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and the Suez crisis as a starting point for a study of the context, reception and politics of a selection plays by Osborne, John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, Howard Brenton, David Hare and Caryl Churchill. The end of my study is marked by Margaret Thatcher's consolidation of power in the early eighties and the 1982 Falklands War. My analysis focuses on how these plays represent forms of British national identity that developed during the era of Britain's imperial strength and how they show these formations changing after World War II. These identities are structured not only by nationality, but also by race, gender and regional loyalties. I am particularly concerned with occasions when the plays reflect the construction of the roles of colonizer and colonized. I also investigate how these playwrights accept or reject the commonplace thesis that Britain not only experienced economic and

imperial decline in the twentieth century, but also suffered a spiritual, moral or cultural bankruptcy. The progress of decolonization and the changing demographics of Britain are important contexts for my analysis, as are nationalist movements within the United Kingdom and Scottish and Welsh devolution. I also consider how these playwrights narrate the history of the postwar period and earlier eras, and I identify parallels between these interpretations and trends in postwar-British historiography. Another important concern is the influence of Bertolt Brecht; each of the playwrights I discuss respond to Brecht in idiosyncratic and often conflicted ways, which illuminate their political and social thinking. Arts Council policies and the controversies surrounding governmental subsidy are also important for my analysis. Investigating these diverse contexts enables me to show what these playwrights, all of whom except for Osborne are or have been avowed leftists, were able to accomplish artistically and politically within the social and institutional constraints faced by theatre workers in postwar Britain. In doing so, I pay special attention to moments when these authors envision more egalitarian and pragmatic conceptions of Britishness for the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Historical Contexts

The playwright David Hare wrote in 1991 that "if you want to understand the social history of Britain since [World War II], then your time will be better spent studying the plays of the period—from *The Entertainer* and *Separate Tables* through to the present day—than by looking at any comparable documentary source" (*Writing* xii). Though its scope will be limited in a number of ways, my project here is the sort of study that Hare imagines. I have chosen for my project a group of plays that are, largely because of the strong political convictions of their authors, particularly responsive to social and political developments. My task has been to discover how the works I've chosen reflect changes in popular notions of British identity, and to examine how they narrate key moments in British history. I have also chosen plays that are representative of the vital leftist theatre movement that developed in the period. I focus on the leftist playwrights John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, Howard Brenton, Hare and Caryl Churchill. Though I would not label him a leftist, I begin with an analysis of John Osborne's early plays in order to establish a context for my discussion of the later playwrights.

Each of the playwrights I discuss draws attention to the relationships between specific formations of national identity and politics, both formal and informal. All except for Osborne seek, sometimes explicitly and sometimes by implication, to

suggest alternative ways of defining human collectivities. In order to make sense of these efforts, I consider how historical events and processes including decolonization, Commonwealth immigration and nationalist movements within the United Kingdom have affected the way people living in the UK identify themselves individually and collectively. My research into these and other events provides a framework for understanding the ways experiences of national belonging and difference are represented on the stage. I have examined historical, sociological, and cultural studies of the postwar period in order to understand how people have positioned themselves within society by either endorsing or resisting social and political identities that developed, for the most part, during Britain's years as an imperial power. This history shows that formations of state, nation, and people have never been congruent and that political and governmental structures have often been maintained in opposition to the opinion of large segments of the population. Contestations around these troubling concepts, as represented in the characters and events of the plays I analyze, will be a major focus of my work.

It has been a revelation to discover in the course of my research just how recent many supposedly ancient national traditions in fact are.[1] Equally striking was the variety and complexity of the relationships between conceptions of people, nation and state—as well as the political ramifications of those relationships. My understanding of these concepts owes much to the work of Benedict Anderson, Linda

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[1] The essays in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, are exemplary on this topic.

Colley, Eric Hobsbawm, Tom Nairn and Edward Said, among others. In *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Colley explains that

> If we accept Benedict Anderson's admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as an 'imagined political community', and if we accept that, historically speaking, most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties. (5)

Though I would quibble with Colley's implication that in Britain "older alignments and loyalties" might emerge undisturbed from the collapse of more recent political structures, this passage contains an insight about British history that is crucial not only to my own study, but also to the work of the playwrights I discuss. Colley is speaking here primarily of regional differences within the United Kingdom during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth century, and particularly since the 1950s, increasing nonwhite immigration and persistent controversy about the meaning of Britain's imperial history has made the situation even more complicated. In this setting, the playwrights I discuss seek to depict the historical roots of contemporary events and controversies, most often in an effort to imagine a more egalitarian society in Britain with more humane and democratic political and economic systems.

Perry Anderson has shown that “In Britain [. . .] the organizing definition of the national was inescapably imperial—the ‘British’ people, strictly speaking, emerging as an artifact of the empire-state” (“Foreword” 10). Recognizing this genealogy helps to explain Britain’s current problems regarding issues of race and nationality. Taking the lead of Colley and like-minded historians, I began my historical inquiry with the notion that British history, at least since the eighteenth century, is in large part a record of the material and ideological mechanisms employed to support the territorial ambitions of empire and maintain social hierarchies at home. These two goals are, as several of the plays I examine show, interdependent; as Tom Nairn argues, throughout the age of empire and until World War II, Britain’s “ascendancy over its competitors in colonization accompanied the crystallization of its internal forms” (20). Nairn goes on to explain that “A regime so largely concerned with overseas and naval-based exploitation required, above all, conservative stability at home” (21). It is also crucial to recognize the small degree to which the British imperial power was maintained by force (or even the threat of force). More crucial to the long-term maintenance of a worldwide empire was an extensive and unceasing ideological effort to legitimate exploitative relationships. This project necessitated the creation, in the minds of both the colonizers and their subjects, of a clearly defined British identity. Here ideology functioned both to create an illusion of identity (among the colonizers) and of difference (between colonizer and colonized). These processes ensured that a narrow class within the imperial state would benefit immensely from the imperial enterprise. Several of the playwrights I

examine see at the root of this ideological project a process of subject formation by which individuals are made to conform to and accept their roles in the mechanisms of empire.

As early as the 1870s politicians and historians began to speak openly of Britain's inevitable decline. Contemporary historians most often locate the beginning of decline in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Rarely do they date it later than the First World War. The period immediately following World War II—with Churchill's fall from power, economic austerity, and the "loss" of India in 1947—has marked for many commentators the rapid acceleration of this historical decline. Some observers see continuing decline manifest in Britain's membership in the European Union, the messy situation in Northern Ireland, and Scottish and Welsh devolution. Though the political culture of the fifties and sixties is often described as a "consensus" politics, many historians see World War II as the last moment of real consensus among the British people (despite the fact that this consensus was produced by the, largely voluntary, suppression of political differences and the quieting of social grievances in the face of an external enemy). This loss of consensus, sometimes linked to a failure of national will, is for many commentators another index to Britain's decline. [2]

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[2] The discussion of decline has its discontents. Though he recognizes the changes Britain has undergone, David Cannadine argues that "Britain's decline has not only been relative, in a contemporary sense; it has also, in historical terms, been relatively gradual and relatively gentle" (*Britain* 29). More importantly, Cannadine shows that "the age of decline is also an age of affluence" and that "Today [1997], for most people, life in Britain is more rich, abundant, and secure than ever it was for their late-Victorian forbears" (*Britain* 30, 5). That notions of decline remain so widespread despite this improved standard of living reveals two things: first, that people (especially historians) see

At the same time, it is very important for my work to recall the hope many Britons, especially on the left, saw in Labour's postwar "New Jerusalem" and their expectation during the war and immediately after that Britain's economic and social hierarchies, and even traditional forms of Britishness, would be subject to radical revision. The experience of this period, and later the historical memory of it, account for the nostalgia that a number of the plays I examine express for that time. David Hare and Howard Brenton in particular see this moment of hope and widespread consensus, rather than the height of imperial power, as the point from which Britain has declined. This alternative conception of decline, as I will show, has a political import that reflects the authors' leftist political commitments.

In the 1940s about 5,000-10,000 nonwhite people were living in the UK. By 1992 there were approximately 2.6 million. The demographers David Coleman and John Salt explain that

> The arrival after the 1940s of large numbers of immigrants from third world countries with populations which differed sharply by colour and race and (with the exception of the West Indians) by language and religion as well, was a break with the past. These multiple cultural differences, relative poverty, and hostility to the newcomers on the

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Britain's international political and economic standing as the main standard by which decline can be measured; second, Cannadine's argument shows—though he doe not say so explicitly—that the currency of notions of decline reflects the deteriorating fortunes of a small, wealthy class rather than the experience of the majority of the population. Other commentators, like Nairn in *The Break-up of Britain* (1978; revised 1981) have very different, sometimes celebratory, responses to Britain's apparent decline.

> part of the natives have kept them distinctive and partly segregated within the UK. (475)

Though few of the plays I discuss address immigration directly or at length, it is important for my analysis to note that in the postwar period an increase in the currency of ideas about Britain's irreversible decline has coincided with the arrival of large numbers of nonwhite immigrants and the growth of a sizeable population of British-born nonwhite citizens. Beginning in the fifties, an increasingly vocal racist nationalism construed immigration primarily as a symptom, but also in part as a cause, of national decline. The historian and former Labour politician Roy Hattersley points out that "there was an almost exact correlation between Britain's gradually diminishing world status and the British people's rapidly accelerating antagonism to men and women whom they regarded as foreign, alien or different" (73). The demographic changes of the postwar era have created a tremendous tension in race relations and demonstrated, for many Britons, the need for a new, more inclusive definition of Britishness.

One text that eloquently expresses the urgency of these issues for Britons of all races—and which has been important for my thinking on the subject—is Hanif Kureishi's autobiographical essay "The Rainbow Sign." Here Kureishi responds to George Orwell's 1941 essay "England Your England," in which Orwell praises British tolerance. "The gentleness of English civilization is perhaps its most marked characteristic," Orwell writes (257). Questioning Orwell's assertions about gentleness and tolerance, Kureishi concludes by arguing that "there must be a fresh way of

seeing Britain and the choices it faces [and] a new way of being British after all this time" (38). This demand for change responds to Orwell's assertion that there is an essential British character which "is continuous [and] stretches into the future and the past." "There is," Orwell elaborates, "something in [English culture] that persists, as in a living creature" (254). Implying that such essentialism is a relic of a past age, Kureishi cautions his readers that "The failure to grasp this opportunity [in the 1980s] for a revitalized and broader self-definition [. . .] will be more insularity, schism, bitterness and catastrophe" (38). Seeing a solution in cooperation rather than conflict, Kureishi argues that a more humane society can develop only through the participation of all its constituents. Significantly, these remarks are juxtaposed with recollections of his youth in the 1960s and 1970s. Prominent among these memories are the words of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech. In Powell's language, "English" is a racial rather than a national or cultural identification, and his version of Englishness works against the kind of change Kureishi desires. The uses to which Powell puts the rhetoric of Englishness makes it necessary, Kureishi implies, to reconsider even more benign varieties of nationalism like that Orwell espouses.

The plays I examine are all in an important sense history plays, and their authors argue the importance of remembering the past, especially the imperial past. In an essay on the position of nonwhite immigrants in Britain entitled "The New Empire Within Britain," Salman Rushdie discusses contemporary attitudes toward imperial history: "it is often argued that those old days, those old ideas are long dead, and play no significant part in the events of contemporary Britain. If only that were true. If

only history worked so cleanly, erasing itself as it went forward" (145). In a similar vein, Stuart Hall emphasizes the psychological and ideological legacies of colonialism when he argues that "an imperial metropolis cannot pretend its history has not occurred. Those traces, though buried and repressed, infect and stain many strands of thinking and action, often from well below the threshold of conscious awareness" (*Hard* 73). The playwrights I discuss demonstrate that the problems Britain faces in the postwar era are rooted in the past and that, both materially and ideologically, the past continues to affect the present. One of the plays I treat is set in part in Victorian Africa; another stages the Roman invasion of Britain; two address, in very different ways, the Suez Crisis of 1956; another caricatures Admiral Horatio Nelson; several allude in important ways to the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland. In each case, the playwrights sense a vital relationship between the past events that they depict on stage and the present state of the nation. Often, in ways I will examine in detail in the chapters that follow, they seek through their representations to influence contemporary social and political debates. A few of the plays even interrogate how history is told. In addition, I show that the meta-historical preoccupations of these playwrights have much in common with the concerns of postwar British historiography and cultural studies. In some cases I have been able to identify instances in which playwrights have been influenced, both in their choice of subject matter and in the ways in which they approach history, by the work of specific historians.

Most histories of postwar British drama are in fact histories of British drama since 1956. The main reason for this choice, of course, is the premiere of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in May of that year. There are good reasons, some of which I detail in my chapter on Osborne, to question how revolutionary the play really was. But, for my purposes, the near coincidence of the play's premiere and the start of the Suez Crisis a few weeks later makes 1956 a natural starting point. The date is also ideal for my project because of Osborne's play's importance to the fledgling Royal Court Theatre and its place in the larger history of subsidized theatre in postwar Britain. In addition, 1956 saw the first visit of Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to Britain. The influence of Brecht on British theater culture is an important subtext of my analysis, and this visit stimulated much interest and controversy in theatre circles.

Marking the end point for my study is not so easy, though Thatcher's 1979 election victory seems a logical choice on purely political grounds; the Falklands War of 1982, which divided opinion and stirred memories of Britain's imperial might in ways similar to Suez, is a fitting alternative.[3] Any choice, of course, is somewhat arbitrary. If pressed, I might choose the overwhelming conservative victory in the 1983 general election—the beginning of what Kenneth O. Morgan calls the "high noon for the new right"—which established Thatcherism as a lasting and increasingly

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[3] Thatcher clearly conceived of the Falklands campaign as an atonement for Suez. The "defeat" at Suez, she writes, "Entered into the British soul and distorted our perspective on Britain's place in the world." She describes this effect as the "Suez syndrome" (8). After the Falklands War, Thatcher said in a speech that "We have ceased to be a nation in retreat. [. . .] [W]e rejoice that Britain has rekindled that spirit which has fired her for generations past and which today has begun to burn as brightly as before" (8).

radical cultural force (468). Ultimately, though, the exact date is immaterial, and the codification of conservative power in the early eighties is a serviceable demarcation. The latest play I discuss in any detail is Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, which premiered just a few weeks after the conclusion of the Falklands war in 1982.

Theoretical and Textual Approaches

My work is fundamentally historicist in that I attempt to reconstruct the political and social environment in which these plays were originally written and produced. Even the most painstaking study can provide only a partial view of the past, and my work here reflects my own preoccupations—and those of the playwrights I discuss—quite clearly. For my methods I am primarily indebted to postwar-British cultural studies. The emphasis cultural studies scholars place on contemporary ways of life, their efforts to understand the functions of ideology and the material bases of artistic production, and their explicit political commitments have all influenced my approach to this study. The project of cultural studies is explained succinctly in Alan Sinfield's insistence that criticism must be concerned "not about literature and its context, but literature in its context" ("Introduction" 3). By this he means that scholars cannot merely gloss allusions to contemporary events in a text or simply explain an author's social and political views. More importantly, they must account for the ways in which a text's meaning is produced in a particular time and

place, within specific cultural institutions and for specific historically constituted audiences. As theatre historians have increasingly recognized, these issues are especially important in understanding a theatrical performance. As Willmar Sauter explains in *The Theatrical Event*, “The awareness of the significance of contextual perspectives has been growing during recent years and now far exceeds traditional ‘background’ of a topic. The context is not only a background; on the contrary, contexts are integral to the understanding of the event itself” (251).

The cultural studies orientation toward the literary text rejects hermetic critical practices and an overly reverential attitude toward a literary artifact. Richard Johnson, a former director of the tremendously influential Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, explains that “the aim is to decentre ‘the text’ as an object of study. ‘The text’ is no longer studied for its own sake, nor even for the social effects it may be thought to produce, but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available” (62). Johnson’s phrase “makes available” is crucial because it suggests that the text does not create meaning in a vacuum but that it appropriates existing ideas and emotions and puts them to a particular discursive or rhetorical use. Meaning is produced, Johnson’s formulation insists, in the interaction between a text and an audience. This decentering of the text is particularly relevant to the study of playtexts, which are not primarily objects of consumption in themselves but can be seen as a set of instructions for public performance. In the theatre space, meanings can become volatile. For this reason, I will be concerned, to the extent that information is available, with the demographic

character of audiences as well as the authors' intentions regarding those audiences. Though these intentions cannot entirely determine a play's meaning (or my interpretation of it), they are crucial in understanding the overtly political works I treat.

Many of the theoretical weaknesses of author-based criticism are exacerbated by the public nature of theatrical performance and the collaborative nature of theatrical production. Nevertheless, mine is largely an author-centered study, as reflected both in the organization of the chapters and the time I spend considering the playwrights' declared intentions. As I suggest above, the undisguised political projects in which all of the authors I discuss (after Osborne) are engaged justify this emphasis. The authors' intentions are usually manifest within the text and, while the text has been decentered in the cultural studies model, it has not been erased. Context remains essential, but only in relationship to the text. (In a sense, this relationship is itself the object of my study, especially since the contexts with which I am most concerned are ones of which the playwrights were most often very aware.) On a practical level, my emphasis on authors is to some degree a result of the unrecoverabilty of the original performances. A theatrical performance, especially its more nuanced features, is accessible only through traces recorded in reviews, playbills, recollections, drawings, photographs, and sometimes film. But, I contend, the most important, substantial and often most readily available trace is the playtext, and that text is fundamental to any interpretation.

I have also derived from cultural studies a conception of society as structured by powerful but fluid economic and social relationships. Within these structures, groups compete for economic and political advantage. This understanding of society is, in the cultural studies tradition, rooted in Raymond Williams's conception of dominant, residual and emergent ideologies. Though Williams's ideas developed over a long period, it is crystallized in *Marxism and Literature* (1976). By this time Williams's ideas had been enriched by his studies of Gramsci's writings on hegemony. Sinfield's formulation is exemplary of the cultural studies view of society:

> society is neither monolithic or static; it is composed of diverse groups whose interests, opportunities and attitudes interact in complex ways in accordance with their relative power at certain points. To be sure, there are dominant ideologies which tend to legitimate some attitudes and disqualify or suppress others. [. . .] But there will also be scope for new kinds of relationships and understanding, for ideology is put together piecemeal during the process of living, from the various components that currently lie to hand. (Introduction 3)

This last sentence is particularly relevant to my project because it recognizes that the material and ideological factors influencing production and reception are never absolutely determinant. Though their agency is limited in important and sometimes severe ways, individuals and groups are, in the cultural studies model, historical actors who can affect social change. The works I examine in this study are nearly all predicated on a similar conception of society.

My analyses are also informed by the work of scholars of colonial and postcolonial history and literature. I have found that the methodologies these scholars employ are compatible with those of cultural studies. The work of postcolonial critics is often historicist in ways comparable to that of cultural studies scholars, and their textual approaches are also often similar. Central to Edward Said's criticism, for example, is the notion that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (*World* 4). Said's work connects his textual practice to a critique of the cultural and ideological forms of imperialism and to a rigorous analysis of what Johnson calls "the historical forms of consciousness and subjectivity" (43). These forms include racial and national identities. Said's analysis of these subjectivities leads him to conclude that:

> Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their own cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long tradition, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness. (*Culture* 336)

A combination of the cultural studies practices sketched above and the methodologies of Said and other like-minded intellectuals defines a critical practice for my project by linking immediate cultural contexts, history, and individual and collective subjectivity in the analysis of artistic production. (What I mean by "subjectivity" is something akin to what Williams calls "structures of feeling," a notion I discuss at several points). At the core of this practice is the idea that a text acts and is acted upon in a complex network of culturally and temporally specific discourses. The appropriateness of this conception of the life of a text to the study of dramatic literature becomes clear when we recognize a dramatic performance as a complex social action—or, better, interaction—that both reflects a particular social order and often seeks to alter its ideological mechanisms.

Of special importance for my project is the work of postwar Marxist historians like E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill. These scholars were part of what David Cannadine calls (with some important reservations) a "Golden Age of British History" in the fifties and sixties in which historians of various political persuasions produced a "version of modern British history that was not only intrinsically exciting and attractive: it also embodied a vision of the national past which was highly usable and very relevant in contemporary Britain" ("British" 170, 173).

Analysis of Dramatic Forms and Methods

As much as the scope of my project allows, I situate the plays I discuss in the tradition of British and European drama since Ibsen. This effort entails, in most cases, a discussion of the ways plays engage the conventions of naturalism and the "well-made play." In order to focus this discussion, I emphasize the ways in which the playwrights have been influenced by the work of Bertolt Brecht. Whether or not they embrace Brecht enthusiastically, all of the playwrights are very aware of his work. Especially since the fifties, the German playwright's influence in Britain has been profound. By the late sixties and seventies, his influence had been diffused throughout the political theatre culture in which Arden and D'Arcy, Brenton, Hare and Churchill were deeply involved. In my discussion of these playwrights, I also explore their involvement in the alternative or "fringe" theatre culture that developed in the sixties and seventies. I am particularly interested, as the following chapters will show, in these playwrights' use of popular dramatic forms, song and other modes of performance that are (or were) largely alien to the "mainstream" theatre.

As suggested above, I consider all of the plays I analyze to be, in a fundamental sense, historical dramas. For my purposes, "historical drama" signifies plays not only set in the past but also that take history as their subject by demonstrating the ways in which present social and political conditions derive from historical processes. I do not mean this term to imply realistic or naturalistic criteria. Many of the plays I examine (*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, *Cloud Nine* and *The*

Churchill Play, for example) are aggressively antinaturalistic and call attention to their own constructedness and the artificiality of the theatre space; others (like *Plenty*) violate naturalistic conventions in important but less obvious ways. These antinaturalistic elements are often Brechtian, and Brecht's theatre itself demonstrates the compatibility of antinaturalistic methods and the history play. In addition, Brecht's discussion of the political limitations of naturalistic theatre will inform my discussion of theatrical forms throughout the dissertation.

In the introduction to *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Williams discusses the relationship between dramatic form and "structures of feeling." A structure of feeling, he explains, is "a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not felt as one way among others—a conscious 'way'—but is, in experience, the only way possible" (18). In dramatic performance, Williams explains,

> The relationship between form and the structure of feeling is variable, but inescapable: This structure, always, is an experience, to which we can directly respond. But it is also an experience communicated through a particular form, through particular conventions. There is indeed always a critical relation between the form and the experience: an identity, a tension, at times, in effect, a disintegration. (19)

The idea that a structure of feeling is not produced by an individual author alone—or even by the content of a work—but also in part by artistic form and artistic tradition is essential to my analysis. The nostalgia, the sense of loss, and the elegiac tone associated with the rhetoric of national and cultural decline are paramount among the

“structures of feeling” with which I will be concerned. In the theatre this structure of feeling is often supported by the sense of fatedness and inevitability Brecht identifies in naturalism. Like Brecht, Williams believes that political power can be buttressed by the emotions provoked by works of art. And both authors imagine the creation of alternative structures of feeling which could empower the oppressed.

The aspects of Brechtian dramaturgy with which I am concerned are the most familiar: the stripping away of naturalistic illusion and the laying bare of the apparatus of the theatre, the rejection of empathy and authenticity in acting, and the drama’s undisguised instructive and explanatory purpose. These techniques are meant to facilitate ideological interventions of the kind these playwrights strive to make. The political import of the alienation effect is clarified by Brecht’s conception of ideology. For Brecht, one of the most important functions of ideology, or, more precisely, a dominant ideology, is to mask the true (usually exploitative) nature of social and political systems. He explains that “our society will not admit of its own accord what makes it move. It can even be said to exist purely through the secrecy with which it surrounds itself” (*Brecht* 164). Ideology produces a dominant mode of consciousness that presents social relations as natural and eternal. There is a crucial correspondence implied in Brecht’s writings between dominant ideologies and “bourgeois” artistic forms. In normal (unalienated) performances, Brecht contends, the dominant ideology causes a political blindness and an abdication of agency by the audience. Thus, the unmasking of the apparatus of the theatre is analogous to the stripping away of the ideological trappings from political structures.

For Brecht, the affective appeal of the theatre is linked to the pleasure which is derived either from the "hedonistic" appeal of the spectacle or the vicarious pleasure of "being enabled to have an experience" (*Brecht* 39). Brecht explains that his theatre will retain the "hedonistic approach" of the past, but that merely providing "new titillations" furthers a "purely conservative aim" (*Brecht* 35, 40). He strives to create a "higher pleasure" that arises "when the rules emerging from [. . .] life in society are treated as imperfect or provisional." The result is that, "once illusion is sacrificed to free discussion, and once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theater's social function" (*Brecht* 39). He explains more succinctly elsewhere that his drama ideally "leaves its spectators productively disposed even after the spectacle is over" (*Brecht* 205). Brecht describes a carnivalistic pleasure in the loosening of social restraints and in the recognition that change is possible. This is the feeling all the playwrights I discuss (after Osborne) want to instill in their audiences, and I will identify numerous moments where the authors strive to create this sense of the impermanence and, often, the historical contingency of social structures.

I will also be concerned with the meaning and uses of tragedy. Brecht's notion of the impermanence and changeability of social formations is intimately related to his ideas about tragedy, which Williams considers in detail in *Modern Tragedy*. Williams's criticism of the "universalist character of most tragic theory" is largely derived from Brecht (*Modern* 46). He argues that rather than interpreting tragedy "by

reference to a permanent and unchanging human nature [. . .] the varieties of tragic experience are to be interpreted by reference to [. . .] changing conventions and institutions" (*Modern* 46). This is a formula for a historical tragedy that can convey social and political analyses more easily and effectively than traditional forms. In this tragedy, in Brecht's words, "the present day becomes history" (*Brecht* 76).

After outlining a genealogy of liberal and bourgeois tragedy, Williams concludes with a chapter on Brecht entitled "A Rejection of Tragedy." The title is somewhat misleading. Though, according to Williams, "Tragedy in some of its older senses is certainly rejected" in Brecht's theatre, the playwright's important innovation is in his exposition of the causes of the tragic events of the modern world (*Modern* 202). In the tragic drama Williams advocates, "We have to see not only that suffering is avoidable, but that it is not avoided. And not only that suffering breaks us, but that it need not break us" (*Modern* 202-3). Williams does not argue simply that the tradition of European tragedy must be abandoned because it is often fatalistic and reactionary. Instead, playwrights must develop a new kind of tragedy that will revivify that tradition by uniting tragic formulae with leftist historical analysis. In this discussion, Williams quotes Brecht's crucial aphorism: "The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary" (*Modern* 203). He explains that the feeling Brecht expresses in this aphorism "extends into a general position: the new tragic consciousness of all those who, appalled by the present, are for this reason committed to a different future: to the struggle against suffering learned in suffering: a total exposure which is also a total involvement. Under the weight of failure, in tragedy

that could have been avoided but was not avoided, this structure of feeling is now struggling to be formed" (203).[4] Among the plays I discuss, Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Hare's *Plenty*, Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* are particularly interesting when considered in light of this Brechtian conception of tragedy.

Performance Efficacy and the Politics of Subsidy

Arden and D'Arcy, Hare, Brenton and Churchill share with Brecht the desire to use their drama to bring about social change. Understanding these efforts—and making any judgments about their effectiveness—demands a consideration of venue, audience formation and reception. But what effect can the theatre, which is patronized by perhaps two percent of the population, have?[5] In *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Baz Kershaw uses the term "performance efficacy" to indicate "the potential that theatre may have to make the immediate effects of performance influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities" (1). Kershaw argues that the effects of

[4] Williams would certainly reject George Steiner's assertion in *The Death of Tragedy* that Marxism is "anti-tragic" and his explanation that "Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy" (8). "The tragic theatre," according to Steiner, "is an expression of the pre-rational phase of history" (342). For Williams, tragedy is the result of a failure of reason.

[5] This figure appears in Sinfield's "The Theatre and Its Audiences," p. 173.

performance need not take the form of immediate political or social change. Retrospectively, it is clear that, in the context of postwar political structures, institutional arrangements within the theatre, and audience demographics, it was highly unlikely that theatre alone could have affected the concrete change some playwrights and theatre workers desired. The leftist theatre culture in which the playwrights I discuss participated was, however, part of a larger cultural movement that gained momentum in the sixties and continued well into seventies. This movement, which, for my purposes, encompassed both the so-called "counter-culture" and the revivified New Left, may not have brought about permanent political change, but it certainly brought about specific social changes (in areas of women's rights and gay rights, for example) and affected the political views of a large number of individuals. The difficulties of assessing what effects of this kind a particular play may have had are apparent. It is especially difficult—often impossible—to quantify the effect of a play on individuals when that play was performed twenty or more years ago. Therefore, except in rare and very specific cases, answers to these questions must remain speculative.

At a number of points in my analysis of these plays, I will discuss the history of subsidized theatre in postwar Britain. The system has allowed many plays to be produced—including most of those I discuss here—which could not have played at a commercial theatre. Thus the government, through the Arts Council, enabled politically radical playwrights to find an audience. In addition to supporting the main subsidized companies at the Royal Court, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the

National Theatre, Arts Council funding supported the "fringe" theatre movement which flourished in the late sixties and seventies. In considering institutional arrangements within the theatre, I also examine the playwrights' critiques of economic and ideological factors at work in the subsidized theatres and in the funding agencies.

My main purpose here is not to make judgments about the playwrights' successes or failures but to understand what they have attempted—and the strategies they have chosen—within the constraints imposed by the economics, institutions and conventions of the theatre in postwar Britain. Thus, while the subsidized theatre raises interesting questions about the institutional containment of potentially subversive energies, I do not spend a great deal of time on such questions. Nor am I inclined to lionize these playwrights for their good intentions, to condemn them for what they have not attempted, or to upbraid them for what in retrospect often seems like their political naiveté. I do hope, by situating these plays within their historical and artistic contexts, to trace the development within the theatre of a critical discourse on race, nationality and imperial history in postwar Britain and, at crucial moments, to show how that discourse responded to—and may on certain occasions have influenced—the debate on these issues outside the theatre.

CHAPTER ONE

John Osborne, Suez and the "Revolution" at the Royal Court

The major theme of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, John Osborne's first two Royal Court plays, is Britain's historical decline. Whether it is figured in familial and generational terms or as a loss of cultural vitality, this decline is always correlated to events in Britain's national and imperial history. Jimmy Porter, the main character in *Look Back in Anger*, reveals the profoundly ideological nature of ideas of national and cultural decline. When Jimmy finds himself mourning the "passing of someone else's [world]," Osborne reveals a structure of feeling in Raymond Williams's precise definition of the phrase: "a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not felt as one way among others—a conscious 'way'—but is, in experience, the only way possible" (17; *Drama* 18). A structure of feeling has less to do with "formally held and systematic beliefs" than "with meanings and values as they are actually lived and felt" (Williams, *Marxism* 132). Jimmy enacts this distinction by feeling acutely the appeal of values in which he does not entirely believe. Other dramatists I will discuss show that the degree to which decline is accepted as fact, or the extent to which the notion is interrogated, has a political meaning. In Osborne's plays, however, the fact of decline is unassailable. Ultimately, both *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* participate in a nostalgia that prevents any meaningful critique of institutions and values rooted in the imperial past. In this sense, the politics of the plays, though they are volatile and conflicted, are ultimately

conservative. This conservatism at times contradicts the explicit content of the plays and even, one suspects after reading his nondramatic writings, Osborne's own intentions.

It is important to remember the optimism and idealism of 1945 in order to understand the complicated political meanings of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*. In their history of British theatre, Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders explain that "The prolonged misery of the 1930s, coupled with the sacrifices which those subject to this misery were called upon to make during the six years of war, created a widespread feeling in Britain in the early 1940s that a new start would need to be made when the war was over" (13). Alan Sinfield argues not only that during World War II people in Britain "were encouraged to believe that there would not be a return to widespread injustice and poverty" but also that "The war exemplified (though not without contest) a pattern of state intervention and popular co-operation to organize production for a common purpose. And its successful conclusion afforded a rare opportunity to recast British society" (*Literature* 1). The landslide Labour victory of 1945 was not, of course, greeted with unanimous enthusiasm and, as Kenneth O. Morgan points out, utopianism and nostalgia coexisted uneasily in the national consciousness (28). Nevertheless, the sense that major changes in society were imminent or were already taking place was widespread.

In the terrible winter of 1947 optimism began to wane and austerity continued. But, with Britain's major European rivals still rebuilding their industries, the early fifties in Britain were a time of relative prosperity—the beginning of what became

known in public discourse as 'affluence'—after the harsh austerity of the immediate postwar years.[6] Despite the founding of the welfare state and limited nationalization, the "New Jerusalem" hailed by champions of the Attlee government had not materialized. By 1951 Labour was out of office and, as affluence spread in the 1950s and 1960s, according to Sinfield, the 1939-1945 war "became myth, figuring, especially, the moment at which we shared the common purpose that consumer capitalism can only imagine" (*Literature* 23). The rootlessness and frustration Jimmy Porter feels can be related to this sense of lost purpose and promise deferred, and to the consensus politics engaged in by postwar Labour and Conservative governments, which seemed to critics to have created not social harmony but political stagnation and public apathy.

In the fifties, outwardly at least, the nation was confident and largely content. The period was marked by two events celebrating the real or imagined virtues of the British character and the imperial past: the Festival of Britain in 1951, to commemorate the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. Labour Cabinet Minister Herbert Morrison, who was largely responsible for the Festival, proclaimed that the Festival site on the South Bank represented a "new Britain springing from the battered fabric of the old" (qtd. in Hewison, *Culture* 58). "The message of the Festival was not just that Britain had recovered, but that she could look to a bright, dynamic future" (Hewison, *Culture* 59).

[6] This affluence was by no means universal. Edward Pilkington points out, for example, that "In 1958, 35 per cent of Britain's households had no bath and nearly one third had no access to hot water" (78).

According to Morgan, however, the Festival, one of the last undertakings of the Attlee Government, had as its "point of reference the Victorian or Edwardian past" and presented Britain "as the somewhat geriatric heir to those earlier societies, not the enterprising youthful harbinger of the new" (110). The Festival's theme, "the Land and the People," hearkened back to a pastoral ideal that contrasted with the site's aggressively modern design. According to Robert Hewison, "the modernist architecture was a lightweight framework for yet another exploration of Deep England." "Deep England" is his term for "an image of the national heartland constructed as much out of folk memories, poetry and cultural associations as actuality" (*Culture* 59, 23). In early October 1951, just days after the Festival closed, the Labour government collapsed and Churchill was soon back in office.

The nostalgic mood of the early fifties reached a peak with the 1953 Coronation, which large factions of the press extolled as heralding a "new Elizabethan age." "The Coronation," Hewison observes, "was an elaborate piece of romantic theatre that managed to be both a celebration of hierarchy and Empire, and a family affair" (*Culture* 64). After the Coronation, "With the old domestic order symbolically renewed, the country settled into comfortable patterns of hierarchy and deference under a conservative government led by Winston Churchill" (Hewison, *Culture* 74). "This renewal," Hewison explains, "also implied a break with the immediate past of the post-war years" (*Culture* 66). The enthusiasm Britons showed for the Coronation suggests an anxiety about the durability of national identity. The fanfare surrounding the event suggests that, as Hewison argues, "the less conscious a

group or a nation is of having an identity, or of needing to protect it, the more secure it is in that identity." "Since 1945," he continues, "the British have become more and more conscious of their loss of status and the insecurity of their identity" (*Culture* 9). Similarly, the new Queen's anxious declaration that "this, my Coronation, is not a symbol of a power and splendor that are gone, but a declaration of our hopes in the future" justifies David Cannadine's assertion that "in a period of change, conflict or crisis [a ritual like the coronation] might be seen by participants and contemporaries as a reaffirmation of national greatness. But in a different context, the same ceremony might assume the characteristics of collective longing for past glories" (qtd. in Hewison, *Culture* 150; "Context" 105). Cannadine is discussing royal ritual as an "invented tradition." As such, the coronation, which is, in its modern form, a relatively recent innovation, confirms Eric Hobsbawm's point that "we should expect [the invention of tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social pattern for which 'old' traditions had been designed" (4).

Belying the "declarations of national greatness" associated with the Festival and the Coronation was the fact that, in international politics, "Britain was now not only a weakened giant, but an indecisive one" (Morgan 133). After India was "lost" in 1947 and Palestine abandoned in 1948, perceptive citizens knew that decolonization would continue. Few, however, could have suspected the rapid pace at which the empire would be dissolved. A nation comfortable with its global power and a people whose identity and self-assurance were inextricably bound up with a

worldwide system of economic and political dominance were entering a period of change that would require much difficult self-examination. In 1957 filmmaker Lindsay Anderson wrote:

> Fundamentally, our problems today are all problems of adjustment: We have somehow to evolve new social relationships within the nation, and a new relationship altogether with the world outside. Britain—an industrial, imperialist country that has lost its economic superiority and its empire, has yet to find, or to accept, its new identity. (“Get Out” 145)

This sentiment was in large part the result of events, particularly the Suez crisis, intervening between the period of the Festival and the Coronation and the occasion of Anderson’s writing, the 1957 publication of *Declaration*, a volume of statements by “new” writers and artists, including Osborne, on the meaning of socialism and political commitment. Anderson explains that “The myth of the imperialist, hierarchic society foundered at Suez and can never be raised again” (“Get Out” 157). At the same time, the attitudes of Anderson, Osborne and the other *Declaration* writers toward socialism are complicated by an increasing awareness of Stalinist atrocities, Khrushchev’s repudiation of Stalin, and events in Hungary in 1956. (As British troops invaded Egypt, Soviet forces were brutally suppressing Hungarian revolutionaries seeking to reform the communist government there.) Anderson explains that the “myth of Russian-Communist infallibility” was shattered (“Get Out” 157). The debate on commitment, the rise of the New Left, and perhaps even Jimmy Porter’s

political frustration can be seen in the context of the quandary Anderson's comments reveal, in which patriotism, imperialism, communism and Labour party socialism all fail to provide a viable political philosophy

It is important when discussing the post-war dismantling of the British Empire to avoid what John Darwin describes as "the tendency to see decolonisation as a morality play in which Progress triumphed over Reaction" and to understand that, despite the perceived anti-colonialism of the Labour Party, attitudes toward decolonization did not necessarily follow party lines. Many conservatives rejected Eden's policies on Suez. At the same time, Attlee and the majority of his Cabinet "were as determined as their Tory counterparts to uphold the Empire's prestige," and much of the working class remained, as it had been for decades, largely indifferent to colonial affairs (Louis 333).[7]

Postwar British governments of both parties faced a number of exigencies in framing colonial policy. First, after World War II, "Imperial supremacy and the assertion of racial superiority were no longer an appropriate rhetoric" (Darwin 64). In addition, British leaders had to be respectful of the United States's declared opposition to imperialism and to recognize the enshrinement of national self-determination in the United Nations Charter. Policy was also complicated by the various nationalist movements that appeared in Asia, Africa and the Middle East

[7] Kathleen Paul argues persuasively that Attlee government "perceived the decline of the formal empire not as a retreat but as part of a greater challenge to retain influence by refashioning [the] external linking apparatus" of the Commonwealth (3). Further, "certain economic and political realities [. . .] served to highlight the need to build and maintain the empire in any other way possible" (2).

during the fifties and sixties. Nevertheless, in the “pattern of British decolonization” that emerged in these decades, “calculations of strategic and economic self-interest would prevail over concern for the inhabitants [of colonized or formerly colonized countries] as viewed by those in the colonial administration” (Louis 340).

The withdrawal from India signaled the beginning of the dismantling of the British Empire. Despite religious and ethnic conflicts that would cost roughly 200,000 lives in the aftermath of the transfer of power, the government and influential elements of the media were able to present Indian independence as a voluntary and long-foreseen devolution of power, which had been promised more and more explicitly since the thirties. This transfer of power had always been part of the rhetoric of empire. The Cabinet believed that “withdrawal from India need not appear to be forced upon us by our weakness nor to be the first step in the dissolution of the Empire” (qtd. in Louis 329). As Arthur Marwick explains, “Apart from a few Victorian regrets over India the official line was one of self-congratulation that Britain was once more leading the way in granting independence to former colonial peoples” (*British* 107). In the end, even Churchill accepted Indian independence relatively calmly. With the regal Lord Mountbatten presiding, it seemed that the British could leave India with their prestige unblemished and that the empire might well remain otherwise intact for the foreseeable future. The equanimity with which most of the British people accepted Indian independence is evoked in *Look Back in Anger* in Colonel Redfern’s wistful recollections of his last days in India.

But the Suez crisis of 1956 made it dramatically clear to the British people that the empire was on its last legs and that Britain was no longer in the first rank of world powers or even capable of independent action on the world stage. The conflict with Egypt was at once part of the protracted process of decolonization and also a startling disruption, for many Britons, of complacency and long-held belief. “The entire Suez affair was extraordinarily bitter,” Morgan explains, “British life was rent with a passion almost incomprehensible to those who had visited the placid, dormant land basking in the cricket victories over the Australians in the summer of 1956” (155). One of the most eloquent statements about the effects of the crisis on individuals in Britain comes in the hawkish Harold Macmillan’s memoirs:

> From time to time there arises a dispute on matters so fundamental and involving such deep feelings as to cause temporary and even permanent rifts between old friends, divisions in families, heavy stresses on the Party organizations, and implicating not only those affected by political controversy but the whole mass of the population. Such emotions were caused by Munich and nearly twenty years later by Suez. (qtd. in Beloff 321)

Despite testimonials like this one, however, the notion that Suez was a turning point in postwar British history has been contested. Marwick, for example, argues that Suez had little lasting effect on British politics: “the really significant point with regard to British political attitudes and values is the speed in which passions cooled” (*British* 101). Marwick and other historians point out that, though it brought an abrupt end to

Prime Minister Anthony Eden's political career, the crisis was rarely invoked in the 1959 electoral campaigns and appears to have had no effect on the outcome. Lord Beloff asserts that, by 1959, "Suez was History" (333). Peter Lyon, on the other hand, argues that Suez was a "psychological watershed" that "led to a hastening of the removal of vestiges of Britain's imperial statehood" (272). The distinction between these views is that, while Marwick and Beloff are considering a narrow range of political consequences, Macmillan, Morgan and Lyon are concerned with psychological and ideological effects, which may not be immediately reflected in electoral outcomes. Keith Kyle offers an explanation that might reconcile these different assessments of the importance of the crisis:

> After a few brief weeks, the subject of Suez, so intensively, so hectically debated, silently departed. The British people had been brought to the edge of an abyss and had drawn back. They had not liked what they had seen and had sensed. The bitter divisions separating husband and wife, friend and friend, dinner partners and workmates were more characteristic of other, less happy lands. By mutual consent Suez, as a topic of conversation had become taboo. (*Suez* 3)

In subsequent decades commentators have come to see the crisis as a forced and even punitive lesson in the realities of waning British influence. John Darwin explains:

> In retrospect the Suez crisis serves as a convenient watershed to separate the years in which Britain's survival as a world power seemed

> possible (and desirable) from the subsequent era, which saw the rapid liquidation of the colonial empire and the scaling down of Britain's global commitments. (223)

If, in the short run, politics seemed to have changed little, in the longer term, Hewison argues, Suez helped to bring about the radical movements of the 1960s. Most crucial was the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND): "Suez did have an effect on the intelligentsia, because it summed up their dissatisfaction with the way the country was being run; the protests over Suez—and the awareness of nuclear danger that it provoked—were the starting point for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament" (Hewison, *In Anger* 128). Initially though, with the Conservatives still secure in power and Labour in disarray, the political energies Suez may have unleashed lacked traditional outlets. Despite Labour's efforts to capitalize on the crisis, anyone seeking radical changes in government had reason to despair.

The Suez Canal was, in the words of Labour Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, the "jugular vein" of the British Empire (qtd. in Hurewitz 22). Eden used a similar metaphor when, according to his press secretary William Clark, he claimed that, during the Suez crisis, Colonel Nasser had "his hand on our windpipe" (qtd. in Shaw 189). The canal's literal and symbolic importance to the empire can hardly be overstated, as the use of the phrase "east of Suez" to refer to Britain's South and East Asian possessions indicates. Built with British and French capital and opened in 1869, the canal was heralded as a monument to Western technological, financial and intellectual might. The project was, as Edward Said explains in *Orientalism*, felt by

imperialists to have succeeded in "improving the Orient as a whole" and in "do[ing] what scheming Egyptians, perfidious Chinese, and half-naked Indians could never have done for themselves" (90).[8] "In the Suez Canal idea," Said continues, "we see the logical conclusion of Orientalist thought and, more interesting, of Orientalist effort" (91). It mattered little that after Indian independence the canal's importance to Britain was diminished. James Morris explains the centrality of the canal to the collective memory of empire:

> Everyone knew Port Said. Everyone had soldiered there, or sailed by. Everyone had smelt the special smell, that blend of dust, dirt and oil which, reaching the approaching ship far out at sea, before even the first flicker of the lighthouse, told the imperialist that he was reaching the east once more. [. . .] Almost every British regiment had taken its pleasures here, at one time or another, and hardly a British warship had not refueled in the roads. (527)

In more recent memory, Egypt had played a crucial (though not entirely voluntary) role as a base during World War II and had been the scene of the turning-point battle of El Alamein. Virtually all British men and women, even if they had not seen Egypt and Suez firsthand, were familiar with an image of Egypt and Egyptians through the accounts of travelers, administrators, soldiers and tradespeople. These perceptions were likely to be mediated by the kinds of discourse Said describes in *Orientalism*.

[8] In his description of "Orientals" here, Said is paraphrasing Vicomte Henri de Bornier's 1862 prize-winning poem commemorating the then unfinished canal.

As Said explains, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1). This exoticism was accompanied by “doctrines of European superiority [and] various kind of racism,” which helped legitimize imperial ambitions (Said 8).

By the 1950s many Egyptians saw the canal as a threat to their nation’s sovereignty and a reminder of the colonial yoke that had so recently been thrown off. Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser’s rise to power began after the 1952 coup that wrested power from King Farouk, who was perceived as a puppet of the European powers. Soon after deposing General Neguib as prime minister in 1954, Nasser turned his attention to the 80,000 British troops stationed in the Canal Zone. Only 10,000 were permitted by the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. In 1954 Nasser and the Churchill government, represented most prominently by then Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, concluded tedious negotiations for the withdrawal of troops over a period of twenty months. The last troops left the Suez base on June 13, 1956.

Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company on July 26, 1956. A consensus among British and American experts held that nationalization was, in fact, legal. Cabinet minutes attest that “from the strictly legal point of view, [Nasser’s] action amounts to no more than a decision to buy out shareholders” (qtd. in Kyle, *Suez* 138). Nasser’s long, colloquial and unscripted speech at Alexandria announcing the takeover retold in brief the history of British occupation and the recent controversies surrounding the “Czechoslovakian” (in fact Soviet) arms deal, the withdrawal by the

United States, Britain and the World Bank of offers to finance the Aswan High Dam, and the question of Palestine. This history lesson was preceded by an assertion that "We shall all of us defend our nationalism and our Arabism and we shall all work so that the Arab homeland may extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf" (qtd. in Kyle, *Suez* 133). This territorial contiguity was blocked by Israel's disputed possession of the Negev Desert.

The possibility of an attack on Egypt existed from the very beginning of the crisis. For hawkish politicians and commentators, military action could be justified in imperial, economic and political terms. But after weeks and months of disingenuous negotiation, intimidation, provocation and military build-up in the eastern Mediterranean, British and French leaders were still searching for a *casus belli* to justify an attack. The statements of Eden and others make it clear that, in addition to the "internationalization" of the canal, the object of the attack would be Nasser's overthrow. As early as July 30, minutes of the Egypt Committee, which Tony Shaw describes as a "de facto war cabinet," record the government's priorities: "While our ultimate purpose was to place the canal under international control, our immediate purpose was to bring about the downfall of the Egyptian Government" (2, qtd. in Shaw 8). Eden indicated that he was prepared to do "anything in our power to hurt Egyptians without hurting ourselves" (qtd. in Kyle, "Britain" 108). Measures taken to provide an excuse for aggression included Operation Pile-Up, designed to show that the Egyptians were incapable of operating the canal at maximum efficiency, and a "Black Radio" campaign to stir up internal opposition to Nasser. On September 23,

Britain and France belatedly brought the Suez question to the UN Security Council in order to preempt Egyptian action in that venue and to establish a pretext for invasion were Egypt to interfere with the operation of the canal.

Ultimately the British and French governments resorted to what has become known as the Sèvres Collusion. Over three days beginning October 22, officials from the two European nations and Israel agreed that Israeli forces would attack the Sinai and that British and French forces would intervene and occupy the canal under the pretense of separating the combatants and keeping the canal open. The plan went into action on October 29 with the Israeli invasion of the Sinai, followed the next day by an Anglo-French ultimatum to Nasser. The ultimatum called for Egyptian and Israeli forces to withdraw to a point ten miles from the canal and threatened military intervention if that condition were not met. In reality, the ultimatum was directed only at the Egyptians: Israeli forces were never within ten miles of the canal. This circumstance, along with the facts that the canal was well within Egyptian territory and that the ultimatum allowed a continued Israeli occupation of the Sinai, led perceptive observers immediately to suspect collusion. As Michael Foot puts it in his biography of Aneurin Bevan, the ultimatum "was one of the most curious documents in all history" since "the victim of aggression was required to conduct a major retreat within its own territory whereas the aggressor, while at first encouraged to advance on all fronts, was invited to comply under threat that the failure to do so would mean the penalty of a further fresh attack on its enemy" (523). It was also true that, by virtue of its 1949 Tripartite Declaration with France and the United States, Britain

was bound to come to the defense of any victim of aggression in the Middle East. Fulfilling this commitment would have meant going to war against Israel.

The mission ended on November 7 with its political and military goals unfulfilled. Nasser remained in power, the canal was blocked by ships the Egyptians had scuttled, and only the northern section of the canal and Port Said were occupied. Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered Eden to call off the attack on October 30 and Britain was condemned by the UN General Assembly. Most damaging was the American government's effort to force a run on the pound. The next four weeks saw what Morgan calls a "shabby and humiliating retreat" (153). Many Britons believed, with good reason, that the mission failed because of the United States government's refusal to lend political or logistical support to the campaign. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles both believed that the British position reflected outdated imperial attitudes, which were an encumbrance in dealing with the Third World. There was much concern afterwards for rebuilding the "special relationship" between the United States and Britain, especially because of Britain's reliance on U.S. military might in the Cold War. At the height of the crisis, Dulles spoke of the events in Egypt as a "death knell for Great Britain and France" and told a British statesman in Washington that "We are facing the destruction of our trust" (qtd. in Kyle, *Suez* 356, 355).

Though patriotic sentiments were stirred in many people, opinion in Britain was divided from the start, especially regarding the appropriateness of military action. A Gallup Poll in late August showed that 47 percent of the public endorsed only

“economic and political actions” against Egypt while only 33 percent favored military intervention (Shaw 63). Shaw observes that “From July through December 1956, the press was consistently more aggressive and pro-war than was public opinion” (92). Opinion, partially because of the political opportunity the crisis presented Labour, broke very roughly along party lines. Still, a large number of conservatives rejected Eden’s policies.

The Labour Party organized a rally in Trafalgar Square on November 4, which Jean Rice attends in *The Entertainer*, to protest the use of force in Egypt,. The rally’s slogan was “Law not War.” *The Truth About Suez*, a Labour Party pamphlet published in December 1956 makes it clear that the “law” referenced in the slogan is international law, in particular the UN Charter. The pamphlet is preoccupied with the consequences of the invasion on Britain’s external relationships, particularly in the UN, and argues that events have “dismayed Britain’s friends and delighted Britain’s enemies” (1). The anonymous author(s) begin by quoting Eden’s “fine words” in support of the UN and showing them to have been contradicted by the Government’s actions. The pamphlet alleges collusion and condemns Eden’s policies. At the same time, the authors take great pains to answer the question “Was Labour soft to Nasser?” in the negative and to affirm the party’s support for Israel. The pamphlet’s attitude toward Nasser and Egyptian nationalism is characterized by Bevan’s comment in Parliament, which is recorded in the pamphlet, that “Nasser’s hands are not clean by any means [. . .]. We must not believe that because the Prime Minister is wrong Nasser is right” (9). Bevan feared an escalation in the conflict, but he also

feared a prolonged colonial crisis, having asked in a recent speech in the House of Commons whether the Government "really imagine that if they overrun Egypt, that is the end of the story? Are they going to bleed Britain to death in Egypt as France is bleeding herself to death in Algeria?" (qtd. in Foot 524).[9]

Albert Hourani argues that the nationalization of the canal was "in Egyptian eyes, a kind of declaration of independence" (408). But the Eden Government clearly underestimated the strength of anti-colonial sentiment in Egypt and the Third World. Shimon Shamir explains that

> It was hardly understood that if the search for dignity was the essential disposition of Nasser's nationalists, this inevitably led them to put some distance between themselves and the former masters of their countries. London was very slow in reading the state of mind of that generation, which—nourished by the residues of a long period of humiliating subjugation to Europe—was defiant and vindictive. (89)

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[9] The left's polemic against Eden and the new Prime Minister Macmillan is expressed more fully in *Guilty Men, 1957: Suez and Cyprus* (1958) by Michael Foot and Mervyn Jones. (The title echoes that of the 1940 tract *Guilty Men*, which indicted Tory politicians for their role in appeasing Hitler. Eden and other were very anxious to avoid any suggestion of appeasement during the Suez Crisis.) The authors analyze Suez as a purely imperialist enterprise: "Imperialism is a highly contagious disease; everything it touches becomes defiled. It breeds in those who govern arrogance and racial pride, sometimes the vilest cruelty; in the governed it breeds degradation and servility. Put plainly, it means the exploitation of the weak by the strong; and who but the apologists for Hitler will dare to justify that?" (50). Foot and Jones provide a detailed history of the canal and British relations with Egypt, cautioning that "Before Colonel Nasser is condemned it is necessary to take a few glances at the way he was nurtured," a sentiment rarely voiced even by Labour in the summer of 1956 (51). The authors argue pragmatically that "For Britain, the military burden of Empire has become intolerable, apart altogether from its immorality" (253). From this perspective, the retreat from empire is not seen in terms of decline but as a morally advanced and financially sound initiative.

The Foreign Office, Shamir shows, wished "to explain away eruptions of anti-British hostility throughout the Arab world as caused by Communist instigation or provoked by the West's association with Israel" (89). The government seemed unable to grasp the affective appeal nationalism held for colonized (or, in Egypt's case, recently independent) people, or to comprehend their resentment of foreign domination. The main tenets of Nasser's nationalism included, in addition to legal recognition on the international stage and national sovereignty, control over his nation's wealth and resources, and a freedom of action manifest in "policies of positive neutrality and non-alignment" (Dessouki 33). The increasing pressure of the Cold War, with its "spheres of influence" and "power vacuums," ensured that there would be little sympathy for such claims in Eden's cabinet.

Newspaper accounts of the Suez war play a crucial role in *The Entertainer*. In that play and in *Look Back in Anger*, Osborne takes pains to show the extent to which opinion is formed by the media, especially the newspapers. Because of the intense coverage of the crisis and the Government's efforts to influence public opinion in its favor, much attention has been paid to the role of the BBC and the other mass media in the affair. Shaw points out that "in the mid-1950s newspaper reading in Britain was at its zenith. In 1956 itself, the total readership of the main daily morning newspapers was 49 million out of a population of 51 million" (15). Many people, like Osborne's Jimmy Porter, read more than one. Richard Hoggart cites a study which found that, in 1953, one third of British adults read two or more Sunday papers and that more than a quarter read three or more (257). In addition, by 1956, BBC television was available

to 95 percent of the British population (Shaw 99). Eden, a "compulsive interferer," tried his best to manipulate public opinion and build a "war psychology" in support of the military action he was determined to order (Shaw 17, 43). But the government had to seem respectful of the United Nations and avoid alienating John Foster Dulles and the Americans. What support existed for war was achieved largely through the uniquely British lobby system, which allows Members of Parliament or government ministers to make unattributable statements to a group of elite journalists. Members of the Egypt Committee would make bellicose statements off the record and more politic pronouncements about the "importance of restoring international control of the Suez Canal" and the value of diplomacy in public (qtd. in Shaw 47).[10]

The Eden Government's prevarication about its military goals, which continued for several months, and the collusion at Sèvres are the two instances during the crisis in which the Government can fairly be said to have willfully misled the British people. A leader in the *Manchester Guardian*, the major paper most critical of the government's actions, argued that the government was "hypocritical, two-faced; it can look wholly peace-loving while actually it prepares for attack" (qtd. in Shaw 51). The coming to light of these deceptions did as much or more to damage the nation's prestige, especially among its own people, as did the military fiasco in Egypt.

[10] Perhaps the most extreme example of Eden's efforts to control the press was the complete account of the events at Sèvres that he gave to Iverach McDonald of the *Times*, a paper that Eden regarded as his and his Government's mouthpiece. According to Press Secretary William Clark, McDonald felt that the government's actions were "collusive and dishonest" and that the situation had been "grotesquely mishandled" (qtd. in Shaw 69). Nevertheless, McDonald kept faith and his newspaper, if not as hawkish as Eden hoped, refrained from overt criticism and helped to dispel early rumors of collusion that appeared in the American press (Shaw 70).

Observer editor David Astor inserted this widely quoted sentence into a November 4 leader by Dingle Foot: "We had not realized that our government was capable of such folly and such crookedness" (qtd. in Kyle 405). Foot asserted that Britain and France had acted "not as policemen but as gangsters" (qtd. in Kyle 405).

After Suez, decolonization progressed quickly and relatively smoothly. Lord Beloff writes what amounts to a political epitaph for Eden when he asserts that the Prime Minister's attitude "reflects the illusions of a passing age" (334). Eden was, Beloff continues, "the last British Prime Minister who believed in common with the majority of the citizens of the country that Britain was still a world power, only temporarily weakened by the impact of the war years" (334). Ill and shaken by events, Eden resigned on January 9, 1957, shortly after returning from a vacation in Jamaica. He was succeeded, somewhat unexpectedly, by Harold Macmillan. Eden wrote later that "We must review our world position and our domestic capacity more searchingly in the light of the Suez experience, which has not so much changed our fortunes as revealed realities" (qtd. in Louis 342-3).

Look Back in Anger

In Britain 1956 is remembered as an *annus mirabilis* for a number of reasons relating to both politics and culture. According to Asa Briggs there was "something traumatic as well as symbolic in the year 1956 itself, the year of John Osborne's play

Look Back in Anger, of rock and roll and Elvis Presley and Bill Haley and his Comets [the film *Blackboard Jungle* provoked riots], above all of Suez and Hungary" (311).[11] Despite the fact that *Look Back in Anger* premiered several months before British and French forces landed at Port Said, Hewison argues that, in retrospect, "Suez and *Look Back in Anger* seem part of the same event" (*In Anger* 127). Similarly, Christopher Innes claims, thinking primarily of the play's reception, that "More than any other single work in the century, [*Look Back in Anger*] was a sociological phenomenon" (*Modern* 98). The play ran for months, transferred in November to the Lyric Hammersmith, and was revived at the Royal Court in March 1957. In October 1956, the BBC broadcast a 25-minute excerpt, after which the play gained even more notoriety. By this time it is reasonable to hypothesize a relationship between the reception of the play and the feelings aroused by Suez. In theatre circles, in addition to Osborne's premiere, 1956 saw the first visit of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to Britain. The company performed *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Drums and Trumpets* at the Palace Theatre.

By examining these and other contexts for *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, I will argue that Osborne's plays both helped to bring about, and, in terms of reception, benefited from, an upheaval in cultural and political discourse the like of which Britain had not seen for some time. In later chapters I will argue that the

[11] The *Blackboard Jungle* riots, which would become, as Briggs indicates, "a staple historical memory from the fifties" may well have been "a fiction of the popular press" (Nehring 218). The references to Presley and Haley reflect what many have called the "Americanization" of British culture, a theme Osborne takes up in both the plays I discuss here.

two plays influenced the ways other playwrights represented the history of empire and decolonization, most particularly perhaps when they reacted against Osborne's attitudes and methods.

The discussion in the press in the early 1950s concerning the coming of a "new Elizabethan age" extended to theatrical circles. In 1953, for example, Richard Findlater called for a "new Elizabethan drama" (qtd. in Rebellato, *1956* 68). When it was formed in 1955, the English Stage Company (at the Royal Court) was praised as the harbinger of a new English "renaissance" by Kenneth Tynan and others. By 1960, due in large part to the success of the Royal Court, *Plays and Players* announced that "our drama has entered on its most vital period since the Elizabethan age" ("Eclipse" 4). Fostering this cultural awakening was a matter of policy for the Arts Council, whose funding was justified largely in terms of cultural prestige. Osborne's desire to create an explicitly national "vital theatre," I will argue, coincided with the priorities of the Arts Council. During the fifties, the activities of the Arts Council, which had grown out of the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art, became increasingly focused on professional theatre in London rather than amateur or provincial companies that could attract a more diverse audience. Rebellato, very critical of this shift in priorities, sees this development as "a move away from encouraging cultural practice and toward cultural reverie" and as the corollary to a "policy of prestige" (*1956* 46). Rebellato explains that "The Royal Court was everything the Arts Council had been waiting for, in its project of national-cultural

renewal" (*1956* 68). The Royal Court's subsidy grew £ 5,000 to nearly £89,000 in ten years.

The Arts Council's assumptions about the state of the national culture—and its need for public subsidy—had a distinct political valence. "The context of national theatre has been national decline," Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack explain. "The state which set up the Arts Council," they continue, "was a world empire emerging victorious from an immense war which had, in fact, broken the economical and strategic basis of its power" (314). The Arts Council's "policy of prestige" had at its root a deep anxiety about the nation's cultural well-being, and the fact that Osborne and other "New Wave" playwrights enjoyed so much early success is in part due to fundamental notions about culture and decline that they shared with the Arts Council. Rebellato concludes that "The new realism of 1956 was prompted and shaped by the desire to revitalize British culture, a culture now shouldering the burden of embodying national supremacy as one of its real bases, its Empire, rapidly declined" (*1956* 192).

According to Shepherd and Womack, "The most obvious dramatic form for national decline is nostalgia" (314). They cite both *The Entertainer* and *Look Back in Anger* as examples of a nostalgia which, "ironized, mutates into denunciation, and becomes the formula for what is almost the official genre of national decline: the bad-state-of-the-nation play" (316). (The authors identify Arden and D'Arcy's *The Island of the Mighty*, Hare's *Plenty* and Brenton's *The Churchill Play*, each of which I will discuss in later chapters, as later examples of this genre.) As a result of this prevailing

nostalgia in the culture at large, Shepherd and Womack argue, "our shared identity is definingly retrospective. This is nostalgia in a precise sense: the past appears as home, the present as exile" (315). Such nostalgia

> registers not only the communal memories but equally, in the same breath, the loss of community. The collective apprehends itself as lost. The gentleness of the rose-tinted retrospective can then turn, without discontinuity, into acrid, cynical rejection—looking back in anger. At that point, the cynicism corrodes even the idealized past, which appears as a cruel fraud. (Shepherd and Womack 316)

Thus, Osborne and others "more or less clearly place their lost England as an illusion" (Shepherd and Womack 316). In *Look Back in Anger* this lost illusion is most directly figured in Jimmy's speeches about Colonel Redfern and India; in *The Entertainer* it is felt in Billy Rice's Edwardian memories, and in what Billy himself represents. This lost England is not a classless one—Jimmy regrets what he sees as the breakdown of class politics in the new consensus—but one in which a strong national identity is able to transcend, or at least coexist with, regional and class differences. Shepherd and Womack's arguments about the prevailing nostalgia of the fifties also demonstrate the important point that nostalgia of this sort is not created by individual writers, or even primarily by writers and other commentators collectively. As Hewison suggests, what is more important than the accuracy of Osborne's version of history—particularly as a narrative of decline—is "the fact that people were prepared to accept Osborne's fiction as real" (*In Anger* 135).

According to Sinfield, "*Look Back in Anger* signaled a change in English theatre in 1956 in great part because it coincided with and helped to stimulate a new institutional arrangement: subsidized theatre" (*Literature* 27). This new system attracted a somewhat—but by no means entirely—different audience than the mainstream commercial theatre. Sinfield's "The Theatre and Its Audiences" provides a useful sketch of the early Royal Court audiences. They were in large part drawn from what Kenneth Tynan identified as the "non-U intelligentsia," which Jimmy Porter himself represents. A young, well-educated, and often left-leaning faction of the middle class was disproportionately represented. As Sinfield explains,

> They had every reason to welcome an attack on the ethos and credentials of the established middle class, which seemed to be sustaining extremes of wealth and poverty, stifling creativity by despising those without the right accent, and endangering the world by obscuring the reality of the international situation. ("Theatre" 178)

Many of these middle-class dissidents, however, were not as radical as this passage suggests. The Scottish playwright John McGrath, who worked at the Royal Court from 1958-1961, writes:

> No longer, we are told, was the theatre the haunt of black ties and evening gowns looking for simple philistine middle-class pleasures. This is not entirely true. The Royal Court has always had 'successful' productions, when the aforementioned black-tie brigade came in hordes, undisguised, and 'unsuccessful' productions when they stayed

> away, along with everyone else. But there was a leavening of turtle-necked, scowling young men and girls with coloured stockings who represented the 'new' audience—university-educated, perhaps in origin non-middle class, perhaps non-public school, perhaps even from Manchester. (*Good* 11-12)

In McGrath's view, these "unprepossessing youths," among whom he counts himself, were in fact "absorbing as many of the values of the middle class as possible, and contributing one or two new ones of their own to the re-formation of middle-class behaviour that was necessary if the middle class was to survive" (*Good* 12). McGrath uses this and other anecdotal evidence in an effort to debunk the myths of 1956, particularly the notion that the so-called "New Wave" had a coherent political agenda.

Osborne felt that the "new" drama had to define a new audience. In 1959 he wrote that "Theatre and cinema audiences are made in much the same way as users of deodorants and detergents. Just as people can become cleaner and less smelly, so the playgoing public can be made intelligent and imaginative" (7). In a similar vein, Lindsay Anderson argues that "The development of a new kind of theatre (what *Encore* calls 'vital theatre') is immediately bound up with the development of a new kind of audience" ("Vital" 45). But, while there may have been some shift in the demographic make-up of audiences, Osborne did little to change the way audiences watch. Formally, *Look Back in Anger* is extremely naturalistic, and it played in 1956 to an audience accustomed to naturalistic conventions. By the mid-fifties some British

playwrights had begun to draw on anti-naturalistic models, particularly Brecht, in order to create plays that were both radical in content and formally innovative. As I will show, Osborne was largely hostile to such innovation.

Look Back in Anger can be situated within a naturalistic tradition which Raymond Williams defines in *The Long Revolution* as liberal "social tragedy." Tragedy of this sort focuses on a character who, like Jimmy Porter, "is at odds with his society and its particular moral laws." This drama relies on "a particular kind of social support, with audiences drawn from groups committed to reform, or at least prepared to give it a hearing." Williams continues:

> We are still in this period [of liberal tragedy], as the history of English drama and theatre in the 1950s (Theatre Workshop, Royal Court) makes clear. It rests, substantially, on an important growth of middle class dissidence from the majority values of the society, and it has brought social tragedy, and also social satire, to their present strength. (266-67)

In a discussion of the expanding audiences for television and film, Williams cautions that "It is not merely the appearance of new audiences, but the creative discovery of new forms capable of expressing the meanings and values of substantial groups in these audiences, which determines dramatic history" (*Long* 271). This argument applies as well to the "new" theatre audience Osborne courted. But, despite the volatile language of his early plays, Osborne worked well within the limits of audience expectations. For an audience accustomed to a certain kind of social drama,

Osborne's plays may have confirmed that audience's views and, especially, feelings rather than changing them, as was his explicit intention.

So the new audience created by subsidized theatre was not initially exposed to programmatic political theatre. Beginning in 1956, Sinfield explains, plays at the Royal Court and at the Theatre Workshop were hailed as a flowering of radical theatre. "The common feature," according to Sinfield, "was disrespect for traditional middle-class attitudes, expressed directly through aggressive presentation of other lifestyles" ("Theatre" 178). He cites Wesker's *Roots* and Arden's *Live Like Pigs* as examples. But, Sinfield continues, "the new drama was not characterized by coherent political thought," and the Royal Court staged revivals of Noël Coward and others in order to cover costs. Thus, according to Sinfield, "The Royal Court company had no avowed political position, and it was not looking especially for left-wing plays" ("Theatre" 179). Eventually, plays by Wesker, Osborne (notably *The Entertainer*, with Laurence Olivier in the lead) and others transferred from the Royal Court to the West End, providing the Court further financial incentive to look for hits. For Sinfield this situation demonstrates British society's "great capacity to incorporate dissident movements. Each attempt to subvert the system is quickly granted, on certain conditions, a space, so becoming not just an aspect of the system but an evidence of its flexibility and beneficence" ("Theatre" 192).

Despite the nearly universal impression that Osborne's early plays are highly politically charged, the nuances of their politics are hard to assess. Though Kenneth Tynan's famous first review of *Look Back in Anger* commended the play's "drift

toward anarchy, the instinctive Leftishness, the automatic rejection of 'official' attitudes," this "instinctive Leftishness" is quite inchoate and inarticulate, if it exists at all (*View* 10).[12] Tynan also speaks of "instinctive Leftism" among London bohemians in his *Declaration* essay "Theatre and Living," suggesting that his assessment of Osborne's politics may have been as much a reaction to the milieu at the Royal Court as to the actual content of his plays (110). Tynan obscures the politics of *Look Back in Anger* when he writes that "One cannot imagine Jimmy Porter listening with a straight face to speeches about our inalienable right to flog Cypriot schoolboys. You could never mobilise him and his kind into a lynching mob, since the art he lives for, jazz, was invented by Negroes" (*View* 178). As Sinfield argues, "This credits the play with more than it says," especially regarding racial attitudes (*Literature* 261). Tynan's comments and others like them created expectations about Osborne's politics that, because they went unfulfilled, led many commentators to suspect, in Larry Langford's words, "a kind of betrayal" of the author's alleged leftist commitment. Benedict Nightingale, for example, claims that Osborne, with whom he developed a spiteful relationship, transformed from a "crusader (so it seemed) for a society at once more caring and more responsive to the oppressed individual" into a "puny blimp" ("Fatality" 64, 68).

Nightingale implies that Osborne's plays are undisciplined and dependent on emotion: "Bluntly, he lacks mind, meaning both the organizing and the appraising

[12] Tynan later rejected Osborne's politics. After *Luther*, Tynan wrote that Osborne "preached nothing but revolutionary individualism" (*View* 77).

intellect" ("Fatality" 66). The emotionalism of *Look Back in Anger* stakes a claim to authenticity and can lead to a confusing conflation of character and author. The play, according to Innes, "presents politics as passion," which "makes the impression of authenticity particularly important; and this is underpinned by the strongly autobiographical basis of the play" (*Modern* 99). When, for example, Innes claims that "Osborne's disillusion also reflects a sense of disappointment that the traditional values are not true: a desire for lost certainties, which leads to the nostalgic portrayal of Edwardian figures like Alison's father," he reads Jimmy as Osborne's mouthpiece and forgets that Redfern's character is established largely through Jimmy's speeches early in the play (*Modern* 102). Though Innes, Nightingale and others have, with good reason, outlined the autobiographical resonance of Jimmy's character, critics must avoid what Simon Trussler calls the "funk-hole" that is the "assumption that Osborne is to be identified with each of his heroes" (*Plays* 13). Nightingale avoids this pitfall by seeing Jimmy Porter as "a sympathetic case study, with sociopolitical reverberation unique in the theatre in 1956," rather than as "Osborne's social or political loudhailer" ("Fatality" 64). There is good evidence to support Nightingale's reading. Though Jimmy's vehemence is not matched on stage by any other character and no dialogic principle seems to be working in the play, Osborne makes it clear in his stage directions that Jimmy's attacks are "carefully rehearsed" and suggests that his may only be an "apparent honesty" (22, 10). Osborne's comments, also in the stage directions, that "To many [Jimmy] may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity. To others, he is simply a loudmouth. To be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-

committal" suggest both that Osborne is critical of his character, and that he wants to leave the play's meaning open to debate (10). Most significantly for my purposes, Nightingale's perspective enables subtle readings of *Look Back in Anger* and makes it easier to understand the play within the social and political environment in which it was originally produced.

The futility of Jimmy's anger and the lack of viable alternatives for political action in the play are best understood in relation to the state of leftist politics in Britain in the middle fifties and to Osborne's eccentric definition of socialism. The Labour Party was disunited after the 1951 split between Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan (Clarke 239). Because slightly more people voted for Labour than for the Conservatives in 1951, it is possible to overstate the disaffection within Labour's constituency. Nevertheless, Churchill was returned to office and, as Kenneth O. Morgan testifies, "The confident march of democratic socialism [. . .] had been halted, almost brutally" (104). It is in this context that we must read Osborne's credo from *Declaration*:

> I want to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards. In some countries this could be a dangerous approach, but there seems to be little danger of people feeling too much—at least not in England as I am writing. I am an artist—whether or not I am a good one is beside the point now. For the first time in my life I have the chance to get on with my job, and that is what I intend to do. I shall do it in the theatre and, possibly, in film. I shall not try to

> hand out my gospel version of the Labour Party's next manifesto to prop up any journalist who wants a bit of easy copy or to give some reviewer another smart clue for his weekly written-up crossword game. I shall simply fling down a few statements—you can take your pick. They will be what are often called 'sweeping statements', but I believe we are living at a time when a few 'sweeping statements' may be valuable. It is too late for caution (47).

This emphasis on feeling resonates with Jimmy's character, and the notion that Osborne is "flinging down" statements for consideration, applied to *Look Back in Anger*, further suggests that Jimmy's diatribes can't be taken as straightforward authorial assertions. Osborne's emphasis on emotion, especially anger, can be historicized by referring again to Morgan: "The moral passion of the thirties, the social idealism of the war years was evaporating in favour of a passive, uncomplaining reformism. There were many complaints of apathy, the result many believed of the ethic of consumer materialism" (137). Osborne's thoughts about the left were made clear when, in December 1957, he wondered, "How were all those people who threatened to emigrate after the General Election in 1945 to know that their anxieties and privations were to last for no more than a few austere years, and that, before long, they would be happily incanting 'You've never had it so good'; that the lean and sinew of the forties would become the fat and spineless fifties" (*Damn You* 191). He refers here to Macmillan's "never had it so good" speech, which

occurred in 1957. The catch-phrase gained particular currency in the 1959 election.[13] Osborne uses the phrase not only to indict the complacency that affluence seemed to breed, but also to lament an apparent return to prewar conditions of class privilege.

Osborne writes that, in the fifties, "People like me thought the world was going to change, but instead it became more drear and austere. It was a dull time, joyless and timid. This was followed by the collapse of the empire and the Suez crisis. We became very disillusioned, and out of this feeling came our writing" (qtd. in Langford 249). This comment testifies to the enthusiasm for socialism of the early postwar years, but it does not explain what exactly about Suez and the progress of decolonization was so disheartening. Alongside the discussion of timidity and weakness, the reference to Suez suggests a criticism of the Government's handling of the crisis. It is very possible that Osborne is chiding Eden and his ministers for not taking swifter, stronger action against Nasser. Though the first part of the quotation seems to welcome change, it is clear that the "the world" (which was in fact changing drastically) here signifies only Britain and that change in the form of colonial independence is unwelcome.

Osborne defines socialism as "an experimental idea, not a dogma; an attitude to truth and liberty, the way people should live and treat each other" ("They Call It Cricket" 65). But, despite Osborne's concern for the way people "treat each other," he seems entirely uninterested in an ethical critique of imperialism. His ideas on

[13] Macmillan actually said, "Most of our people have never had it so good" (qtd. in Marwick, *British* 109-110).

socialism and politics in general focus almost exclusively on the domestic, even when events like Suez intrude. Significantly, Osborne does not equate socialism with the policies of the Labour Party, arguing in the 1957 piece "Fighting Talk" that "Socialism is about people, and the Labour Party has forgotten it" (*Damn You* 190). Osborne's nonpartisan, non-theoretical definition of socialism appeals to common sense. This appeal is evident when he recalls his grandfather's definition of a socialist as a "man who doesn't believe in raising his hat." Osborne declares that this "definition," which reduces leftist politics to simple class animus, "served me for a long time" ("They Call It Cricket" 65). Osborne's statements on politics in the late fifties signal a disenchantment with party politics, though he does admit the possibility of socialism "meaning" something. He is also less implacably hostile to Labour than he is to the Tories, whom he identifies as "people who create little or nothing themselves, [are] incapable of imagination or honesty, [and] wield enormous power without responsibility to anyone but themselves" (*Damn You* 188).[14]

In his very useful recent account of Osborne's politics, "The Unsocial Socialism of John Osborne," Larry Langford, who is generally sympathetic to Osborne, argues that "If it seems inaccurate to label [Osborne] a socialist writer, he nonetheless showed a lasting concern for the possibility of socialism in Britain" and

[14] In his obituary for Osborne, David Hare describes him as "a lifelong satirist of prigs and puritans, whether of the Right or of the Left" ("Lifelong" 28). This characterization is supported in Osborne's 1962 *Daily Herald* piece "The Socialist Once Angry" in which he justifies not voting for Labour as follows: "The Tories are always detestable [. . .] But the Labour Party is similarly despicable in its mean-witted shambling to keep up the same kind of moral stride with its puny bribes and come-ons to old age pensioners and unhoused young families" (*Damn You* 195).

that “his drama powerfully expresses anger not only at what Britain has become, but more specifically, at what it never became. For Osborne, that lost potentiality is tied to socialism as much as to anything else” (238, 237). Langford examines Osborne’s socialism as an inheritance from a distinctly British tradition of “ethical socialism” represented by Wilde, Shaw, H.G. Wells and Orwell. (Orwell, as I will show, exerts a powerful influence on Osborne’s portrait of Jimmy Porter). Langford explains that

> the individualist tradition in British socialism has always shown a fear of regimentation by the power of the state, even a socialist one. This fear denotes a particular characteristic of British socialist thought from it beginnings to the present day: the desire to balance the political need for collectivization with a commitment to the moral priority of the individual. (243)

This idea provides another strategy for historicizing Osborne’s valorization of his artistic independence and his (and Jimmy’s) non-allegiance to the Labour Party. Osborne defines socialism against dogma, and insinuates that the Labour Party peddles dogma. This quality of Osborne’s thought is also interesting in light of the debates about English empiricism initiated in the early sixties by Perry Anderson, E.P. Thompson and others among the New Left. Anderson and Tom Nairn argued that the empiricist tradition explained the failure of working-class activism in Britain, while Thompson argued that empiricism was an intellectual habit that could serve a wide spectrum of political ideologies. In his important 1964 essay “The Origins of the Present Crisis,” Anderson explained the continued dominance of a single “historical bloc” (the ruling class) in England, writing that “The two great chemical elements of

[the] blanketing English fog are 'traditionalism' and 'empiricism': in it, visibility—of any social or historical reality—is always zero" ("Origins" 31). In a 1968 essay, Anderson observes that this empiricism "shunned theory even in its rejection of theory" ("Components" 64). Among the "great oppositions" Anthony Easthope identifies as defining English empiricist discourse are: "concrete/abstract; practice/theory; common sense/dogma; home/foreign and virility/effeminacy" (90). The "English" terms come first. When he deploys his grandfather's quaint definition of socialism against dogma, Osborne is clearly working within a schema very similar to Easthope's. Whether or not Osborne believed that his non-theoretical, non-dogmatic socialism was distinctly English, the association was certainly available to him. The connections between Englishness and empiricism also help explain Osborne's hostility to Brecht, who, of course, had a notable theoretical bent.

The difficulty of assessing Osborne's politics is compounded by his later repudiation of causes that he supported in the fifties and early sixties, especially the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The CND, primarily a middle-class and intellectual movement, counted among its supporters such figures as Bertrand Russell, Michael Foot, A.J.P. Taylor, J.B. Priestley, Joan Littlewood, trade union leader Frank Cousins and a number of prominent members of the clergy. The movement's ideas about Britain's place in the postwar world were mixed; while they seem to have accepted a realistic assessment of the nation as a second-rank military and political power, they "genuinely believed in Britain's moral authority, and felt that a moral gesture like the unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons by Britain

would find an immediate response in other countries" (Morgan 181). In *Almost a Gentleman*, the second volume of his autobiography, Osborne writes of his experience with CND and other forms of activism:

> From 1956 I had abused my intelligence and, more seriously, my instinct with frolicking priggism. After 1961, came the abstemious hangover. By 1968 I was quite reformed and vilified by the priglets as "Tory Squire". "Mellowed Blimp", they exclaimed wittily. But, for the meantime, I played the fool prettily and consistently. (149)

Osborne also implies that he was coerced into appearing at CND marches and pickets by his wife at the time, Mary Ure (who played Alison in the original production of *Look Back in Anger*): "Mary determined that we should be seen together in the vanguard. [. . .] Refusal to be alongside would have been interpreted as marital disloyalty, a politicized act of adultery" (149). Osborne represents his repudiation of his early activism as a return to sense, but in fact he abandoned a potentially radical critique of Britain's role in the Cold War and the futile efforts on the part of various governments to bolster the nation's status as a world power by acquiring nuclear weapons. In "They Call it Cricket," however, Osborne seems sincere enough, railing in particular against "H-Bomb Harold" Macmillan. The British bomb effort, he writes, is "the most debased, criminal swindle in British history" (47). This sentiment is echoed in *Look Back in Anger* when Jimmy reads from a newspaper the Bishop of Bromley's "moving appeal to all Christians to do what they can to assist in the manufacture of the H-Bomb" (13).

In his early plays Osborne interrogates some of the more visible symbols of Englishness, including the monarchy. In *The Entertainer*, for example, Jean Rice wonders after the funeral of her brother Mick, who has been killed at Suez, "Why do people like us sit here, and just lap it all up, why do boys die, [. . .] what are we hoping to get out of it, what's it all in aid of—is it really just for the sake of a gloved hand waving at you from a golden coach?" (78). Though I will show that Osborne is ambivalent about Jean, her question regarding the cost of maintaining the nation's prestige evokes the mood of many young, left-leaning people in the aftermath of Suez. In the *Declaration* essay, written at approximately the same time as *The Entertainer* in the early months of 1957, Osborne claims that his "objection to the Royalty symbol is that it is dead; it is the gold filling in the mouthful of decay," a comment which, according to his autobiography, caused considerable controversy ("They Call It Cricket" 58). Significantly, the problem with the monarchy and the tired symbols of national greatness for Osborne is that they have been emptied of significance, not that they represent injustice, intolerance and social inequity, as a genuinely socialist critique would likely argue. Thus, Osborne maintains, "When the mobs rush forward in the Mall they are taking part in the last circus of a civilization that has lost faith in itself, and sold itself for a splendid triviality, for the 'beauty of the ceremonial' and the 'essential spirituality of the rite'" ("They Call It Cricket" 58). In this light, Osborne's iconoclasm is merely a gesture of despair, and the values at its root appear to be fundamentally conservative.

Osborne's attitudes toward foreign intellectual and artistic movements reveal an extreme cultural nationalism. Jimmy shares this hostility when he rants, "I've just read three whole columns on the English Novel. Half of it's in French" (10-11). Elsewhere Osborne recalls that

> For as long as I could remember the literary and academic classes seemed to have been tyrannized by the French. The 'posh papers' every Sunday blubbered with self-abasement in the face of the bombast of the French language and its absurd posture as the torch bearer of Logic, which apparently was something to which no one in these islands have access. (*Almost* 11).

Similar attitudes are evident in Osborne's anxiety in his autobiography and in the essays in *Damn You, England* to disclaim Brecht's influence. In September 1956, he writes that "it seems a dangerous idea to jump on some kind of Brechtian bulldozer and rip the place up, tempting as the idea may have been coming out of the Palace Theatre," where the Berliner Ensemble had played that summer (*Damn You* 5). "The Brechtian bulldozer," he argues, "may not be our answer. We need to find a machine of our own." (*Damn You* 6). In another essay, Osborne responds to an assertion in the *Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre* that he was influenced by Brecht in writing *The Entertainer* by claiming that at the time he was writing the play "Brecht was little more than a name" to him. He suggests an alternative, and wholesomely English, influence when he adds that he "had been going to the music hall before the compiler was born" (*Damn You* 18). In a fictitious dialogue published in the *Sunday Times*

Magazine entitled "The British Playwright's Mafia," the "President," called John Osborne, claims that "They all said I was 'influenced' by Brecht when I wrote *The Entertainer*. Naturally, I'd never even seen a Brecht play when I wrote it—nor, indeed, heard of him. I was 'influenced' by the music hall, which I'd been to almost every week since I was four years old" (*Damn You* 145). In his autobiography, Osborne records that he had not finished the second act of *The Entertainer* in February 1957 (*Almost* 36). But Osborne had rehearsed and performed in *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in the summer and fall of 1956, which casts doubt on his claim to ignorance of Brecht's drama. Elsewhere, Osborne writes that, after the Berliner Ensemble's visit, "None of us had any idea how to begin to tackle [Brecht]. [. . .] Language, custom, national temperament, training, or lack of it, even physical appearance seemed to doom the effort" (*Damn You* 28).[15] This cultural chauvinism is also evident in his grudging acceptance of George Devine's "dogged" or "umbilical Francophilia" (*Almost* 49, 11). In his obituary for Devine, Osborne writes that the Royal Court was "very English in its approach—empirical is a respectable word for it—unsystematic, non-manifesto" (*Damn You* 82). As Sinfield points out, literary

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[15] Osborne's hesitation to employ radical theatrical techniques, especially Brecht's, is perhaps a consequence of his rejection of theory and party in favor of sincere if, as in Jimmy's case, thwarted emotion. Naturalism seemed to Osborne the only appropriate vehicle for the angst-ridden emotion he valorizes. It is possible that Osborne's reservations about Brecht are also related to his ambivalence about socialism and his discomfort with foreign varieties of Marxism. Such suspicion of Brecht was a widespread feature of British theatre culture in the fifties. This distrust, according to Drew Milne, encouraged a willful ignorance of the political implications of Brecht's dramaturgy. Milne explains that "Cold war ideology deliberately sought to sever the relation between theory and practice in Brecht's political theatre, resulting in an English tradition of anti-Brechtian productions of Brecht's plays" (180).

intellectuals "were sensitive in their own way to Englishness, and saw modernism as a foreign fashion that had had its day" (*Literature* 185). This modernism may have been represented for Osborne by the Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco, Pirandello and Sartre plays Devine brought to the Royal Court.

In a 1960 *Observer* article Osborne comments that "The condition of being English is one of the last hideouts of guerrilla Romanticism" (*Damn You* 11).[16] "Guerrilla Romanticism" suggests that Englishness is threatened and that, for Osborne, it is best expressed as a cult of feeling. In a hearing before the House of Lords in November 1966, Osborne testified that "the English theatre is something of extraordinary importance and it is something that the English genius has contributed to the world that is quite unique" and that drama is a "unique English art that we do excel at more than any other race in the world" (*Damn You* 166). Here a romantic notion of artistic inspiration resonates with Osborne's exaltation of "the English genius." These comments cast additional light on Osborne's rejection of political "dogma" and Brecht's drama, each of which is less compatible with notions of artistic individualism and genius than the "native" English traditions Osborne extols.

Look Back in Anger takes place in a one-room flat in "a large Midland town" (9). Five characters appear on stage: Jimmy Porter, his friend Cliff Lewis, Jimmy's wife Alison, her friend Helena Charles and Alison's father, Colonel Redfern. A large

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[16] The connections between romanticism and nationalism are complex and intimate. Nairn comments that "The politico-cultural necessities of nationalism [. . .] entail an intimate link between nationalist politics and *romanticism*" (104; emphasis original). Nineteenth-century Irish nationalism provides good examples of this relationship.

number of other characters are spoken about, some in considerable detail. When the play opens, Jimmy, Alison and Cliff are sharing the flat. Jimmy dominates the other two with his fiery personality, hurtful personal attacks, and long-winded invectives on a number of subjects including women, empire, the press, homosexuals and, most frequently, the class system. In the first act, Jimmy and Cliff engage in a wrestling match which ends with Jimmy deliberately pushing Cliff into the ironing board at which Alison is working, causing her to burn her arm. While he is helping dress her wound, Alison tells Cliff that she is pregnant. The act ends with the arrival of Helena, an actress who has prospects for a job in town. Helena ends up staying for several weeks and experiences the abuse Jimmy inflicts. She calls Redfern to come and take Alison home, which he does. At the end of act two, Helena confronts Jimmy and tells him that Alison is pregnant. Unexpectedly, Helena kisses Jimmy just before the curtain. The beginning of act three, which takes place several months later, virtually replays the opening moments of the play, with Helena at the ironing board instead of Alison. Cliff moves out of the flat. Alison, who has miscarried, returns unannounced and Helena, apparently out of guilt, leaves. Alison stays and the play ends with her and Jimmy playing the "squirrels and bears" game they played in the past, which signals a reconciliation.

Jimmy's education is important in understanding his attitudes. He has been at what he calls a "white-tile" university, as opposed to the older provincial "red-brick" universities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds. The "white-tile" universities were probably the five provincial colleges (later universities) created by the

University of London after the passage of the 1944 Butler Act (Clarke 287). The Butler Act was intended by its author, the Conservative Home secretary R. A. "Rab" Butler, to democratize higher education and to create multilateral schooling at lower levels. Scholarships became more widely available and the proportion of the population in the relevant age group attending universities doubled from two percent to four percent in 1962 (Clarke 287).[17] This Act also helped to bring to public consciousness the plight of the "scholarship boy," upon which Richard Hoggart dwells at length in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). Hoggart explains that for these young men a "sense of loss is increased precisely because they are emotionally uprooted from their class, often under the stimulus of a stronger critical intelligence or imagination" (225).[18] Though Jimmy still has a certain admiration for the working class, his views imply a condescension toward their tastes. As Hoggart explains, scholarship boys "tend to be unhappily superior" about the "self-indulgences which satisfy many in their class" (225). The self-indulgences to which Hoggart refers

[17] But education, even after the Butler Act, remained restricted and class-bound and the proportion of young people in higher education remained quite low by international standards (Clarke 288). "Meanwhile," as Morgan explains, "the public schools and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, with their massive closed scholarships, huge private endowments, and overwhelmingly public-school intake [. . .] remained sacrosanct against change" (19). Morgan adds that "The preoccupation with upward mobility through education was a story that society, or parts of it, wanted to tell itself, not a record of experience" (234). An act intended to erase differences in educational opportunity led, in Jimmy's case, to alienation and disappointment without threatening class hierarchies. Jimmy's weakened connections to his class are visible in his relationship with Ma Tanner, his friend Hugh's mother, and in his emotional reaction to her death.

[18] In "Notes Towards a Definition of Culture," T. S. Eliot writes in response to the Butler Act and other education initiatives that "to be educated above the level of those whose social habits and tastes one has inherited, may cause a division within a man which interferes with happiness" (176). This is part of his argument that universal access to quality education might not be a good thing. Eliot and Hoggart's views are similar on this point.

include low-brow reading matter and other cultural materials consumed by the working classes. Though Jimmy does not critique working-class culture in particular, he is critical of the popular media, especially the newspapers, in much the same way as Hoggart's scholarship boy (and Hoggart himself).

At the beginning of *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy and Cliff are surrounded by "a jungle of newspapers and weeklies" (9). Jimmy is something of a critic of the press, beginning with his distinction between the "posh" papers and the "dirty ones" (75). He continues reading despite wondering aloud, "why do I do this every Sunday?" (10). Jimmy rails against the conservatism of the "posh" papers and, by implication, their power in forming public opinion. But he is equally critical of the sensationalism and triviality of the others; the stories he parodies in the latter are typified by an article about "grotesque and evil practices going on in the Midlands" (75). Jimmy's attitude toward the "posh papers" is potentially subversive, as his comments about the Bishop of Bromley and the H-Bomb suggest, and his criticisms challenge a prevailing conservative ideology and a trivialized, sensationalistic popular culture. Significantly, there seems to be no newspaper that is compatible with Jimmy's attitudes on politics and culture. The absent voice in the press, one can infer, is serious, generally progressive, and nonpartisan.

Early in the play, Jimmy reveals an anxiety about an Englishness that is explicitly opposed to other national identities within the United Kingdom. This concern is most obvious in Jimmy's attitudes toward Cliff's Welshness. First, Jimmy calls Cliff a "Welsh ruffian" (11). A few minutes later, in a moment of tension

resulting from Cliff's emotionally intimate relationship with Alison, Cliff is a "sexy little Welshman" (31). These comments are a way for Jimmy to disclaim a potentially unifying—but also potentially leveling, in the negative sense ascribed to the word by conservative commentators—British identity and to insist on a "racial" or ethnic determinism that is conspicuously absent from civic Britishness. While Jimmy's thinking on the subject is not revealed in any great detail, he likely shares some of T. S. Eliot's assumptions about Englishness. Eliot writes:

> The Englishman [. . .] does not ordinarily think of England as a "region" in the way that a Scottish or Welsh national can think of Scotland or Wales [. . .]. Thus the Englishman may identify his own interests with a tendency to obliterate local and racial distinctions, which is as harmful to his own culture as to those of his neighbors. (126)[19]

Eliot also explains that "It is important that a man should feel himself to be, not merely a citizen of a particular nation, but a citizen of a particular part of his country, with local loyalties" (125). Admittedly, the discussion of national difference within

[19] For Eliot and, it seems, for Osborne, a broad British identity is unavailable or undesirable: "It would be no gain whatever for English culture, for the Welsh, Scots and Irish to become indistinguishable from Englishmen—what would happen, of course, is that we should all become indistinguishable featureless "Britons," at a lower level of culture than any of the separate regions" (129). Whatever the validity of such a claim, the willingness with which Eliot imagined the highly unlikely effacement of regional difference illustrates a severe anxiety. For Eliot the loss of regional identity would be disastrous because, "a national culture, if it is to flourish, should be a constellation of cultures, the constituents of which, benefiting each other, benefit the whole" (132). The organic relation between these local cultures resembles that between the classes in Eliot's conception of culture, which I discus later.

Britain in *Look Back and Anger* is minimal, but is important to notice the almost always unstated assumption in the play that the nation whose well-being is in question is England and that British culture is almost entirely identified with specifically English figures such as Shakespeare and Ralph Vaughan Williams, both of whom are important to Jimmy. The fact that Jimmy's rather idiosyncratic nationalism is explicitly English could indicate the fracturing of a British identity bolstered in the past by imperialism and war. (Alternatively, it could demonstrate that British identity never fully supplanted local identities). It is perhaps intuitive that the rise of English nationalism would coincide with an increased awareness of national decline. Nairn argues that such decline is "irrevocable." "So," he continues, "is the emergence of a new English national awareness" (80). As Nairn points out, imperialism and early economic development "enabled the historically 'composite' nature of such states [as Great Britain, France and Spain] to be buried politically for a time" (178).

The Bishop of Bromley "denies the difference of class distinctions" (13). This comment brings to mind what Neil Nehring calls a "myth of an impending classlessness," which is essential in understanding Osborne's early plays in their original context. This myth, Nehring explains,

> effectively delimited public discourse by fixing attention on the most conspicuous indications of significant change—higher employment and wages (relative to the Depression, though), and the accelerated consumer culture, symbolized by the teenager. The ideology of

> affluence thereby suppressed the economic facts that remained unchanged, at base the persisting relative inequalities in income. (185)

Conservative commentators feared that this "classlessness" signaled a "leveling down," while leftists worried that their political base would be eroded. Jimmy does not accept the Bishop's declaration, and he is dismayed at the widespread acceptance of the rhetoric of classlessness and attacks the apathy it promotes. Part of what he believes has been lost is the political certainty based on class difference that made possible the sort of political actions Jimmy valorizes in his discussion of his father later in the play. The playwrights I discuss in subsequent chapters will go to greater lengths than Osborne to challenge this myth, which will become increasingly untenable after the mid-sixties.

Jimmy suggests that the Bishop of Bromley may be Alison's father's *nom de plume*. By suggesting that Redfern's voice is interchangeable with the Bishop's, Jimmy identifies the church and the imperialist as parts of the "establishment," a term which, as Hewison shows, gained great currency in discussions of society starting in 1955 (*Culture* 75). The establishment, or "the Great and the Good," as Hewison most often refers to them, were a class "Born to service in the Church and State" (*Culture* 76). In his stage directions Osborne writes that Colonel Redfern was "brought up to command respect" and therefore is "often slightly withdrawn and uneasy now that he finds himself in a world where his authority has lately become less and less unquestionable" (63). In the world as Jimmy understands it, the establishment remains in control, but with a diminished sense of direction and purpose, which in

turn leads, or should lead, to a public questioning of their role. This loss of direction is the same loss that the nation has apparently suffered, a fact which suggests that Redfern's class even now represents, for Jimmy, the nation as a whole. Though Redfern is the figure of an authority that excludes people like him, Jimmy sympathizes with the Colonel, whom he views almost as a museum piece from a bygone era in which Britain was strong.

The decline Jimmy feels so acutely is manifest in two not entirely compatible ways: as a decline from empire, whose privilege Jimmy and his class never enjoyed to any great extent, and as the loss of socialist promise. These attitudes conflict and Jimmy often appears troubled by the resulting tension, as if he were being pulled in different directions by a class-based democratic sentiment and by the powerful attraction of a nationalism rooted in the imperial past. In different ways each of these attitudes causes Jimmy to dissent from the consensus maintained by postwar Labour and Conservative governments. His sentiments reveal early signs of the breakdown of this consensus, which represents for Jimmy a complacency and loss of political will that leave him without obvious political outlets. Ultimately, the most important loss for Jimmy may be the political certitude that rigid social hierarchy provided. And, of course, he needs a stable establishment to make his dissent meaningful.

Jimmy's first rambling speech about Colonel Redfern shows that he can be both a dissident and a nationalist at once. He begins by commenting on the music on the radio:

> Oh, yes. There's a Vaughan Williams. Well, that's something, anyway. Something strong, something simple, something English. I suppose people like me aren't supposed to be very patriotic. Somebody said—what was it—we get our cooking from Paris (that's a laugh), our politics from Moscow, and our morals from Port Said. Something like that, anyway. Who was it? (*Pause.*) Well, you wouldn't know anyway. I hate to admit it, but I think I can understand how her Daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms. Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a romantic picture. Phoney too, of course. It must have rained sometimes. Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not. If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's. I must be getting sentimental. But I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American Age—unless you're an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans. That's a thought isn't it? (17)

There are a number of important points here. Jimmy's enthusiasm for Vaughan Williams's music is telling. The authenticity that Jimmy sees in Vaughan Williams's work lies, presumably, in the composer's fusion of the high-cultural idiom of classical

music and English folk music traditions. While Edward Elgar's music became a totem of empire, its roots were cosmopolitan and European. Vaughan Williams's nationalist project sought to purge English classical music of continental, especially German, influence. Osborne's choice reflects a congruence between his and his character's feelings about national culture and foreign influence. There is also an oblique comment on the BBC's programming. It is very likely that Jimmy would have heard Vaughan Williams on the Third Programme, which was introduced in 1946. Hewison notes that the Third Programme "followed [T. S.] Eliot's cultural model precisely," referring to Eliot's vision of a "lost, ideal organic society" (*Culture* 54). In "Notes Towards a Definition of Culture," Eliot writes that one of the necessary societal conditions for "culture" is an "organic (not merely planned, but growing) structure, such as will foster the hereditary transmission of culture within a culture: and this requires the persistence of social classes" (87-8).[20] The organicism

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[20] Eliot was likewise one of the great prophets of cultural decline. He wrote in 1948 that

> we can distinguish between higher and lower cultures; we can distinguish between advance and retrogression. We can assert with some confidence that our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago; and that the evidences of this decline are visible in every department of human activity. I see no reason why the decline of culture should not proceed much further, and why we may not even anticipate a period, of some duration, of which it is possible to say that it will have no culture. (91)

Also interesting in this context is his opinion on subsidy for the arts. Eliot notes that culture has become "recognised both as an instrument of policy and as something socially desirable which it is the business of the State to promote" (158). But, he explains, Britons must not "slip into the assumption that culture can be planned. Culture can never be wholly conscious—there is always more to it than we are conscious of; and it cannot be planned because it is also the unconscious background of all our planning" (170).

Eliot comes up elsewhere in the play. In one of their impromptu comedy routines, Jimmy and Cliff take up the subject of "T.S. Eliot and Pam." Jimmy then introduces "a little recitation entitled 'She said she was called little Gidding, but she was more like a gelding iron!" The episode suggests that the kind of institutional literary criticism (and poetry) that Eliot represents is destructive and emasculating—especially as opposed to the kind of cultural vitality Osborne hopes himself to create.

Eliot fetishizes is the product of a relationship between classes: “The higher level of culture must be though of both as valuable in itself and as enriching the lower levels: thus the movement of culture would proceed in a kind of cycle, each class nourishing the others” (110). For Eliot this trickle-down theory of culture required that he energetically support the Third Programme. Eliot and Vaughan Williams were impassioned defenders of the Third Programme, the former becoming vice-president of the Third Programme Defence Society. When the Third’s hours were cut back in 1957, both men, along with Laurence Olivier, joined the new Sound Broadcasting Society, another group dedicated to supporting the Third. In fact, however, the Third Programme attracted only about one percent of the BBC’s listeners (Hewison, *Culture* 55). Thus Jimmy is aligned with a minority who passionately defended high-brow tastes.

Jimmy’s discussion of Moscow, Paris and Port Said is also significant to the play’s discourse on Englishness. The lines allude to Orwell’s discussion of “Europeanised” English intellectuals in his essay “England, Your England”: “They get their cookery from Paris and their opinions from Moscow” (275). “The really important fact about so many of the English intelligentsia,” Orwell asserts, “is their severance from the common culture of their country.” “England,” he claims, “is the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their own nationality” (275).

The reduction of Eliot to a music hall act, in Nehring’s words, “associates cultural decline with the loss of virility,” a troubling move throughout Osborne’s work (361). The scene is also, of course, an affront to Eliot, whose view of the music hall would likely have been condescending.

Orwell concludes this discussion by arguing that "Patriotism and intelligence will have to come together again" and with the hope that the war will be an occasion for such a union (the essay was written in 1941) (276). Interestingly, Orwell's "they" becomes Jimmy's "we," as he identifies himself as a member of an intellectual milieu in which, because of his class origins, he is an outsider. Nevertheless, Jimmy's intellectualism and his appreciation of such things as Vaughan Williams's music is a sign of his assimilation of middle-class values. Moscow, of course, represents communism of a particularly dogmatic, Stalinist type, to which Jimmy could be expected to object. But Jimmy is part of a milieu that would likely have some sympathy for communism and certainly with the socialism of the Labour Party. The drift of the passage, however, suggests that Jimmy's main objection to Soviet communism would be that it is not part of a "native" English political tradition. Paris represents a cultural influence which, in light of his remarks about the English novel, Jimmy can hardly be expected to welcome.

The reference to Egypt, which is not borrowed from Orwell, is uncanny in light of the events of 1956. With the mention of "morals," the comment indicates a typically Orientalist conception of Eastern culture and carries a suggestion of elicit sexuality. As Edward Said explains, "the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex. [. . .] In time 'Oriental sex' was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture" (190). Several of the writers Said mentions in this discussion are gay, including Gide—whom Jimmy also invokes—and Maugham; Forster could be mentioned as well. This hint of what

would be viewed in the culture at large as unconventional or immoral sexuality is heightened by knowledge of the naval presence in Port Said and the temptations commonly associated with port cities. This brief reference to Egypt reveals no clear comment on empire, but could imply a criticism of the imperial mission. More likely, however, the object of scrutiny is the effect of the colonial encounter on the imperialist, which was something of an obsession in imperialist discourse.

Jimmy's comments about the "Edwardian Brigade" are most interesting for what they say about ideology and the way that Jimmy's anger and even his self-conception are linked to an idea of national decline. Obviously, the "bright ideas" that Jimmy attributes to Redfern and the Edwardians have suffered fatigue. He knows that the images for which he is nostalgic are "phoney," but they are nonetheless powerful. Jimmy is clearly conflicted as he voices a patriotic sentiment that he feels is not entirely appropriate to his economic or social standing. Thus, he "hate[s] to admit" his admiration for Redfern and his "brigade." The speech quoted above is paired thematically with the following, which comes much later in the play. Colonel Redfern speaks to Alison:

> It was March, 1914, when I left England, and, apart from leaves every ten years or so, I didn't see much of my own country until we all came back in '47. Oh, I knew things had changed, of course. People told you all the time the way it was going—going to the dogs as the Blimps are supposed to say. But it seemed very unreal to me, out there. The England I remembered was the one I left in 1914, and I was happy to

> go on remembering it that way. Beside, I had the Maharajah's army to command—that was my world, and I loved it, all of it. At the time it looked like going on forever. When I think of it now, it seems like a dream. If only it could have gone on forever. Those long, cool evenings up in the hills, everything purple and golden. Your mother and I were so happy then. It seemed as though we had everything we could ever want. I think the last day the sun shone was when that dirty little train steamed out of that crowded, suffocating Indian station, and the battalion band playing for all it was worth. I knew in my heart it was all over then. Everything. (68)

The similarity between the Colonel's first-hand and Jimmy's second-hand memories, especially the sunlight and the rain, shows that they express an ideological meaning more than they represent the real experience of either man. This resemblance is especially clear in the falseness of the memories: Jimmy knows that "it must have rained sometimes" during the Edwardian period and, of course, the sun did not stop shining when Redfern left India. Alison responds to her father's speech with the telling comment, "You're hurt because everything is changed, Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same" (68). This statement recalls the main argument in Orwell's essay. Come what may, he assures his reader, "England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same" (279). Alison's comment suggests that Jimmy's belief in continuity in change—specifically

in unchanging social discrimination—fuels his anger. But this remark makes him seem more radical than he is; he is just as concerned about decline and what has apparently been lost as Redfern. The Colonel's wish that "it could have gone on forever" both suggests a blindness to the historical conditions of decolonization and epitomizes the mindset that made many imperialists unprepared for the coming of independence in India and elsewhere. That Redfern left in 1914 suggests that Osborne dates the start of Britain's "Decline" to World War I. As Richard Findlater wrote in 1952, the years before 1914 had by the fifties become "the land of heart's desire for the nostalgic English" (qtd. in Malick 10). The passage also implies that decline was a domestic phenomenon that only reached the colonies as rumor ("People told you all the time the way it was going"). This, in turn, suggests that the loss of the empire occurred not due to nationalist pressure or economic exigencies, but as a result of a failure of the will to rule. As Rebellato points out, this viewpoint is characteristically conservative. He explains that, "because the right obstinately saw Britain as nation with a historical destiny to rule the waves, reasons for the ultimate failure [of the empire] were not located outside, but within" (138).

Jimmy's comment about the "American age" reveals an anxiety regarding Britain's status as a great power that would come to the forefront during the Suez crisis. Many Britons were disturbed by Britain's reliance on American military might and Britain's membership in NATO, which violated a long held maxim against forming continental alliances. Suez demonstrated that Britain could not act on its own against US wishes, and many British people felt betrayed by their ally. But Jimmy's

comment has more to do with the United States's cultural domination than its political and military ascendancy.[21] Increasingly during the fifties and sixties, America is seen not only as the premier world power, but also as the source of a cultural vitality Britain has lost. But the United States was at the same time seen as a purveyor of a debased popular culture that was sapping Britain's cultural vigor. Jimmy's comment here sounds like Leavis's 1962 warning that "The vision of our immanent tomorrow is today's America: the energy, the triumphant technology, the productivity, the high standard of living and the life-impoverishment" (qtd. in Hewison, *Culture* 131). But the jazz musicians Jimmy admires seem to have some of the vitality in the present that Vaughan Williams and, in *The Entertainer*, the Edwardian music hall, represent in the English past (though Williams lived until 1958). Jimmy asserts that "Anyone who doesn't like real jazz, [sic] hasn't any feeling either for music or for people" (48). This comment implies a rejection of what he would likely consider the debased (read both commercial and popular) American music, rock and roll, which Osborne criticizes in the stage directions to *The Entertainer* as "the latest, the loudest [and] the worst" popular music (12). Osborne's

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[21] As Neil Nehring points out, the "Americanization thesis" goes back at least to Leavis's 1930 essay "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture." Leavis foreshadows many of Eliot's arguments in "Notes Toward a Definition of Culture," especially in his insistence that "In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends" and in his frequent lamentations about "the desperate plight of culture to-day" (13). For Leavis, Americanization is not "something of which the United States are guilty" but the product of "the machine," particularly the mechanical reproduction of cultural artifacts, that "has brought about change in habit and the circumstances of life at a rate for which we have no parallel" (16). Leavis cites Henry Ford as a particular exponent of these changes. A similar argument about American popular culture is central to Osborne's project in *The Entertainer*.

attitude toward mass-produced popular forms is similar to that expressed by Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*. A famous chapter entitled “The Juke-Box Boys” epitomizes Hoggart’s position: the “Juke-Box Boys” drop “copper after copper into the mechanical record-player,” he writes, “to hear the same dozen or so pop songs, almost all of which are American” (189). This, Hoggart explains, is “a particularly thin and pallid form of dissipation, a sort of spiritual dry-rot” that transforms young people into “the directionless and tamed helots of a machine-minding class” (190).

Sinfield writes that, in the fifties, “Jazz afford[ed] a social and cultural allegiance, a bench-mark against which other life-styles are examined and found wanting” (*Literature* 159). For “Movement” writers like Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis, jazz was a deliberate provocation of establishment culture. The music serves much the same function for Jimmy, marking a kind of intellectualism and a type of dissidence soon to be associated not only with the Movement, but also, in a more extreme form, with the so-called Angry Young Men. Sinfield also explains that, unlike rock, jazz was oddly compatible with elitist notions about art: “jazz could be appreciated as an ‘art’” in a culture in which “Art was linked to exclusiveness.” “Jazz fans,” Sinfield continues, “were continually defining jazz, identifying purer forms of it, providing it with a canon, a tradition and elite performers” (*Literature* 160). Jimmy demonstrates this tendency when he voices his preference for “real” Jazz. Still, jazz was “quite unlike the elite culture of the leisure class” and, according to Sinfield, facilitated “a Leavisite move” in which “exclusive earnest commitment is preferred to the unthinking ‘good taste’ of a leisure class that takes its culture for granted.” Thus,

"The intellectual jazz fan disdained the prevailing notion of the artistic while demanding its redeployment on new terms" (*Literature* 160).

There is also, of course, a racial subtext in Jimmy's preference for jazz. Enthusiasm for jazz in Britain in the 1950s was largely motivated by a desire for an emotional authenticity that seemed to have disappeared from British culture. But interest in jazz was not necessarily accompanied by progressive attitudes about race. Sinfield points out the paradox many enthusiasts failed to recognize: "The excitement of Black music and the circumstances in which it was generated were co-opted by white people to address a range of feeling that lay beyond their own culture. The irony, as with jazz, was that the music appropriated as unfettered self-expression derived from some of the least free people in the world" (*Literature* 152). African-American music, as we will see, also plays a prominent role in *The Entertainer*, where Osborne recognizes this irony, but in an oddly ambiguous way. In both plays, this music is evoked in order to critique a certain insular kind of Englishness, while Osborne's characters' attitudes toward the people who make the music is ambivalent or indifferent.

In Jimmy's caricature of Alison's brother Nigel, Osborne catalogs his grievances against the establishment, again drawing on Orwell's themes in "England, Your England." Jimmy describes Nigel as "The straight-backed chinless wonder from Sandhurst" (20). He continues the attack:

> [Nigel's] knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it—a medal inscribed "For

> Vaguery in the Field”. But it wouldn’t do for him to be troubled by any stabs of conscience, however vague. [. . .] Besides, he’s a patriot and an Englishman, and he doesn’t like the idea that he may have been selling out his countrymen all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he can do—seek refuge in his own stupidity. The only way to keep things as much like they always have been as possible, is too make any alternative too much for your poor, tiny brain to grasp. (20)

The passage is a paraphrase of the following from Orwell’s essay:

> But the British ruling class obviously could not admit to themselves that their usefulness was at an end. [. . .] After all, they belonged to a class with a certain tradition, they had been to public schools where the duty of dying for your country, if necessary, is laid down as the first and the greatest of the Commandments. They had to feel themselves true patriots, even while they plundered their countrymen. Clearly there was only one escape for them—into stupidity. They could keep society in its existing shape only by being unable to grasp that any improvement was possible. Difficult though this was, they achieved it, largely by fixing their eyes on the past and refusing to notice the changes that were going on around them. (269-70)

Jimmy has none of the grudging respect for the son that he has for the father because the son is living out of his time. Class privilege is a betrayal, a blind adherence to tradition and a denial of the realities of the postwar world. Orwell would have been

attractive to Jimmy (and to Osborne) because of his idiosyncratic views on socialism and his effort to reconcile socialist commitment and patriotism. “England, Your England” was originally published in 1941 in *The Lion and The Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, and the attempt to reconcile socialism and Englishness is the context for Orwell’s exhortation that “Patriotism and intelligence will have to come together again” (276). Orwell expresses the hope that “This war, unless we are defeated, will wipe out most of the existing class privileges” (279). Jimmy Porter, from his later perspective, would likely find this expectation naive.

As much as Jimmy is disgusted by the state of the nation, his self-conception remains grounded in his nationality, and he cannot turn his back on England. When his friend Hugh abandons England, Jimmy remains and one of his strongest personal relationships is severed. Alison relates that Hugh

> made up his mind that he must go abroad—to China or some God-forsaken place. He said England was finished for us anyway. All the old gang was back—Dame Alison’s Mob as he used to call it. The only real hope was to get out and try somewhere else. [. . .] Jimmy accused Hugh of giving up, and he thought it was wrong of him to go off forever, and leave his mother all on her own. [. . .] A few months later we came up here, and Hugh went off to find the New Millennium on his own. (46)

The return to power of the establishment (“Dame Alison’s Mob”) is exactly what Orwell hoped would not happen. The “old gang,” as the historian Angus Calder

explains, was a phrase of some currency during and after the war, which was used to indicate the prewar ruling class (137). At the time of the war the "old gang" appeared to have failed and their world to have collapsed. Hugh's actions suggest that this judgment was premature. The "New Millennium" recalls the "New Jerusalem" that Labour promised in 1945, and Alison's phrase suggests a mild fanaticism on Hugh's part. Jimmy's refusal to accompany Hugh brings to mind yet another passage from "England, Your England": "And above all it is your civilisation, it is you. However much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from it for any length of time" (254). This comment sheds light on Jimmy's personality, which is determined by, and remains dependent on, ideological formations he rejects. This dependence explains why Jimmy's anger and his self-definition are bound so closely to his perception of national decline.

In a sustained attack on Alison's friend Helena, Jimmy proclaims that "Reason and Progress, the old firm, is selling out! Everyone get out while the going's good. Those old forgotten shares you had in the old tradition, the old beliefs are going up—up and up and up" (55-56). With Britain's strength waning, Jimmy implies, the value of the symbols of that strength will appreciate. The sentiment expressed here would seem incongruent with Jimmy's earlier sympathy for the Third Programme's—and, by implication, Eliot's—cultural project, unless one imagines a clear distinction between the substance and the symbols of the culture. Jimmy adds that "Helena and her kind" are "a romantic lot. They spend their time mostly looking forward to the past." This phrase may shed light on the title of the play, and could, with only a slight

alteration of meaning, be applied to Jimmy himself. He continues: "She's moved long ago into a lovely little cottage of the soul, cut right off from the ugly problems of the twentieth century altogether" (56). For Jimmy, reform, based on "reason and progress," has been thwarted. People like Helena and Nigel are, to use the word Jimmy hurls at Alison early in the play, pusillanimous in their abdication of the intellect. The use of economic terms continues in Jimmy's attack on Helena, as he speaks of "dividends," "capital gain" and "stocks," which suggests that this diatribe is also a critique of materialism and market capitalism: "The Big Crash is coming," he warns sardonically, "you can't escape it, so get in on the ground floor" (56).

These attacks prepare the ground for Jimmy's famous speech about the lack of "good, brave causes."

> people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. (84-5)

This speech can be significantly misinterpreted by confusing Jimmy's opinions with Osborne's. To read it as an authorial pronouncement, is to diminish the political import of the play is diminished. If, on the other hand, Jimmy is seen as the "case study" Nightingale takes him to be, the audience can ask why he is disaffected and

despairing. Jimmy's sentiment here indicates a disenchantment with leftist politics, a self-regarding desire for martyrdom, and the fear of nuclear holocaust, which would be exacerbated by thinly veiled Soviet threats during the Suez crisis.[22] In his *Declaration* essay, Osborne suggests that his critics have been "incapable of recognizing the texture of ordinary despair, the way it expresses itself in rhetoric and gestures that may perhaps look shabby, but are seldom simple. It is too simple to say that Jimmy Porter himself believed that there were no good, brave causes left, any more than Archie [Rice, the main character of *The Entertainer*] didn't feel a thing" (51). This claim reveals a distance between author and character and supports Langford's argument that Jimmy is a frustrated idealist rather than a mere malcontent.

While Jimmy here refers to World War II and the fight against fascism in the forties, that war is never mentioned explicitly elsewhere in the play. The "cause" that he does speak of is the Spanish Civil War, in which his father fought. "For twelve months," Jimmy recounts, "I watched my father dying—when I was ten years old. He'd come back from the war in Spain, you see. And certain god-fearing gentlemen there had made such a mess of him, he didn't have long left to live" (57). Though Jimmy is not aligned with the kind of leftist politics that his father apparently engaged in, the story of his father's death provides a genealogy for Jimmy's own political beliefs, however inarticulate and undeveloped they might be. Jimmy recalls that his

[22] Threats were broadcast on Moscow radio and Soviet Prime Minister Bulganin wrote a letter to Eden asking, "In what situation would Britain find herself if she were attacked by stronger states, possessing all types of modern destructive weapons. Indeed such countries, instead of sending to the shores of Britain their naval or air forces, could use other means, for instance rocket equipment" (qtd. in Campbell 246).

father would "talk to [him] for hours, pouring out what was left of his life to one lonely, bewildered little boy" and that the experience taught him "at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless" (58). The commitment that induced his father to fight in Spain was class-based and international, in contrast to Alison's father's patriotic service in World War I and India. Thus, Jimmy's lament that there are no good causes left has a political valence, suggesting that his repressed and wasted energy could in the past have been channeled into leftist political commitment, but that the left has lost direction. This interpretation is supported by Lindsay Anderson's comment from 1956 that

> the young people who respond so unmistakably to *Look Back in Anger* are responding to its outspoken attacks on certain venerable sacred cows, also to its bitter impatience with the moral vacuum in which they feel public life, and cultural life is today being conducted. The class resentment is only part of it. If there 'aren't any good, brave causes left' (or if that is the feeling in the air) the fault is not so much that of the Right, the Tory element in politics and art, as of the Left, the progressives, the Liberals in the best sense of that long-suffering word. The manner in which the British political Left has muffed its chance to capture the imagination and allegiance is too obvious to need dwelling on. (qtd. in Hewison, *In Anger* 174-5)

Anderson sees Jimmy as a reflection of young people's "disgust with contemporary hypocrisies, and at the same time a reflection of their own sense of confusion and lack

of focus" (qtd. in Hewison, *In Anger* 146).[23] A few moments before making his pronouncement about the lack of "brave" causes, Jimmy describes class-based politics as "that poor old charger of mine, all tricked out and caparisoned in discredited passions and ideals! The old grey mare that actually once led the charge against the old order—well, she certainly ain't what she used to be" (52). The heroic image of a mounted soldier fighting for a just cause contrasts markedly with that of Jimmy Porter, sweets vendor.

Jimmy's nostalgia for a past age in which causes and loyalties were clear is registered when Helena tells Alison that Jimmy "thinks he's still in the middle of the French Revolution. And that's where he ought to be, of course. He doesn't know where he is, or where he's going" (90). Helena implies that Jimmy is the victim of both cruel historical circumstances and the cowardice and small-mindedness of the British people and their leaders. Later, in conversation with her father, Alison comments that "perhaps [Jimmy] should have been another Shelley, and can't understand now why I'm not another Mary, and you're not William Godwin" (67). There is indeed something Shelleyan in Jimmy's mixture of anger, anarchy and idealism, but Alison's comment is perhaps most significant in that it links him with one of the canonical figures of English literature, but one who was in many ways an exile. The comparison—which resonates with Osborne's comment that Englishness is one of the "last hideouts of guerrilla Romanticism"—also links Jimmy to a distinctly

[23] Anderson also recalls a companion responding to Jimmy's "no brave causes" speech by exclaiming "What about Suez?" (qtd. in Hewison, *In Anger* 146).

English tradition of dissent that was, paradoxically, rooted in the French Revolution. What is most interesting here, though, is the way in which the individualism of the Romantics rests uneasily beside a commitment to egalitarian principles in Jimmy's personality, though the biographies of Shelley and Byron suggest these impulses could be reconciled.

In an effort to explain why Jimmy Porter complains that there are no "brave causes" when, in retrospect, "one can see a whole range of brave causes which could furnish material for any angry young man," Dan Rebellato quotes this passage from E.P. Thompson's introduction to *Out of Apathy*, a volume he edited in 1960: "what is peculiar to the apathetic decade is that people have, increasingly, looked to private solutions to public evils. Private ambitions have replaced social aspirations [. . .] people tend to feel—in the prevailing apathy—that they are impotent to effect any change" (*1956* 13; qtd. in Rebellato, *1956* 18). A correlative dramatic tendency can be seen in Osborne's focus in his early plays on individual characters reacting ineffectually against an indifferent or hostile society. This emphasis, as I discuss in more detail later, is crucially related to the dominant themes and the ideological bases of naturalist theatre. The causes Rebellato imagines might have appealed to Jimmy include, in addition to institutional racism and homophobia at home, "Britain's entry into the nuclear arms race in 1952 and the madness of Mutually Assured Destruction; the freezing climate of the Cold War, spurred on by McCarthyism in America; Britain's crude and desperate attempts to maintain its dwindling Empire, with battles of word and blood in Kenya, Nyasaland, and Suez" (Rebellato, "Causes").

Jimmy's comments about homosexuals is particularly interesting in light of his claim that there are no good causes to fight for. The issue of homosexuality was controversial and highly visible in the early- and mid-fifties, as Sinfield, Rebellato and others have shown. Homosexuality was discussed in the press as a raging epidemic or even, in a McCarthyite move, as a threat to national security and the delicate equilibrium of the Cold War. Osborne's relatively open discussion of gayness in *Look Back in Anger* was bold. At the same time, however, the theatrical "revolution" he instigated was directed against an older kind of drama represented largely by the work of two gay authors, Noël Coward and Terrence Rattigan. And this revolution was largely distinguished, as Rebellato has shown, by an opposition between virility and effeminacy, the "West End Vice" (*1956* 190-91, 160). Referring to Alison's gay friend Webster, Jimmy comments that

> I almost envy old Gide and the Greek Chorus boys. Oh, I'm not saying that it mustn't be hell for them a lot of the time. But, at least, they do seem to have a cause—not a particularly good one, it's true. But plenty of them do seem to have a revolutionary fire about them, which is more than you can say for the rest of us. Like Webster, for instance. He doesn't like me—they hardly ever do. (35)

Jimmy is clearly anxious about homosexuality, maintaining a grudging respect for gays and their struggles while emphasizing his own incompatibility with them. Osborne also includes a number of references to Jimmy's precocious and promiscuous heterosexuality in order to demonstrate that he has not been effeminized

by his education. In addition, through Gide, Jimmy links homosexuality with a continental literary milieu, for which he has made clear his distaste. It is significant that Webster is Alison's friend because, as Sinfield demonstrates, homosexuality was associated with the leisured upper classes and intellectuals (*Literature* 66-74). Though we can infer that Webster is a dissident from his class, he and Alison nevertheless represent a "feminine" principle that comes into conflict with Jimmy's masculinist working-class sensibility. Jimmy even describes Webster as a "sort of female Emily Bronte" (19). Still, Jimmy imagines that Webster has become distanced from his own class origins because of his sexuality, which has imbued him with the "revolutionary fire" Jimmy admires. Webster, according to Jimmy, speaks a "Different dialect but [the] same language" as himself (18). "When [Webster] comes here," he explains, "I begin to feel exhilarated. He doesn't like me, but he gives me something, which is more than I get from most people" (18). Webster has "not only guts but sensitivity as well," a combination that accords well with Jimmy's values and with his conception of himself (19).

Because 6,644 people were arrested in Britain in 1956 for homosexual offenses, Osborne's audience could have seen Jimmy's respect for Webster, ambivalent though it is, as a statement against government policy (Rebellato, *1956* 168). The panic about homosexuality in the fifties was typified by the "Evil Men" series in the *Sunday Pictorial* that ran in the summer of 1952 and the infamous 1957 Wolfenden Report's conclusion that only 1 in 30,000 homosexual offences led to arrests (Sinfield, *Literature* 77; Rebellato, *1956* 158). The Wolfenden Report

concluded that the apparent increase in homosexual activity (based on the increased number of arrests) was caused by the "loosening of former moral standards" and "general social instability," rather than by the witch-hunt itself (qtd. in Rebellato, *1956* 159).

In 1959, Osborne reacted to an expose about homosexuals in the theatre. Osborne replied, as Sinfield paraphrases his comments, that "Sexual preference is a private matter and homosexuals have been good for art, philosophy and literature [and] the idea of driving them from the theatre is 'detestable'" (*Out* 260). In addition, Osborne and Anthony Creighton wrote the play *Personal Enemy* (1955) about a McCarthyite smear campaign against homosexuals.[24] And it seems very likely that Osborne and Creighton had a lengthy affair (Sinfield, *Out* 260). Still, despite the homoeroticism of Jimmy's relationships with Cliff and Hugh, and Webster's strong off-stage presence, *Look Back in Anger* has become a "heterosexual classic" (Ravenhill 1). This is in part because Osborne himself was deeply conflicted about homosexuality and, as Mark Ravenhill writes, "very keen to prove that he was heterosexual" (10).

But despite being sympathetic to the plight of homosexuals in 1950s Britain, Osborne associated heterosexuality, in the cultural sphere at least, with a "healthy" Englishness. Sinfield, Ravenhill and Rebellato all identify ways in which *Look Back in Anger* and its reception were reactions not only against the class origins and

[24] The play is unpublished.

preoccupations of playwrights like Coward and Rattigan, but also against their sexuality. This reaction was based on stereotypes; the distinction lay between "the honest simplicity of the heterosexual man and the role-playing and artificiality of the gay man" (Ravenhill 10). Whatever Osborne's sexuality, he certainly did not identify himself as gay. Sinfield explains that Osborne likely believed that homosexuals are invariably effeminate and saw "himself as a straight man who consented to be tended upon by Creighton," citing Osborne's comment in *A Better Class of Person*, the first volume of his autobiography, that Creighton was "one of those luckless homosexuals [. . .] who only fall in love with heterosexuals" (*Out* 261). The fact that Webster is kept off stage, along with Jimmy's conflicted affinity for him, supports Sinfield's point that "Osborne's gay characters are always both distanced from and close to himself" (*Out* 261). Though he is not explicit about the connection between sexuality and nationality, Osborne's sexual anxiety is manifest alongside his concern for national identity, and his effort to revitalize the national culture is cast in an aggressively masculinist and heterosexist idiom. Attitudes toward sexuality are, of course, integral to ideologies of Englishness; the oppositions Easthope identifies as defining traditional notions of Englishness include "virility/effeminacy" and "masculine/feminine" (90). In addition, the colonial relationship abroad very often cast the European colonizer in a masculine role and the colonized subject in a feminine one.

Also relevant to understanding Osborne's ideas about Englishness are the additional characters and dialogue he wrote for Tony Richardson's film of *Look Back*

in Anger. Osborne co-wrote the screenplay with Nigel Kneale, a former BBC associate of Richardson's, apparently because Osborne was not yet confident writing for the screen (Tibbetts 66). Osborne, though, is credited with "additional dialogue" and Richardson confirms in his memoir *Long Distance Runner* that Osborne wrote the dialogue for the new characters (98). The most significant new character, for my discussion, is Johnny Kapoor, a South Asian character who runs a stall in the market near Jimmy's. Also added is a scene in a movie theatre where Jimmy and Helena watch a film set in Raj-era India, which the film scholar John Tibbetts describes as "a Korda-esque patriotic saga of English colonialism in India" (68). Jimmy's character is more nuanced in the film and Osborne seems to have tried to complicate the nostalgia for empire in the original play, a point demonstrated when Jimmy makes a mocking bugle call during a battle scene in the cinema. Most significantly, Jimmy defends Kapoor against the racism of the police and the vendors in the marketplace, which suggests possibilities for political action and *ad hoc* political alliances that are absent from the play.

The period between 1956 and the film's appearance in 1960 saw a continuance of the substantial non-white Commonwealth immigration that had begun in 1948 and, in 1958, outbreaks of violence against Blacks in Nottingham and Notting Hill, London.[25] These riots, directed not against South Asians like Kapoor but against

[25] See Gilroy's excellent *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* for an account of the contexts and consequences of the race riots in 1958 and after. Edward Pilkington's *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots* is also informative.

West Indians, coincided with the beginnings of the postwar revival of fascism that would bring the National Front to prominence in the seventies. After August and September 1958, racial issues gained a political importance (and volatility) that they still have today.

The connections between jazz and race—never explicit in the stage play—are unmistakable from the very beginning of the film. The opening scene shows a jazz club, in which blacks and whites mingle both in the audience and in the band. Jimmy joins in on trumpet. As Edward Pilkington points out, in jazz clubs "black people could mingle freely with white women and men, on equal terms and without fear of trouble" (62). The club is a space clearly dissociated from dominant British culture. The film breaks the claustrophobic confinement of the play, by including scenes such as this and characters like Kapoor.

Later, Jimmy defends Kapoor against the policeman Hirst and false, racially motivated accusations made by a white woman in the market. When Kapoor is kicked out of the market, Jimmy insists that he and Kapoor must fight "the whole fascist gang." But to Jimmy's question, "Don't you want to see justice done?" Kapoor replies that he is "most interested in justice. But I'm not in the habit of expecting it to apply to me." Jimmy finds out that it was his own friends' complaints which led to Kapoor's expulsion. When challenged, his friends respond that Jimmy is lucky: Kapoor "might have sold sweets" like Jimmy, demonstrating that economic insecurity is often at the root of prejudice and that, in such situations, financial concerns can be used to justify intolerance. Finally, Jimmy asks Kapoor, "What made you come to

this bloody country anyway?" Kapoor responds, "I came because in India I was an outcast, an Untouchable." Though an Untouchable would probably have had little opportunity to come to Britain, by including this detail, Osborne exposes the limits of the British "tolerance" hailed by Orwell and others.[26] Jimmy is the privileged inheritor of a liberal tradition, which adds to his discontent when those values are discredited. Tibbetts concludes that "Jimmy is outraged both at the failure of the other stall owners to defend Kapoor against what is obviously an act of racist bigotry [on the part of the police] and at Kapoor's mistake in expecting enlightened treatment in England in the first place" (67). The fact that Kapoor expected to be welcomed in Britain shows the hollowness of an imperial ideology that assured Commonwealth citizens about British tolerance. It also reveals the deception involved in governmental policies that encouraged immigration to Britain during the postwar labor shortage.

The film *Look Back in Anger* witnesses an early moment in the popular construction of immigration as a problem and as a challenge to conceptions of Englishness and Britishness. Immigrants came to be seen as a threat to the social and economic health of the nation. Beginning with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, increasingly severe restrictions were placed on immigration and citizenship. Paul

[26] Kathleen Paul records that Asians first came to Britain in significant numbers in 1956 and that they were judged to be, in the words of a Government "working party," of "very low social standing and suitable only for menial work" (148). In fact, the Indian and Pakistani Governments "actively discouraged the emigration of unskilled and illiterate persons to the United Kingdom," fearing that their presence might compromise the position of students and well-to-do Asians already in the country" (152).

Gilroy explains in detail how, especially after the 1958 riots, non-white immigrants, particularly West Indians, came to be viewed as a problem:

> The idea that blacks comprise a problem, or more accurately a series of problems, is today expressed at the core of racist reasoning. It is closely related to a second idea which is equally pernicious, just as popular and again integral to racist meanings. This defines blacks as forever victims, objects rather than subjects, beings that feel yet lack the ability to think, and remain incapable of considered behavior in an active mode (11).

The last sentence here perfectly describes Kapoor. He is the stereotypical victim, meek and practically mute. He is a passive object of Jimmy's sympathy, who can feel the barbs of racism but is defenseless on his own. While this characterization may, following Gilroy's argument, impugn Osborne as a racist, the portrait of Kapoor is sympathetic and his inclusion in the film is a bold effort to address issues that had only recently come to prominence in social and political discussions in Britain.

Though *Look Back in Anger* may now appear less revolutionary than it did in 1956, and Osborne lacks the clearly defined political agenda of the playwrights I will discuss in the following chapters, the play is an essential starting point for my work. The play brought with it a new attitude toward the contemporary and helped to bring to the theatre a revitalized discourse on empire and national identity.[27] *The*

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[27] The success of the 1999 National Theatre production of *Look Back in Anger* might seem to undermine my assertions about the contemporaneity of the play. But, while the play may or may not be

Entertainer is even more emphatically contemporary, and in it the themes with which I am concerned are often more conspicuous and more fully developed.

The Entertainer

The Entertainer, which opened at the Royal Court on April 10, 1957 (playing concurrently with a revival of *Look Back in Anger*), is a bad-state-of-the-nation play in which the Rice family's fortunes stand for those of the nation. The play is set during the Suez crisis in the summer and fall of 1956. Archie Rice is a tawdry, impecunious and philandering music hall performer. His father, Billy, is a retired music hall artist of great renown. Billy, Archie, Archie's second wife Phoebe and his son Frank live in rented rooms in a large house in a seaside resort town.[28] Jean,

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a museum piece, the interest it generated was largely historical and to a great degree dependent on its near-legendary status.

[28] The sociological import of Osborne's choice of setting is illuminated by John K. Walton's *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914.* According to Walton, "the Victorian and Edwardian seaside resort was important not only as repository for investment, consumer spending and social emulation, but also as a crucible of conflict between classes and lifestyles, as wealthy and status-conscious visitors and residents competed with plebeian locals and roistering excursionists for access to and enjoyment of amenities. The seaside brought mutually incompatible modes of recreation and enjoyment into close proximity in ways which seldom happened inland, and gave an added edge to the perennial Victorian debate about the proper relationship between leisure, class, religion and mortality" (3). Many aspects of this conflict were well attested in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938). A few years after *The Entertainer*, the seaside resorts would again be in the public eye due to the "mods and rockers" disturbances that climaxed in the summer of 1964. During the Edwardian period that is so important to Osborne, however, the seaside acquired a different meaning: "By the turn of the century," Walton argues, "the seaside was coming to be perceived as an influence for social stability" (Walton 223). In addition, Walton claims, "Seaside holidays [. . .] may have fostered myths of shared prosperity and upward social mobility in ways which marginally strengthened the established order" (225). In *The Entertainer* the seaside does seem to represent a retreat from political and class conflict, especially for

Archie's daughter, is an art teacher at a Youth Club in London and Mick, his son, is in the Army and has been sent to Egypt. Jean is involved in a turbulent relationship with Graham. Archie's brother Bill, a successful barrister, appears briefly. The play alternates between realistic scenes in the family home and Archie's music hall numbers, in which he is on stage alone performing for an imaginary audience.

At the beginning of the play, Jean returns home after an argument with Graham that, it turns out, was precipitated by her opposition to Suez. Archie then receives a telegram notifying the family that Mick has been captured in Egypt. Soon the family receives word that Mick will be coming home and a party is arranged. But the family's hopes are smashed when a policeman arrives to tell Archie that Mick has been killed. After the funeral, Frank decides to emigrate to Canada and Archie coaxes Billy out of retirement in a desperate effort to make money and avoid a jail sentence for tax evasion and writing bad checks. Archie, who left the mother of his children for Phoebe, is now scheming to leave Phoebe for a 20-year-old beauty contestant who thinks Archie can help her become an actress. Billy, however, finds out about Archie's plan and tells the young woman's parents that Archie is married. The parents had agreed to finance Archie's new show and it is because of the financial repercussions of his action that Billy agrees to come out of retirement. Billy dies soon

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Jean. The seaside culture as represented by the music hall represents a stable kind of Englishness which takes precedence over class identifications. Perhaps because of the particular susceptibility of the leisure industry to economic vicissitudes, the seaside is often seen as a barometer for the state of the nation. In Osborne it is also an index of the state of the culture. The level of consumption suggested in the play indicates affluence; the nature of the objects and entertainments consumed indicates, for Osborne, a falling away from the culture's former vigor.

after returning to the music hall and the penultimate scene takes place at his funeral.[29] The play ends with Archie singing his trademark piece "Why Should I Care?"

Twenty-two British soldiers were killed in the attack on Egypt and during the brief occupation of Port Said.[30] Among the dead was 2nd Lieutenant Anthony G. Moorhouse, a 20 year-old from Leeds. Moorhouse was kidnapped on December 10, over a month after the cease-fire, in "Arab Town" in Port Said after driving a Jeep alone into a crowd of Egyptians. The abduction and subsequent searches raised tensions during the British troops' last few days on Egyptian soil. Moorhouse's fate was, according to the *Times*, the British commander General Hugh Stockwell's "chief anxiety," prompting him to launch a door-to-door search and order the interrogation of over 1,000 Egyptians ("British Withdraw"). Moorhouse's story was particularly stirring because Stockwell reported that a Norwegian UN officer had seen the lieutenant alive. The *Times* on December 24 proclaimed, "Kidnapped Officer to Be Freed" and stated that Stockwell was sure that Moorhouse would "come back safe and sound" ("United Nations"). By that date, however, Moorhouse had been dead for several days. During the search of Port Said, the soldier was placed in a metal locker or trunk while his captors fled. Before they returned, Moorhouse died of asphyxiation. Colonel Cyril Banks, a Member of Parliament who resigned from the

[29] Colin MacInnes recalls that as early as the thirties "a vogue for 'revivals' of the old [music hall] artists had [. . .] begun, already strongly tinged with sentimental nostalgia." "Revivals of this nature continued sporadically into the 1940s and even the early 1950s—by which time almost all the classic stars had vanished" (11).

[30] Though the British for public relations reasons wanted to keep Egyptian causalities to a minimum, somewhere between 750 and 1,500 were killed.

Conservative Party after Suez and a friend of the Moorhouse family, went to Egypt a few days later to bring the body home. Banks spoke to Nasser on December 24 and testified that the Egyptian leader was grieved by Moorhouse's fate and that Moorhouse had not been tortured. Lieutenant Moorhouse's death was the model for Mick Rice's fate in *The Entertainer*.[31]

In February 1957, as he was finishing *The Entertainer*, Osborne wrote in a piece entitled "Fighting Talk" that "The Labour Party's miserable failure to provide a valuable, workable belief, an attitude to live by, was shown up completely by the Suez affair" (*Damn You* 190). Osborne explained that "The working people in this country were almost solidly behind Sir Anthony Eden, simply because after fifty years of cant about brotherhood and ethics, the Labour Party still had not managed to tell anyone what Socialism meant" (*Damn You* 190). These comments articulate some of the critiques of leftist politics that were implied in *Look Back in Anger*. Later in the same essay, Osborne argues that

> We live in an island of sanctimony, without any vital culture of our own (this we are forced to borrow from America), without any moral dynamic of our own, and still responding to the same tired, grubby symbols handed out to us by the deadheads who write political manifestos, make films, and produce plays. (*Damn You* 190)

[31] Moorhouse's fate provoked at least one other direct dramatic response. In Brendan Behan's *An Giall* (1958), the Irish language play that became *The Hostage*, the British soldier Leslie suffocates in a press under very similar circumstances; in *The Hostage*, Leslie is shot to death.

Osborne's criticism of the nation's lack of morals and its worship of empty symbols is charged with his anger about Suez. Clearly, he believes that artists had not responded adequately to recent events, a feeling which must have inspired *The Entertainer*. Osborne's fear of the Americanization of culture and the rejection of the trappings of monarchy and empire are important themes in *The Entertainer*. But American culture here is not commercial and homogenized, but "vital." Rather than a contagion, it is a measure by which British culture is found wanting. *The Entertainer*, as I will show, communicates both these aspects of Osborne's feelings about American culture. The criticism of imperial symbols in *The Entertainer* is most clear in Jean's words about the "gloved hand waving at you from a golden coach" at Mick's funeral. Such comments beg the audience to consider the causal relationship between the worship of symbols and Mick's death. Though the play does not endorse Jean's critique without question, and she is herself conflicted in her feelings about events (she admits at one point "I don't even know what I'm feeling. I don't even know if I do at all"), her reaction mirrors a strain in contemporary feeling and contributes to the dialogic aspect in the play, which *Look Back in Anger* largely lacks. This dialogic quality is especially apparent in the tension between the younger generation, particularly Jean and Frank, and the older generation represented by Billy. Archie, whose attitudes we might expect to fall somewhere in between these positions, expresses few opinions and no conviction. Osborne explains in his stage directions that "Whatever [Archie] says to anyone is almost always very carefully

'thrown away'. Apparently absent minded, it is a comedian's technique, it absolves him of seeming committed to anyone or anything" (34).

Rebellato discusses *The Entertainer* and *Look Back in Anger* at length in a chapter titled "The Politics of the Vital Theatre," arguing persuasively that the perceived lack of "vitality" in both politics and culture was a driving force for the writers who became know as "Angry Young Men." For Osborne and others, as I suggest above, the continuing postwar consensus and the coming of prosperity in the fifties seemed to have sapped the nation's strength and spirit. In *The Entertainer* this decline is symbolized by the Suez debacle and embodied in the deterioration of the music hall. In the note that precedes the published edition of *The Entertainer*, Osborne writes that "The music hall is dying, and, with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone, for this truly was a folk art" (7). He also describes the music hall as "immediate, vital and direct," the same qualities he wants his own drama to have (7).[32] Implicit here and throughout the play is a critique of newer forms of

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[32] It's hard to imagine that Williams didn't have *The Entertainer* in mind when he wrote in *The Long Revolution* (1961) that

> It is common to make a sentimental valuation of the music-halls as expressing the spirit of "Old England" (which is nonsense in that what they expressed was not old), or as signs of great cultural vitality. In fact the music hall was a very mixed institution and there is a direct line from the chaos of the eighteenth-century theatre through the music hall to the mass of material now on television and in the cinemas, which it is stupid to overlook. To complain of contemporary work of these kinds – from striptease shows to pop singers—and to use the music hall as an example of contrasting vitality or health, is to ignore the clear evidence that it was the illegitimate theatres and the music halls which established these kinds of entertainment. (265)

Strip tease is a prominent aspect of Archie Rice's "degraded" music hall, and Osborne deplores pop music. Williams recognizes that the music halls were the popular culture of an earlier period and that it

entertainment and their primary medium: television. Archie's act is debased as audiences are diverted from the music halls and provided with the ersatz culture of consumer capitalism. In order to compete, Osborne implies, Archie's performances must become more and more tawdry and titillating. This cultural adulteration is also argued in Billy Rice's complaint about a television in his favorite pub and in Phoebe's willingness to see any film playing at the cinema. "I get my self six penn'orth of sweets and have couple of hours of whatever's on," Phoebe says (22, 27). "Music hall was on its last legs," Osborne writes of the time during which he composed *The Entertainer*, "but there were still a few halls in and around London for me to visit, not yet quite defeated by grey, front-parlour television" (*Almost* 35).[33]

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makes little sense to valorize them at the expense of the popular culture of the fifties and sixties. That Osborne attempts this suggests that his ideas about culture are conflicted and internally inconsistent.

[33] The music hall in *The Entertainer* and jazz in *Look Back in Anger* have a similar kind of authenticity. According to Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, jazz and the music hall share "with folk art the genuine contact between audience and performer: but it differs in that it is an individualized art, the art of the known performer" (66). Osborne's assertions about the music hall as a folk art form are supported to some degree in Hall and Whannel's *The Popular Arts*. They argue that "The music hall maintained many elements in common with earlier folk culture" and that "it dealt by means of spectacle, song, and comedy with a whole range of familiar experiences, framed by common references and attitudes." "These attitudes," Hall and Whannel continue,

> were, to a large extent, shared between audience and artist, and the rapport was high. The music hall was, for a time, part of the very life of the community—though that community was now much more stratified than any of the earlier 'organic' societies. On the other hand, the music hall was, in essence, an art of the performer, rather than the art of a community. The community had become an 'audience': the art had been individualized. It would be easy to sentimentalize the music hall—a late expression of the 'folk' in our culture—but it would be closer to the truth to say that the music hall was a transitional form—in a transitional society—between earlier 'folk' and later 'popular' art. (56)

For Hall and Whannel this last point undermines the thesis that television and other new media have destroyed not only the music halls but with them the remnants of English folk culture. "[N]ew media," they argue, "do not mark as decisive a break in the cultural development of 'popular' art as we might imagine from the death of the music halls at the hands of, say, television. The media did change. But within the new forms we find many of the same distinctive qualities which distinguished the art of the halls" (60). For an interesting late example of music hall nostalgia see Colin MacInnes, *Sweet Saturday*

There are important similarities between Osborne's vision of cultural decline and Hoggart's in *The Uses of Literacy*, which was published in 1957. Like Osborne, Hoggart is unable to see any value in popular music or commercial television. Hoggart adheres for the most part to a standard critique of the "culture industry," with the important qualification that he is almost entirely concerned with the effects of mass media on working-class culture. For Hoggart, TV induces in its audience a "shared passivity." "The eyes" of this audience, Hoggart contends, "would register but not connect to the nerves, the heart and the brain; they would connect to a sense of shared pleasure, of pleasure in simply sharing the unifying object, not in the object itself" (143). For the working class, he argues, "material improvements can be used so as to incline the body of working-people to accept a mean form of materialism as a social philosophy" (250). But because Osborne does not focus so much on the culture of a particular class as Hoggart, his analysis acquires a very different emphasis. Osborne is not so concerned with effects of popular culture on the behaviors and capabilities of individuals or groups, but on the health of a broad—and amorphous—national culture. Osborne's description of the music hall as "something that once belonged to everyone" suggests the existence of a national culture that transcends class, a notion Hoggart works to undermine.

Night (1967). "Music Hall," MacInnes explains, is "so anchored in a vanished epoch, and in its spirit so frequently sentimental [. . .] that I do not think one could be deeply interested in the Halls without also feeling a regret that something so charming, innocent, comical and realistic has gone forever" (12). Though MacInnes is much more sympathetic to contemporary popular arts than Osborne, he testifies that by the by the early 1930s "the Halls had already been dying for a decade, largely destroyed by the cinema, musical comedy and revue, and other technical and social causes" (11). MacInnes also discusses the influence of jazz and television on the halls in later decades.

In a discussion of the Angry Young Men, Hewison claims that "The Suez debacle provided a cause for anger, but it was as much a rage of frustration at the country's impotence (over Hungary, as well as Colonel Nasser) as disgust with the Conservative Government's exercise in gunboat diplomacy" (*Too Much* 278). Osborne writes that, amidst "the muddle of feeling about Suez and Hungary," there was "some relief that an international event could arouse such fierce, indeed theatrical responses, with lifetime readers canceling the *Observer* and rallies and abuse everywhere" (37). Though Osborne is clearly dissatisfied with Labour, he remains steadfast in his antipathy for the Conservatives: "What made Suez a typically Tory venture was not only its deception, its distaste for the basic assumptions of democracy, but the complete ineptitude of its execution. They will never learn; they will always be busy propping up the same totems, organizing their number one worship" ("They Call It Cricket" 66). But Osborne made no pronouncements about imperialism and decolonization. Indeed, he seems unconcerned with these issues except as they are felt domestically, and is apparently untroubled by questions about the morality of imperialism. On the evidence of these comments and *The Entertainer*, it is impossible to define Osborne's views on the issues raised by Suez more precisely than to say that he mixes moments of nostalgia for empire (expressed through characters quite distanced from him personally) with an antipathy for Tory policies.

The play begins with Billy Rice on stage alone. Immediately, race and ethnicity (and, implicitly, formations of British and English identity) are highlighted

more than at any point in *Look Back in Anger*; the first line of the play has Billy curse the "Bloody Poles and Irish!" who live in the building with him. "I hate the bastards," he shouts (13). It is often forgotten that the fifties saw, in addition to immigration from former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, substantial European immigration, especially from Poland. Irish immigration was, of course, nothing new. It was unusual at this time for native Britons (except perhaps the most economically desperate) to live in the same building as immigrants. For Osborne, this detail is an index of how far the Rice family has fallen. Moments later Billy complains that the house is a "Bloody farm-yard" (15). "They want locking up," he tells Jean, "And you know what now don't you? You know who [the landlady has] got upstairs, in Mick's old room, don't you? Some black fellow. It's true. I tell you, you've come to a mad-house this time" (15). Sinfield's demographic sketch and Tynan's more impressionistic (but first-hand) account, both of which I quoted earlier, suggest that many among the Royal Court Audience would have found these sentiments unsavory and dated. Still, Billy is an attractive figure. He is

> a spruce man in his seventies. He has great physical pride, the result of a life-time of being admired as "a fine figure of a man". He is slim, upright, athletic. He glows with scrubbed well-being. When he speaks it is with a dignified Edwardian diction—a kind of repudiation of both Oxford and cockney that still rhymes "cross" with "force", and yet manages to avoid being exactly upper-class or effete. Indeed, it is not an accent of class but of period. One does not hear it often now. (13)

As a representative of an older kind of Englishness, Billy resembles Colonel Redfern, who is described as “a large, handsome man” (63). Both are bewildered by the postwar world. Billy’s son Archie, on the other hand, though only fifty, has “almost grey” hair and “wears glasses and has a slight stoop” (33). But despite his vitality and virility, Billy will be dead by the end of the play. His attitudes are severe and old fashioned, and not only in regard to race: referring to Archie’s show, Billy asks “why should a family man take his wife and kids to see a lot of third-class sluts standing about in the nude?” (18). He also objects to “pansy boys” and complains that “Now, half the time you can’t tell the women from the men. Not from the back. And even at the front you have to take a good look, sometimes” (18). Billy’s litany of abuse also targets the welfare state: “No use leaving [his savings] to the Government for them to handout to a lot of bleeders who haven’t got the gumption to do anything for themselves” (21). With these comments Osborne outlines an outmoded but perhaps not entirely unmourned view of English culture as masculine, heterosexual, ethnically pure, chaste, familial and, in rhetoric at least, meritocratic.

Englishness is defined in *The Entertainer*, mostly by Billy, in both racial and national terms against a diverse group of “outsiders” including Irish, Egyptians, Poles and “blacks” (presumably West Indians). Billy’s nationalism is definingly retrospective; one wonders if he would have articulated the same formula for Englishness half a century earlier. Quoting a key phrase of Enoch Powell’s, Tom Nairn explains that, when formerly dominant nationalities become less secure in their supremacy, they “will have to ‘define themselves anew’ against the separatism of

their former minorities" (181). Nairn is referring primarily to stateless historical nationalities, like the Scots, Welsh, Bretons and Basques, but in postwar Britain similar responses are directed not only against internal national groups but also against commonwealth emigrants at home and anti-colonial nationalists abroad, as Billy's similar hostility toward the Irish, blacks and Egyptians attests. There is little sense of an authorial voice in the play's discussion of Englishness. While Osborne is sympathetic to Billy's, he clearly shows that his conception of national identity is outmoded. Both Jean and Frank challenge Billy's notions, but they are unable to articulate a clear alternative. Thus, rather than envisioning a new kind of post-imperial British identity, *The Entertainer* is a testament to its necessity.

Later, Billy recalls his heyday in the music hall: "We all had our own style, our own songs—and we were all English. What's more, we spoke English. It was different. We all knew what the rules were, and even if we spent half our time making people laugh at 'em we never seriously suggested anyone should break them" (81). This passage is further evidence that the music hall is important for Osborne not so much due to the nature or quality of the performances, but because it is distinctly English and because it represents a lost sense of community. With perhaps a lower-middle- or even working-class inflection (though Billy's accent is supposedly classless), the music hall performer was in the past the voice of a unified, patriotic culture that is now apparently waning. The deference the old music hall performers maintained is also evoked in Billy's recollection concerning the Cenotaph. The claim about the lord and the butcher again points to a formerly unified national culture:

> When I was younger, every man—and every man wore a hat in those days, didn't matter if he was a lord or a butcher—every man used to take his hat off when he passed the Cenotaph. Even in the bus. Nowadays I've watched people just go past it, not even a look. If you took the flags off it, I expect they'd sit down and eat their sandwiches on it. (79)

The Cenotaph was erected in 1920 by architect Edward Lutyens to commemorate the World War I dead.[34] As a monument to men who died fighting for the empire, the Cenotaph is linked thematically to Mick's death. Lack of respect for the monument is linked in Billy's mind to the public's failure to support the Suez expedition wholeheartedly. In Billy's rhetoric, the Cenotaph figures not the human cost of militarism and imperialism, but the Victorian ideals of service and sacrifice. For a large segment of society, World War I was the ultimate manifestation of those ideals. But, as Sinfield notes, the war has a variable meaning, of which Osborne was certainly conscious. Sinfield explains that "World War I is a key myth in Britain. It represents both ultimate heroism in service of the nation and (for those of a critical cast) an extreme instance of the cruelty and wastefulness of capitalism" (*Out* 88).

In the first scene of the play Billy asks Jean for her thoughts about Suez: "What d'you make of all this business in the Middle East? People seem to be able to do what they like to us. Just what they like. I don't understand it. I really don't" (17).

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[34] Much of Lutyens's work is in a grand imperial style; his most important work was the Viceroy's House in New Delhi.

Later in the scene, Billy tells Jean, "I feel sorry for you [young] people. [. . .] You've never known what it was like, you're all miserable, really. You don't know what life can be like" (23). Feeling that he cannot give Jean the "life" or the privilege he has enjoyed, Billy presses money on her. This exchange of money for "life" conveys an obvious critique of affluence, but more significant is Billy's inability to conceive an alternative way of living. Though Jean represses her opinion at this point, it is soon revealed that she has attended the Trafalgar Square rally. She explains to Billy that she went "Because, [. . .] with a whole lot of other people, strange as it may seem—I managed to get myself steamed up about the way things were going." When Billy tells her that she should have her "bloody head read," the major ideological and generational conflict of the play is established (28). Moments later Jean and Billy have the following exchange:

> BILLY. I didn't know you were interested in politics.
>
> JEAN. Neither did I. I've always found the whole thing rather boring.
>
> BILLY. Good God! I've heard some things in my time. This is what comes of giving them the bloody vote. They start breaking their engagements, just because they believe every shiftless lay-about writing for the papers. (28)

Billy, looking more old-fashioned than ever, links the nation's confusion with weak-minded women voters and liberal journalists. As we have seen, Osborne suggests that the revived interest in politics in the wake of Suez is a good thing because it threatened the apathy and complacency of the middle fifties, even if he apparently

does not approve of the Trafalgar protest, as his later comments about Jean, which I discuss below, suggest. In "They Call it Cricket," written just a few months after Suez, Osborne recalls that he collected signatures for a letter to the *Times* protesting the Government's actions. "That was the limit of my imagination then, " he recounts, "True, it was a very militant letter, possibly seditious even, which may be the reason it was not published" ("They Call It Cricket" 49). The incident seems to have convinced Osborne that such "unofficial" political gestures are futile.

Archie's three children respond to the crisis in very different ways. For Jean, participation in the Trafalgar rally is part of a wider political awareness, which is also reflected in her work at the Youth Club and in her nascent feminism. The latter is evident in her description of her relationship with Graham:

> He doesn't want me to try something for myself. He doesn't want me to threaten him or his world, he doesn't want me to succeed. I refused him. Then it all came out—Trafalgar Square and everything. You know, I hadn't realized—it just hadn't occurred to me that you could love somebody, that you could want them, and want them twenty-four hours of the day and then suddenly find that you're neither of you even living in the same world. (29)

Graham's attitudes toward women resemble Billy's. Graham, an ambitious young man who at one point tries to reconcile with Jean by telling her, "I've got quite a decent career lined up," represents the new establishment, Billy the old (84). In addition to Jean's objections to Suez, the play presents, though not in as much detail,

Frank's protest in resisting the draft. Frank is physically weak and, it seems, permanently subservient to his father. "He is young," Osborne tells us, "and will probably remain so" (51). Mick, who never appears on stage and is never described in any detail, is a patriot (though apparently an unconscious one) and, in Jean's eyes, "a very good boy." She continues: "He's a gallant young nineteen year old who's fighting for us all, who never learnt to say no, who never wanted to, and I hope to God he comes back safely" (30). Billy, predictably, praises Mick as "a fine boy" because "When they called him he went. No arguments, nothing. He just went" (30).[35] Jean, who regrets Mick's unthinking adherence to duty, replies heatedly to Billy's criticism of Frank: "when they called Frank, he refused, and he went to jail for it—for six months. Young Frank, full of doubts about himself, and everybody." Jean insists that "You don't have to measure up young Mick against Frank, Grandad" (30). Billy replies, "you can't turn against your own people, Jean. You can't do it." Jean then answers with a bold affront to Billy's patriotism, questioning his familial conception of the nation: "My own people—who are my people?" (31). When Phoebe complains that Frank was made to stoke boilers in a hospital after he got out of jail. Jean replies sardonically, "Yes. He'd have been better off in the Army sticking a bayonet into some wog" (31). This is the only time a character in the play recognizes a connection between British actions in Egypt and imperial racism. Early in the play,

[35] There is an oblique comment here on the controversy surrounding the continuance of National Service in peacetime. Arthur Marwick records that, by September 1956, 44 percent of poll respondents favored eliminating National Service. Thirty-eight 38 percent opposed abolition. The figures were 33 percent and 50 percent, respectively, in 1949 (*British* 103-104).

Jean seems extremely confident in her convictions. Later, however, when Archie asks her if she really cared about “all that,” referring to Suez and the Trafalgar rally, she answers only, “I thought I did at the time” (69). Though this uncertainty could well be an accurate characterization of a young person in Jean’s position, her comment could suggest that her interest in politics is faddish and her convictions fleeting and insincere. But she again seems very certain of her beliefs when, after Mick’s funeral, she asks, ”Can any one tell me what this whole thing added up to?” (74). Her apparent vacillation, though, makes it difficult to ascertain Osborne’s intentions in his characterization of Jean. Are her words and actions meant to be a brave protest against war or a naïve and confused response to uncertainty and personal tragedy? Or is this question an oversimplification? Can she be both sincere and uncertain or confused?

These questions are very important because much of the political meaning of the play depends on the audience’s judgment of Jean. At the time he was writing the play, Osborne seems to have viewed her as a smart and courageous, if not always self-assured, young woman. His stage directions state that Archie “suspects [Jean’s] intelligence, aware that she may be stronger than the rest of them” (34). Jean understands ideology in a way the other characters, with the possible exception of Frank, do not. This impression is supported in Osborne’s *Declaration* essay, where he defends Jean against the charge that she is “vaguely anti-queen.” “The bigger point that this character is trying to make,” he explains, “was something like: ‘What kind of symbols do we live by? Are they truthful and worthwhile?’” (“They Call It Cricket”

50). Jean comes off particularly well in comparison to Graham, who is described as typical of a certain type of upwardly mobile young person: “There are plenty of these around—well dressed, assured, well educated, their emotional and imaginative capacity so limited it is practically negligible” (83). In the relationship between Jean and Graham, Osborne has largely reversed the gender dynamic in Alison and Jimmy’s marriage. Jean—like Jimmy—is distinguished by her feelings or, more specifically, her capacity to feel. But there is a danger here in the stereotypical association of femininity and emotion; for this reason Jean, much more easily than Jimmy, might be dismissed as mildly hysterical. Osborne perhaps encourages such an interpretation by associating Jean more often with “soft” feminine emotions and values like compassion and pacifism, whereas Jimmy’s are the “hard” masculine emotions of anger and indignation. In addition, Jean’s activities, both in attending the Trafalgar rally and in working at the Youth Club, suggest an expansion of the political sphere. Here Osborne seems both to recognize alternative outlets for political energies and to imagine a more prominent role for women in politics. In Jean’s case, the emotional response sparked by Suez led to a new understanding that might make meaningful political action possible in the future. Years later, however, Osborne writes that Jean is “a somewhat insubstantial girl, expending her vapid emotion on cloudy universal concerns rather than the comfortless tragedy of isolated hearts” (*Almost* 146). This comment betrays the sexism latent in Osborne’s characterization of Jean in terms of her emotional capacity. But this is the voice of disillusion. In 1957 a Royal Court audience could be expected to feel substantial sympathy and, very

likely, admiration for Jean. Though Osborne's characterization of her is somewhat equivocal, his deliberate choices made that sympathy possible.

Archie's performances double the audience's role as spectators and invites them to reflect on the ways in which their gaze is manipulated. Osborne also uses this effect to encourage self-reflection among the audience members. As Innes explains, "The structure [of *The Entertainer*] is designed to bring home exactly who is responsible for the social decay" represented by the seediness of Archie's music hall. Innes elaborates: "The (serious-minded, Royal Court) audience for straight drama, represented by the domestic scenes in the Rice household, are placed in the uncomfortable role of (uneducated, provincial) spectators at the seediest of vaudevilles" (109). Osborne implies that Archie is playing to the demands of his audience, suggesting that audience tastes under the pernicious influence of a debased popular culture is at the root of the music hall's decline. But with the doubling of the Royal Court audience, this criticism constitutes a charge against that audience on the grounds that British culture is in the grip of a philistinism for which everyone is responsible. This doubling effect is created in Archie's first speech: "We're going to entertain you for the next two and a half hours and you've really had it now. All the exit doors are locked" (24).

Archie's garish make-up and the conspicuous theatricality of his act heighten the audience's recognition of the artificiality of the theatre and of their role as spectators within that synthetic environment. In his first performance, Archie opens with his theme song:

Why should I care?

Why should I let it touch me?

Why shouldn't I, sit down and try

To let it pass over me? (24)

The nature of this performance-within-a-performance encourages the audience to question the sincerity of these sentiments, and by the end of the play it does become clear that Archie's lack of feeling is a façade. Still, though Osborne suggests in a passage quoted earlier that the sentiment here is ironic, these lines bring to mind the apathy which commentators including E. P. Thompson identified in 1950s Britain. But the lingering irony here causes one to wonder if what has been described as apathy is a lack of feeling or, more precisely, as masking or repression of emotion.

In his next number Archie launches into what must surely seem to the audience to be a parody of conservative rhetoric:

We're all out for good old number one,

Number one's the only one for me!

Good old England, you're my cup of tea,

But I don't want no drab equality.

Archie then assures his audience that "Britons shall be free!" A moment later, as a Union Jack descends as a backdrop, Archie sings:

Those bits of red still on the map

We won't give up without a scrap.

What we've got left back

We'll keep—and blow you, Jack!

Oh, number one's the only one for me! (32-33)

Archie does not demonstrate such jingoistic sentiments in private. In fact, he expresses no interest in empire and very little in domestic politics. His apparent insincerity suggests again that Archie is pandering to his imaginary audience's tastes. (The Royal Court audience's feelings would be less certain). He gives this audience what they want, which is apparently rock and roll, nudes and patriotic sentiments. History has eroded the bedrock of patriotism, these scenes suggest, allowing patriotic sentiment to be reified and commercialized. This development is embodied most obviously in the nude wearing Britannia's helmet depicted on one of the backcloths before which Archie sings. Even if the Royal Court audience found Archie's patriotic sentiments odious, they remained implicated in the culture Archie represents by the complex spectatorship Osborne forces upon them. Osborne implies that individuals cannot opt out of the national culture and separate themselves, as many in the audience surely wished, from its unsavory aspects. Osborne's diagnosis of cultural malaise thus posits a unitary—though not necessarily harmonious—culture that transcends political difference.

Though he imagines a singular national culture, Osborne does distinguish between political responses to the crisis he sees facing Britain. He associates the "what do I care attitude" with the Conservatives, writing in February 1957 that he does not "believe that a man can live simply for himself and his family, and this seems to me the essential Tory attitude" (*Damn You* 189). Archie clearly evokes

Harold Macmillan, the new Conservative Prime Minister. Here the performative aspects of patriotism are a main target of Osborne's parody. The reference above to "drab equality" recalls Macmillan's complaint about the "dreary equality" of postwar British society in his first speech as Prime Minister (qtd. in Anderson, "Get Out" 144). Peter Clarke also sees a parallel between Macmillan and Archie, who, he claims, "easily could have stood in for" the Prime Minister, and notes that the left-wing cartoonist Vicky (who created the Prime Minister's "Supermac" alter-ego) represented Macmillan as Archie in a 1957 cartoon (273). And David Cannadine calls Macmillan a "consummate public performer" and points out that "To his critics, [Macmillan] was little more than a second-rate actor, implausibly and cynically posturing in a variety of superficial and contradictory parts—crofter's grandson, middle-class publisher, ducal son-in-law, vulgar show man, world leader, stag at bay, elder statesman and poor man's Churchill" (*History* 250). To his supporters, Cannadine continues, Macmillan was "a virtuoso performer [. . .] who recognised the essential importance of gesture and theatricality in playing (and winning) the great game, and who was a past (and present) master at saying one thing while resolutely and effectively doing something completely different" (*History* 250). The "part" Macmillan played at the time of Suez, Cannadine argues, "was so maladroit, inglorious, and inconsistent that he deserved to have been destroyed by it" (*History* 255). It was certainly this failure Osborne had in mind when modeling Archie on the Prime Minister. Archie calls forth feelings ranging from pity to disdain to a kind of

shame-faced amusement; Macmillan may have evoked similar emotions in the young, educated, left-leaning Royal Court audiences.

A feature entitled "This New England," which appeared in *Encounter* in June 1956, suggests what Macmillan might have meant by "dreary equality:"

> in an overcrowded country approaching the condition where the majority receive almost equal shares, there is little vivid variousness, a spreading grey of suburbs which make up in quantity of dimness for the more concentrated intense ugliness of nineteenth-century slums. Everywhere the price paid for diffused facilities is sacrifice of quality. (qtd. in Hewison, *In Anger* 81)

That this complaint against the welfare state and the apparent leveling of class distinctions mirrors Archie's attitudes is confirmed when Jean accuses him of having "been too busy hating all those feckless moochers out there in the great darkness" to have ever solved a problem on his own (77). Anthony Burgess describes a "post-war English mess [. . .] that's made by having too much freedom, [. . .] the great democratic mess in which there's no hierarchy, no scale of values, everything's as good—and therefore as bad—as everything else" (qtd. in Nehring 244). Osborne would have agreed that Britain was a mess. He would also perhaps be nostalgic for order and hierarchy, or, more precisely, for the political certainties that hierarchy provided. But Osborne differs from Burgess and the anonymous author of the *Encounter* piece in that his complaint, here and in *Look Back in Anger,* is that apathy

and what he surely recognized as a myth of classlessness mask the fact that little has really changed—that the "old gang" Macmillan and Eden represent has returned.[36]

In Archie's music hall performances, according to C. W. E. Bigsby, "The stage [. . .] becomes an image not only of the desperate fictions acted out with diminishing confidence by the politicians of late-fifties Britain, but of the role-playing of individuals cut adrift from the history they had assumed to be the origin of their private significance" (282). This last point is borne out in Archie's off-stage scenes, most notably in his self-pitying reaction to the news of Mick's capture:

> we have problems that nobody's ever heard of, we're characters out of something that nobody believes in. We're something that people make jokes about, because we're so remote from the rest of ordinary everyday, human experience. [. . .] Simply because we're not like anybody who ever lived. We don't get on with anything. We don't every succeed in anything. [. . .] All the time we're trying to draw someone's attention to our nasty, sordid, unlikely little problems (54).

There is some ambiguity as to whom Archie's "we" signifies. Surely, "we" is the Rice family. But "we" is also the nation, and the rootlessness Archie feels is largely a

[36] Archie reveals his attitude toward Eden when he asks Jean, after she tells him that she was at the Trafalgar rally, "Are you one of those who don't like the Prime Minister?" Archie then comments in his off-hand manner, "I think I've grown rather fond of him. I think it was after he went to the West Indies to get Noël Coward to write a play for him. Still, perhaps only someone of my generation, could understand that" (39). Archie is referring to Eden's vacation to Jamaica immediately after Suez. His comments link Archie, generationally, with Eden and his successor. The reference to Coward suggests that the playwright also belongs to this older generation. The generational difference between Jean and her father could then be seen to parallel that between Osborne and his theatrical forbears as represented by Coward.

result of his diminished confidence in the ontological basis of Englishness. That he feels himself to be role-playing even offstage demonstrates this new uncertainty. By referring to himself as a character, Archie highlights the fact that he is always performing, even, as we see later, in grief.

As in Lieutenant Moorhouse's case, the papers report that Mick is going to come home safely. Jean realizes that the family is "going to have [themselves] a hero" (44). Moorhouse's capture, unlike Mick's, was anything but heroic, though we are meant to question the veracity of a report Jean reads from the paper in which one of Mick's fellow soldiers claims that he "must have killed at least seven of the attackers. [. . .] 'He must have run out of ammunition' said [the comrade]. 'Young Rice wasn't the type to give up'" (44). This comment recalls Billy's boast in his rant against the Poles who live in the building: "One Britisher could always take on a half a dozen of that kind. Or used to. Doesn't look like it now" (37). Anticipating Mick's return, Archie appeals to Jean, Phoebe and Frank to "try to be a little normal just for once, and pretend we're a happy, respectable decent family. For Mick's sake." In the next scene, Archie sings "Thank God I'm Normal":

> Thank God I'm normal,
>
> I'm just like the rest of you chaps,
>
> Decent and full of good sense,
>
> I'm not one of these extremist saps,
>
> For I'm sure you'll agree,
>
> That a fellow like me

Is the salt of our dear old country,

of our dear old country. (60)

"Land of hope and Glory" plays, and Archie continues: "Some people say we're finished, / Some people say we're done. / But if we all stand / By this dear old land, / The battle will be won" (60-61). As Archie sings a backdrop depicting a "nude in Britannia's helmet [. . .] holding a bulldog and trident" descends (61). This tableau returns with bitter emphasis to the theme of Britishness as performance. Though Archie's conviction here is questionable, the denigration of "extremist saps" probably refers to those who might have protested the invasion of Egypt or questioned the validity of the imperial symbols Archie is himself travestying. More than anything, Archie's performance suggests that the trappings of imperial British identity, like the music hall, might best be relegated to the past in which they retained their meaning and vitality. Contrived as these patriotic displays are, they will be impossible a few minutes later when Frank brings the news of Mick's death.

Before that news arrives, Frank, as if in response to his father, performs the following song, which makes explicit a criticism of imperial rhetoric that Archie rejects or is unable to imagine:

When you've shouted Rule Britannia,

When you've sung God Save the Queen,

When you've finished killing Kruger with your tongue,

Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine

For a gentleman in khaki ordered south. (64-5)

These lines echo some of Jean's comments and point to the dangers of patriotism and its potential costs for soldiers, if not for colonized peoples. These words, which have special meaning coming from the draft-resister Frank, and resonate with Billy's performance of "Onward Christian Soldiers" a few scenes earlier. The Boer War, to which Frank's song alludes, was fought in service of imperialism, just like Suez. Significantly, the Boer War is now most often remembered as an early sign of weakness in the British Empire and as a formative moment for a growing anti-imperialist faction within Britain. After the announcement of Mick's death, Frank's criticism becomes more direct and his irony sharper. He sings:

> Bring back his body, and bury it in England.
>
> Bring back his body, and bury it here.
>
> Bring back his body, in an aeroplane.
>
> But don't ever talk to me.
>
> Those playing fields of Eton
>
> Have really got us beaten.
>
> But ain't no use agrievin'
>
> 'Cos it's Britain we believe in. (74)

The reversal of Wellington's adage about Waterloo suggests that the upper classes are responsible for Suez—and, by extension, Mick's death—because they preserve outmoded notions of patriotism. By the end of the song, Frank's tone is sardonic. The "Britain" he refers to is the imperial state in decay. The travesty of Wellington and the demand "don't ever talk to me" are refusals of the patriotism that has supported

that state. Frank isn't given much space in the play, but his views here are more extreme, or at least more embittered, than Jean's. He is openly hostile to his father's and his grandfather's patriotism. Earlier, in response to Archie's exhortation "Let's pull ourselves together," Frank responds ironically, "That's right chaps—remember we're British" (58).

The play asks the audience to consider the status of Mick's death as tragedy. Archie's responses, as we will see, are bathetic, and his earlier comment about the family's (and the nation's) "nasty, sordid, unlikely little problems" suggests the impossibility of tragedy under the circumstances of postwar Britain and of Suez in particular. Mick's death is perhaps tragic in the Brechtian sense that it shows the avoidable human toll of political actions, and such an interpretation is facilitated for the audience by Jean's comment at the funeral about the gloved hand and the golden coach. Significantly, the audience is distanced from the event by Mick's absence, which seems to be an effort on Osborne's part to avoid sentimentalizing his death. Mick is not a character in the play in any meaningful sense and none of his personality or beliefs is conveyed. He is no hero or martyr, perhaps only a victim. The play cannot confer on Mick the status of hero because of the lack of a credible cause to justify the Suez expedition. In other words, there is no belief or value that could in this case be weighed against a young man's death.

The scene that ends with Frank bringing Archie the news of Mick's death, contains much discussion of the possibility that Phoebe, Archie and Frank will move to Canada, where some of Phoebe's relatives have offered Archie a job managing a

hotel. Phoebe's niece in Ottawa writes that she has "a twenty-one inch T.V. set, a radio, etc. and now we have a 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air car complete with automatic shift and all the fancy gadgets everyone goes in for over here" (68). Osborne implies that leaving Britain for reasons such as these is not only materialistic but also a form of desertion. But Osborne understands very well the frustration that could motivate people to leave the country. Frank sounds like Hugh Tanner in *Look Back in Anger* who, in Alison's words, "said that England was finished for us" when he says to Jean:

> Can you think of any good reason for staying in this cosy little corner of Europe? Don't kid yourself anyone's going to let you do anything, or try anything here, Jeannie. Because they're not. You haven't got a chance. Who are you—you're nobody. You're nobody, you've no money and you're young. And when you end up it's pretty certain you'll still be nobody, you'll still have no money—the only difference is you'll be old. You'd better start looking out for number one, Jeannie, because nobody else is going to do it for you. Nobody else is going to do it for you because nobody believes in that stuff any more. Oh, they may say they do, and may take a few bob out of your pay packet every week and stick some stamps on your card to prove it, but don't believe it—nobody will give you a second look. They're all so busy, speeding down the middle of the road together, not giving a damn where they're going as long as they're in the bloody middle. (46; 67-8)

This criticism of the welfare state balances Frank's earlier indictments of the establishment and shows the depth of his disaffection from the nation's political culture. After Mick's funeral and Billy's death, Frank does resolve to go to Canada. Archie apparently will stay, even after his brother Bill offers to pay his fare and tells him, "It's Canada or jail" (85). Frank is leaving out of necessity and despair. For him, Canada represents freedom and opportunity that a complacent, stagnant, and still class-bound Britain cannot provide. Nor, any longer, can the empire.[37] In Osborne's hands, Frank's emigration is an ironic reenactment of the imperial mission that led earlier generations overseas. Frank's exhortation that Jean must "look out for number one," besides echoing Archie's parody of Macmillan, indicates Frank's belief that the values of consumer society have triumphed and that the left has been pitifully ineffectual. "Looking out for number one," as we have seen, is for Osborne a quintessentially Tory attitude. Frank shows that this attitude has become pervasive throughout the culture, but he himself has adopted it only after his disillusionment

[37] The possibility of emigration was real for many Britons. During the fifties 912,000 emigrated from Britain, mostly to Australia and the "White" Commonwealth (Pilkington 83). At the same time that the Government was recruiting displaced Europeans and, more reluctantly, West Indians and South Asians to relive the scarcity of labor in the immediate postwar years, they encouraged the emigration of "British Stock" to the "White" Commonwealth, particularly Canada, Australia and New Zealand. According to Kathleen Paul, postwar governments sought to "strengthen the links between Commonwealth members by maintaining the Britishness of the whole and to increase the stature of the British Empire by boosting economic development through demographic growth" (26-27). Total UK emigration to Canada between 1946 and 1960 was 582,787 (Paul 34). Paul records that "perhaps, as some newspapers speculated, partly in response to the debacle of Suez, 1957 was a boom year for emigration to Canada, with over twenty thousand applications per week submitted to the London and Liverpool offices of Canada House" (34). Altogether, 175,892 people left the UK for Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia in 1957, the peak year for such emigration. For Osborne, these emigrants were rats leaving a sinking ship. Paul also notes that, like Phoebe, "many [emigrants] were inspired by the encouragement of friends and relatives already in place" "[O]thers," Paul adds, "spoke of the desire to provide a better life for themselves and their children—a life persuasively suggested by the advertisements on display in every labour exchange office" (62).

with British society became complete. Osborne suggests that this attitude is the logical outcome of inequitable social structures and, implicitly, argues for some form of collectivism.

Archie has been to Canada before. For unspecified reasons, he went there during World War II, and he traveled to the United States. Later, in a passage crucial to the cultural politics of the play, he discusses these experiences with Jean:

> Did I ever tell you the most moving thing that I ever heard? It was when I was in Canada—I managed to slip over the border sometimes to some people I knew and one night I heard some negress singing in a bar. Now you're going to smile at this, you're going to smile your educated English head off, because I suppose you've never sat lonely and half slewed in some bar among strangers a thousand miles from anything you think you understand. But if I ever saw any hope or strength in the human race, it was in the face of that old fat negress getting up to sing about Jesus or something like that. She was poor and lonely and oppressed like nobody you've ever known. Or me, for that matter. I never even liked that kind of music, but to see that old black whore singing her heart out to the whole world, you knew somehow in your heart that it didn't matter how much you kick people, the real people, how much you despise them, if they can stand up and make a pure, just natural noise like that, there's nothing wrong with them only with everybody else. [. . .] There's nobody who can feel like that. I

> wish to God I could feel like that old black bitch with her fat cheeks and sing. If I'd done one thing as good as that in my whole life, I'd have been all right. Better than all your getting on with the job without making a fuss and all that, or doing something constructive and all that, all your rallies in Trafalgar Square! I wish to God I were that old bag. I'd stand up and shake my great bosom up and down, and lift up my head and make the most beautiful fuss in the world. (70-1)

Though this seems to be a blues rather than a jazz performance, Archie's sentiments recall Jimmy's proclamation in *Look Back in Anger* that "Anyone who doesn't like real jazz, hasn't any feeling either for music or for people [sic]" (48). The performance Archie describes contrasts markedly with the rock and roll that accompanies his cheap and mildly pornographic opening performance (48). In a 1957 review of a volume of plays by Tennessee Williams, Osborne writes that "Lacking a live culture of our own, we are drawing more heavily than ever on that of the United States" (*Damn You* 67). For Osborne, and for Archie, the United States's greatest wealth is not material but cultural, even spiritual. Archie's comment that Jean will "smile [her] educated English head off" draws a clear distinction between English rationality and authentic human emotion. The paradox here, of course, is that the emotional authenticity and cultural vigor Archie sees in the United States is expressed by a black woman, who represents one of the most oppressed segments of American society. In addition, Archie's comments again bring to light the opposition between performance and authenticity that is crucial to Osborne's ideas on politics and culture.

His parody of Macmillan depends on this opposition, as does his implied criticism of the Trafalgar rally, which he views as an ostentatious display of superficial commitment.

Archie's description of the black woman combines sympathy with overt racism and sexism. He realizes that African Americans are oppressed, but refers derogatorily to the woman three times. Sinfield quotes Sheila Patterson's *Dark Strangers* (1963) to demonstrate that the value and authenticity attributed to African-American art in Britain in the fifties and sixties was often coupled with illiberal stereotypes. Patterson argues that

> Primitiveness, savagery, violence, sexuality, general lack of control, sloth, irresponsibility—all these are part of the image [of blacks]. On the more favourable side, Negroid peoples are often credited with athletic, artistic and musical gifts, and with an appealing and childlike simplicity which is in no way incompatible with the remainder of the image. (qtd. in Sinfield, *Literature* 127)[38]

This ambivalence is obvious in Archie's recollection of the singer. He does not discount the woman's suffering, and he recognizes his own privilege. Yet he still maintains an extremely condescending attitude toward her. And his insensitive

[38] For an insightful discussion of "race relations" discourse in the 1950s, including Patterson's book, see Chris Waters's "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963." According to Waters, "The large-scale migration of persons of color to Britain in the 1950s lead to the emergence of race relations as a 'social problem,' now addressed by experts who established the subject as a formal field of academic inquiry. Empowered by science and imbued by a strong sense of moral entrepreneurship, these experts secured their status as an authoritative voice on matter of race in Britain, monopolizing control over a relatively new domain of knowledge" (217).

assertion that he would accept the woman's suffering if he could achieve the emotional authenticity of her performance is made possible by the exotic otherness he ascribes to her. In some sense, Archie is strongly attracted to the woman (or, more particularly, to what she represents for him), and he desires to be like her. But he is also frightened to identify with the woman, and his racist and imperialist assumptions keep him at a distance. In the context of this very British play, Archie's monologue suggests that the comforts of affluence are slight compensation for the suffering of the 1930s and 1940s, which encouraged both cultural and political authenticity. In an affluent society characterized by political consensus and complacency, Osborne implies, Archie cannot even suffer properly. Because the lower strata of society suffered most acutely in the past, this argument suggests that Osborne here, more than at any point in *Look Back in Anger*, is concerned with the vitality of a specifically working- or lower-middle-class culture.

The importance of African-American music to Archie is confirmed when, after learning of Mick's death, he sings this blues: "Oh, lord, I don't care where they bury my body, no I don't care where they bury my body, 'cos my soul's going to live with God!" (73). This performance, witnessed only by his family, occurs immediately after the famous speech in which he tells Jean,

> You see this face, you see this face, this face can split open with warmth and humanity. It can sing, and tell the worst, unfunniest stories in the world to a great mob of dead, drab erks and it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because—look at my eyes. I'm dead

> behind these eyes. I'm dead just like the whole inert, shoddy lot out there. (72)

His blues performance apparently represents an awakening for Archie in which he is finally able to feel and, just as importantly, express genuine emotion. But in what, if any, sense is Archie's blues authentic? Is it merely another performance? The piece brings to mind the "nigger minstrels" that frequently appeared at seaside resorts in a slightly earlier period, and it certainly calls to mind "blackface" performers like Al Jolson.[39] Such associations suggest that Archie's performance can't be authentic. But though Archie's performance certainly recalls minstrelsy, the occasion of his performance differentiates it. His only audience is his family, and his performance is not exploitative or demeaning in the way minstrel shows were. And, at the end of the play, Archie falters and cannot complete his final performance of "Why Should I Care?" Apparently he can no longer maintain the façade the music hall requires and genuine emotion breaks through. Archie's own "English" style fails him and his seemingly impossible appropriation of an African-American idiom a few scenes

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[39] For the "nigger minstrels" see Walton 166-170 and 182-183. In addition, Michael Pickering provides an excellent discussion of black face and the "nigger minstrels" in the music hall as artifacts of British imperialism in "Mock Blacks and Racial Mockery." "Nigger minstrel" shows claimed the status of documentary (in depicting life on a Dixie plantation or in 'Darkest Africa'). This claim, however, was always undercut by the exaggerated artifice of blackface performance. According to Pickering, "what minstrelsy seems to have invited was a perpetual switching back and forth between 'belief' in the performance and an awareness if its fictive contrivances, rather than a blanket suspension of disbelief" (221). As Pickering explains, "nigger minstrelsy [. . .] was infused with values, notions and conceptions that were inseparably a part of [imperial and racist ideology], and in disseminating them so ubiquitously it undoubtedly contributed to the sustenance of that racial conceit and sense of the supreme quality of British civilisation which were fundamental to imperial consciousness" (188). Thus, the images of the minstrel show "could be used in the justification of Empire but more significantly in the underpinning, by way of parading and acting out 'difference,' of an English national identity, particularly in the complexion leant to it by the dominant ethos and culture" (194).

earlier can be seen as an act of desperation. As a cultural product, Archie's blues cannot be authentic in the sense normally ascribed to that word, but his emotion may well be. If this is the case, Archie's ultimate tragedy is that he has no means within his own culture to express the genuine emotion he is finally able to feel.

Archie's performance also contains an attack on an Englishness which, publicly at least, valued efficiency, practicality, rationality and the repression of emotion. These traits are, of course, antithetical to those ascribed to the "darkies" of the minstrel show: idleness, lust, violence, vanity, emotionalism. As Michael Pickering explains, "black musicality was perceived as an expression of a side of human nature characteristically expelled from the moral arena of English propriety, and in this sense, it satisfied desires that existed outside the need for corroboration of racial or cultural superiority." In other words, "The distortions of black stereotypicality contained dim realisations of what was lost in the self-denials required by capitalist society" (205, 225). A critique of English emotional inhibition, as I've shown, runs through Osborne's work. Archie's blues not only calls attention to the repressive qualities of a dominant formation of English identity, but also, if judged to be in any large part sincere, signals a breakdown of that version of Englishness. On an individual level, he is no longer able to maintain his identity as a patriotic Englishman, which the play has already shown to be tenuous and performative. In a sense, Archie's blues simply represents a changing of masks. Though the new, tragic mask is likely to be judged less flattering (by his own standards, as indicated in his speech about the female blues singer, and by British

society at large), it allows him to respond to Mick's death in a way that is otherwise impossible.

Osborne's dramatization of events and controversies related to Suez so soon after they happened is a bold move. But ultimately the issues raised by Suez regarding race and decolonization are only incidental to Osborne's subject matter in *The Entertainer*. The events themselves are held at a distance; they are indicators of national decline and, in their domestic political consequences, a telling symptom of internal division. In other words, Osborne sees the crisis entirely as an episode in British history and shows little interest in understanding the moral questions it raises about imperialism. Of course, because the audience for the play would have been very familiar with the details of the crisis and Lt. Moorhouse's fate, little exposition would have been required. Nevertheless, Suez in the end seems incidental to the themes of the play.

Conclusion

Many critics have noted that *Look Back in Anger* is stylistically conservative. Hewison, for example, reviewing the 1999 National Theatre production, describes it as, "excepting its language, a profoundly conventional one-set, three-act, small-cast drama" ("Raging" 1). And Osborne himself referred to the play as "formal [and] old-

fashioned" (qtd. in Hewison, "Raging" 1). The setting of *Look Back in Anger*, Raymond Williams explains in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, is the "traditional room of the naturalist theatre: the room as trap, with the sound and messages of a determining and frustrating world coming in from outside; the people staring from a window, looking on and raging against their world" (318-19). This formula is crucial to the naturalist structure of feeling, and it limits the political meanings available to Osborne in ways I outline below. Williams sees the novelty of the play originating from the process by which "The locally convincing detail and atmosphere, of one generation, becomes first dated; then theatrical; a new local style is then launched against it" (*Drama* 318). This argument suggests that the "revolution" the play allegedly initiated can be seen as merely an inevitable generational change in subject matter. But if the play now seems formally and stylistically traditional, it is nevertheless important to note the ways in which it did differ from the dominant theatrical mode of the time. Williams's 1977 "Lecture on Realism" provides a concise genealogy of dramatic realism that is useful in understanding what was new about *Look Back in Anger*.[40]

In that essay Williams identifies three thematic emphases that have characterized the realistic tradition since the late nineteenth century: "the secular, the contemporary and the socially extended" (65). Drama is secular when it dispenses with "elements of a metaphysical or a religious order" that "directly or indirectly

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[40] I am indebted to Stephen Lacy's *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in Its Context 1956-1965* for drawing my attention to Williams's essay and its relevance to Osborne.

frame, or in the stronger cases determine, the human actions" (64). "This dimension," Williams explains, "is dropped, and in its place a human action is played through in specifically human terms—exclusively human terms" (64). The "contemporary" refers simply to the "siting of actions in the present" with "an emphasis on the actions of the contemporary world," which, Williams explains, has only relatively recently become common in the theatre (63-4). "Social extension" refers to the expansion of the subject matter of a play to include a wider range of social groups and classes, and an effort to include local details and colloquial idioms. In the nineteenth century, social extension meant depicting the lives of bourgeois protagonists rather than "persons of rank" (64). In the twentieth century, social extension meant depicting social groups other than the bourgeoisie. The secularism of naturalistic theatre is well established, and does not distinguish Osborne's play. William's second criterion is satisfied in *Look Back in Anger* not only by the temporal placement of the action, but also by Osborne's widely ranging references to contemporary controversies and familiar cultural symbols. It is in terms of social extension, however, that *Look Back in Anger* is most distinguished. The play expands the range of characters commonly seen in mainstream theatre in the mid-fifties. Most particularly, rather than simply including one or a few characters from the middle or lower classes, the play is set in the milieu of those classes. Alison and her father, who come from a class commonly represented in the theatre, are the outsiders here. In addition, Osborne's decision to set the play outside London suggests a deliberate effort to broaden the range of British drama. Still, a case for the play's newness argued on the basis of social

extension can be overstated. Jimmy's class origins are never defined precisely, but he is certainly not from the lowest strata of society. Cliff's Welshness is also significant, but it does not figure in the thematics of the play, and a Welshman is probably the least foreign non-Englishman Osborne could have chosen. Webster could also be cited as an example of social extension were he not kept offstage.

The naturalistic room is the most conspicuous physical aspect of both *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, even though in the latter play the scenes located there are interspersed with Archie's music hall performances. Though the characters on stage may not resemble those typically seen in the previous phase of mainstream British drama, and the room may be shabbier or more austere, both plays rely on dramatic structures at least as old as Ibsen and Strindberg. The room, in its relationship to the world outside, is central among these structures. More than anything it is the deterministic relationship between the room and the world—or, better, between individuals and their environment—of which Williams speaks that limits the political meanings available to an author working in a naturalistic mode. Brecht, who is a central figure in Williams's writings on drama and tragedy, based his dramatic methods on the necessity of demonstrating to his audience that the world does not have to be the way it is and that the suffering created by social institutions is avoidable. These methods enabled him, ideally, to leave his audience disposed toward social and political action. Because such a project would be difficult or impossible in a naturalistic mode, Brecht discarded the conventions of naturalism. Also, Brecht describes naturalism as a kind of illusionism, and the room on stage is an illusionistic

apparatus. Brecht argues that "The illusion created by the theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may always be recognized as an illusion" (*Brecht* 219). This effect cannot easily be accomplished without breaking the confines of the naturalistic room.

In formal terms, *The Entertainer* is more complex and less realistic than *Look Back in Anger*. The doubly artificial aspect of Archie's act, where Olivier performs the performer, produces something akin to a Brechtian alienation effect in the sense that the continuities of naturalist representation are disrupted and the so-called fourth wall is broken, forcing audience members to consider their role as spectators.[41] But the play still demands naturalistic acting techniques, even when Olivier is acting the artificiality of Archie's performance. Osborne's interest in the music hall also recalls Brecht's interest in popular and musical forms. The major difference between Brecht's drama and Osborne's project in *The Entertainer* is that Osborne wants to present events and emotions mimetically and forsakes the kind of materialist analysis Brecht insists upon, though he hints at that kind analysis in a few of Jean's lines on patriotism and sacrifice. Despite his protestations, Osborne probably was influenced by Brecht in writing *The Entertainer*. But while that influence makes the play stylistically more various and dynamic than *Look Back in Anger*, there is no evidence that Osborne had any good grasp of, or interest in, the political import of Brecht's

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[41] In a discussion of Brecht independent of any reference to Osborne, Frederic Jameson argues that there is necessarily something of the style of acting Brecht advocated in the performance of the "greatest actors": "[A]n Olivier, for example, both star or protagonist and character actor all at once, irrespective of his age or the roles he chose at various moments of his career [. . .] maintains just that slight distance from Heathcliff or Othello" that Brecht admired (75). It is easy to imagine such an effect in the original production of *The Entertainer*.

dramatic methods. Williams uses a fourth criterion to distinguish realism and naturalism. Realism should be "consciously interpretive from a particular political viewpoint" in a way naturalism is not (68). Brecht's plays are realistic in this sense. Osborne's work remains in the realm of naturalism and, in both plays I discuss here, his project is fundamentally mimetic rather than analytical. He resists making any overt political comment and instead portrays a society in upheaval through one or a small number of characters.

When Hewison argues that *Look Back in Anger* is conventional "excepting its language," he recognizes the aspect of the play that underlies its novelty. The emotionalism that Tynan, Osborne and others praised as "vitality" is the extension of a traditional dramatic mode, but it is made both convincing and new by Osborne's language. The newness of the play was largely a function of the perceived authenticity of Jimmy Porter's speech, which is the mark of a persuasively rendered individual subjectivity. Speaking of the New Wave as a whole, Javed Malick writes that

> The feelings of frustration, pain, anger, and discontent came across in the writings of the new dramatists loud and clear, but also in predominately emotional and subjective terms, because the key to a lasting and deep reorientation of insight—the dramaturgic form, the very structure and style in which this experience was formulated—remained firmly rooted in the naturalist tradition and structure of feeling. (13)

Much like Williams, Malick argues that, under naturalistic conventions, the "complex social world could not be dramatized directly [. . .] and forever remained an outside, mysterious force that intervened in the dramatic action only through reports, messages, or visitors" (29). This analysis describes the function of the newspapers and the policeman who notifies the family of Mick's death in *The Entertainer* exactly. In *Look Back in Anger* the newspapers serve the same function, as do the telephone and the church bells that infuriate Jimmy. While one could argue that in *The Entertainer* the war in Egypt threatens the sanctity of the naturalist room, it is more accurate to say that the play's theatrical method keeps Suez—or, more specifically, the turbulence the crisis caused in Britain—at a distance. Malick also argues that the tragic consciousness of naturalism is "a direct result of [the] individualist approach to the problem of human existence" (29). In *Look Back in Anger*, the centrality of Jimmy's character is never in doubt; he is the tragic protagonist of naturalism. In *The Entertainer*, the tragedy is registered primarily through Archie, but also through Jean and the rest of the family. Still, despite the stylistic dislocation produced by the music hall scenes and the relative decentering of Archie as a protagonist, the play supports the individualist and subjectivist structures of feeling of naturalistic tragedy, which make it difficult for the audience to conceive any kind of collective social or political action on the basis of what they see on stage

All of the playwrights I discuss in the following chapters are more stylistically innovative than Osborne. In addition they all are, or were when they wrote the plays I examine here, avowed socialists with none of the ambivalence about socialism (or a

socialist playwright like Brecht) that Osborne exhibits. Another crucial difference between Osborne and these playwrights is that, despite the fact that his plays were seen primarily by a distinct and relatively narrow segment of society, Osborne hoped to address the nation as a whole in a way the later playwrights do not. And, in the late fifties, he believed he could. The eventual loss of this belief is registered in a 1967 *Times* article in which Osborne laments that "We live in a society of such lurching flexibility that it is no longer possible to construct a dramatic method based on a shared social or ethical system" (20). This flexibility, he continues, is the result of an "inexorable process of fragmentation [that] is inimical to all public assumptions or indeed ultimately to anything shared at all. A theatre audience is no longer linked by anything but the climate of disassociation in which it tries to live out its baffled lives" (20). The later playwrights, with the possible exception of David Hare, whose work most resembles Osborne's, nearly always target a sub-national audience of, for example, women, Scots, students, or, most commonly, leftists and intellectuals. As the plays I have examined in this chapter suggest, in the late fifties, Osborne believed that there was a beleaguered but still identifiable British culture that united diverse groups within society. This belief allowed him to express confidently his views on the state of the nation, and to hope that the nation would hear.

CHAPTER TWO

Someone Else's Land: Imperialism and Nationality in the Plays of John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy

While Osborne's early plays were social tragedies grounded in the dominant naturalistic tradition of the first half of the twentieth century, John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy drew on different theatrical models to create a very different kind of tragedy. Theirs was tragedy in the Brechtian sense of showing not only the negative effects of present social institutions, but also the historical, and therefore changeable, nature of those institutions. Arden and D'Arcy are, again like Brecht and unlike Osborne, openly committed to leftist politics. Brecht's influence also allowed the playwrights to advance far beyond Osborne's tentative and conflicted inquiry into constructions of British and English national identity. Their efforts to this end paralleled a growing academic interest, particularly among the New Left, in reconsidering the history of the British state and its empire.

Early reviewers of Arden's plays had difficulty comprehending his political project and often complained of his plays' obscurity and his refusal to take an obvious stand on the issues the plays raised. John Russell Taylor, for example, writes of the "difficulties which audiences have found with all Arden's work: you never know where he stands in the play" (10). Reactions like Taylor's are explained by an incomprehension of Arden's dramaturgy and by the fact that his ideas are expressed as much through the forms and methods of his drama as through the explicit content

of the plays. But Arden may also have misjudged his audience; in Catherine Itzin's words, he "assumed—naively perhaps—that his audience shared his socialist world view" (29). Even receptive critics often felt that Arden was at odds with his audience. Writing in the *New Left Review*, Tom Milne, editor of *Encore*, a theatre magazine that championed Arden early on, argues that his lack of commercial success can be attributed to his "refusal to allow conventional reactions from the audience" (21). "Against your will," Milne continues, "you are forced to revalue your attitudes. The result is not dissimilar to that achieved by Brecht in his didactic plays, where instinctive emotional reactions are conquered by reason" (21). Much of Arden's audience, however, felt a distinctly non-Brechtian alienation. As Javed Malick and Albert Hunt recognize, Arden develops a "supraindividual emphasis" (Malick's phrase) that deprives the audience of sympathetic central characters (17). Early in his career, as Malick observes, "there was little effort to explore whether Arden's failure to live up to the expectations of middle-class theatergoers might have been a conscious choice on his part rather than a symptom of artistic deficiency" (17). Albert Hunt, one of the first critics to comprehend Arden's artistic project, writes in *Arden: A Study of His Plays* (1974) that "On closer inspection, Arden turns out to be making demands on his audience which radically undermine the conventional responses that people bring to what Arden calls the 'legitimate' theatre." Arden, Hunt continues, "rejects the basic assumptions the cultivated theatre going public hold about what makes 'good' theatre" (22). In Hunt's view Arden turned away from mainstream

theatre “because the form of the theatre of illusion can’t contain his response to experience,” a notion to which I will return (31).

Arden was, in Dan Rebellato’s words, “the notorious box office failure of the early [Royal] Court” (*1956* 112). Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* played to 68 percent capacity over 151 performances in 1956 and 78 percent over 104 performances in 1957. With Laurence Olivier in the lead, *The Entertainer* played to 98 percent capacity during a run of 36 performances before transferring to the West End. By contrast, Arden’s *Live Like Pigs* (1958), the original production of *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1959), and Arden and D’Arcy’s *The Happy Haven* (1960) played to 34, 30 and 18 percent respectively in runs of not more than 28 performances.[42] Arden came to symbolize George Devine’s famous dictum about the playwright’s “right to fail.” But while the plays I will be discussing in this chapter are less well known than Osborne’s, Arden and D’Arcy had a strong influence on the playwrights I consider in subsequent chapters, all of whom have roots in the kind of alternative or “fringe” drama which, along with Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, Arnold Wesker’s Center 42 and a few others, Arden and D’Arcy pioneered in Britain in the late fifties and early sixties.

Arden embraced Brecht’s methods, bringing to his plays what Osborne would consider an un-English theoretical emphasis, and he struggled against the limitations of the proscenium stage. He acknowledges that Osborne and other playwrights “were

[42] Attendance figures taken from *At the Royal Court*, Richard Findlater, ed.

at last handling a whole range of material unacceptable to critics and managements, to say nothing of the Lord Chamberlain," but regrets that the "public was still expected to submit to exactly the same actor-audience relationships which had obtained at least since the start of the century" (*To Present* 49). For this reason, Arden claims that "The so-called revolution at the Royal Court and the Theatre Workshop in the late fifties had been largely a revolution of content" (*To Present* 49). As Malick explains, Osborne, Wesker and others were concerned not with "presenting or developing a new and different style of theatre but in updating, with recognizably contemporary and local subject matter and idiom, the old form of naturalism" (11).

The worldview of naturalist drama is anathema to Arden and his wife and collaborator, Margaretta D'Arcy.[43] The relationship between the world and the action of a naturalist play is deterministic; characters like Jimmy Porter, usually trapped in a confining indoor space, are helpless against the pressures of the apparently unchangeable world outside. Arden and D'Arcy, by contrast, strive to evoke what Brecht describes as "the pleasure felt when the rules emerging from [. . .] life in society are treated as imperfect and provisional" and thus to leave their audience "productively disposed even after the spectacle is over" (*Brecht* 205). Terry

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[43] Of the plays I examine in detail, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* are written by Arden alone; the others are collaborations. All of Arden and D'Arcy's full-length stage plays since Arden's *Left-Handed Liberty* (1965) have been written together. See Claudia W. Harris "An Undeviating Path: Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden" and Tish Dace "Who Wrote 'John Arden's' Plays?" both in *John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy: A Casebook*, ed. Jonathan Wike, Garland: New York, 1995, for useful discussions of the extent and nature of the collaboration. As Dace points out, Arden recalls that D'Arcy introduced him to Brecht, whom he "had only heard of" (54).

Eagleton's description of Brecht's methods could serve nearly as well for those of Arden and D'Arcy:

> Brecht recognized that [illusionistic drama] reflected an ideological belief that the world was fixed, given and unchangeable, and that the function of the theatre was to provide escapist entertainment for men trapped in that assumption. Against this, he posits the view that reality is a changing, discontinuous process, produced by men and so transformable by them. The task of the theatre is not to "reflect" a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and so how they could have been, and still can be, different. The play itself, therefore, becomes a model of the process of that production; it is less a reflection of than a reflection on, social reality. (64-5)

This distinction between reflecting reality and reflecting on it helps illuminate the differences between Arden and Osborne. Osborne strove to create an authentic portrait of his characters and their milieu. This is as true of his historical plays, including *Luther* and *A Patriot for Me*, as of *Look Back in Anger*. One might at times identify an authorial voice in Osborne's plays, but, as in an older naturalism, the presence of the author is mostly effaced. Arden and D'Arcy, on the other hand, usually through Brechtian alienation effects, constantly remind the audience that what they are seeing is constructed and mediated by the authors' intelligence. In other words, the play is an interpretation of reality. Interpretation, in turn, suggests

intention and purpose. Arden acknowledges the impossibility of transparent representation, opting instead to create a realistic—but not superficially naturalistic—picture of social relationships and historical processes. His plays are realist in the same sense that Brecht's are, always referring to (but not merely reflecting) specific events in the past and present in order to comment on contemporary society.

Another element of Arden and D'Arcy's project is to initiate a dialogue on ethnicity, nationality and, in some cases, race in the theatre and, specifically, to trace the history of formations of British identity. Osborne rarely if ever makes a clear distinction between Britishness and Englishness. For Arden and D'Arcy, however, distinctions between Irish, Welsh, Scottish and English are always important. Moving from Osborne to Arden, we can see an increasingly complex interrogation of national identity that I will follow through the work of David Hare, Howard Brenton and Caryl Churchill. This movement parallels both the revisionist tendencies of postwar British historiography and the increasing sophistication and prominence, particularly in the seventies, of an academic discourse on nations and nationalism in the work of such scholars as Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Said and Benedict Anderson. These writers have shown that national traditions and identities are dependent on specific and changing notions of otherness and are rarely as historically grounded as they are often made to seem. In *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, Osborne conceives of social and political identities almost exclusively in terms of nationality, which precedes and ultimately contains even the class differences with which Osborne is preoccupied. Jimmy Porter and, there is every reason to believe, Osborne conceive

themselves as unproblematically English and accept the forms of that identity almost unconsciously. Arden and D'Arcy, on the other hand, are always conscious of ethnic and racial difference within the United Kingdom and of related issues raised by colonialism abroad.

Arden and D'Arcy's criticism of British society becomes increasingly radical and more recognizably Marxist in the late sixties and early seventies in *The Hero Rises Up*, *The Ballygombeen Bequest*, *The Island of the Mighty* and *The Non-stop Connolly Show*. Because of this trajectory, Arden's career is often narrated as follows: a successful apprenticeship at the Royal Court culminated in one or two notable plays after which, largely as a result of his collaboration with D'Arcy, he veered wildly toward leftist politics and nontraditional drama.[44] Critics have represented the course of Arden's career as a betrayal of his talents and even of art. Simon Trussler, for example, writes that Arden's career has progressed in a "disturbing direction":

> Arden's professionalism has been diluted, in effect if not intention, by an almost exclusive involvement with community and fringe theatre groups—and this has itself reflected a shift in the political emphasis of his plays. Bolder and often cruder in outline, they have become more

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[44] Craig Clinton, for example, argues in "John Arden: The Promise Unfulfilled" that "Arden's [early, non-collaborative] work is typified by a certain neutral quality on the author's part" and that "Arden frequently seems to be observing his characters in the clear and cold light of intellectual detachment" (48). Clinton explains at one point: "As Miss D'Arcy appears to be the a more outspoken proselyte of the leftist ideal both she and her husband hold in common, one could assume that the dogmatic attitudes advanced by the author [sic] in [*The Hero Rises Up*] are due largely to her unbridled fervor" (55).

> and more directly propagandist, yet at the same time simply less accessible (in any sense) to a wide playgoing public. (*John Arden* 3)

According to Trussler, writing in 1973, Arden's plays after 1965 (primarily collaborations with D'Arcy) signal "a period of self doubt and artistic uncertainty" (*John Arden* 3).[45] He argues that it is "difficult to predict whether the balanced dialectician can transform himself into an active propagandist and still retain not his integrity—which has never been in doubt—but the qualities which have made his work to date both worthwhile and distinctive" (44). But Arden was never as detached as Trussler intends the phrase "balanced dialectician" to suggest, and the discontinuity Trussler perceives in Arden's career is not as clear as he claims. For Arden, as for Brecht, a materialist or dialectical method is necessarily political. Albert Hunt clarifies this point by explaining that Arden's work is dialectical in that, "In contrast to the theatre of illusion's simplified view of life, Arden's response is built on an intense awareness of contradictions, of the existence of opposites in any given situation" (31). This method does not obscure Arden's politics at all for Hunt, who claims that "John Arden's political position has always [. . .] been completely clear" (21). When he calls Arden a propagandist, Trussler identifies (and dismisses) Arden's hope, present from his earliest works, that his plays might effect people's opinions and actions after they leave the theatre.

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[45] Trussler largely ignores D'Arcy's contributions to the co-authored plays. The failure he sees is Arden's, even when he suggests that D'Arcy is the cause of that failure.

Brecht's conception of dialectics can clarify the nature of Arden and D'Arcy's realism. For Brecht, the alienation effect "allows the theatre to make use in its representations of the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism. In order to unearth society's laws of motion this method treats social situations as processes, and traces out all their inconsistencies" (*Brecht* 193). The sense in which Brecht uses the term "dialectic" is made clear in a passage he quotes from Lenin: "It is impossible to recognize the various happenings in the world in their independence of movement, their spontaneity of development, their vitality of being, without recognizing them as a unity of opposites" (279). "Dialectical materialism" (Brecht's phrase, as translated by John Willett) seeks to understand social and political formations by looking at past and present social relations and their development through time. In order to represent these historical processes, Arden and D'Arcy must turn away from naturalistic representation.

Arden and D'Arcy's use of history is exemplified in Arden's *Left-Handed Liberty: A Play About Magna Carta* (1965), commissioned by the City of London to commemorate the 750th anniversary of that document. Arden shows that "any idea that they were preparing 'the cornerstone of English liberty' must have been far from [the] minds" of the men who created the Magna Carta. "Indeed," Arden continues, "it was far from the minds of any Englishmen until about the end of the sixteenth century." The Magna Carta is shown to be an expedient agreement for King, Barons, Church and an emerging mercantile middle class. As Albert Hunt explains, "The effect is that we are prepared to accept the Charter, not as an historic myth, nor as a

prop in a play, but a subject for consideration" (105). Arden creates a jarring alienation effect when the actor playing King John, one of the narrators of the play, steps out of character and asks, "What use am I myself—a bogeyman or ghost seven hundred and fifty years old and still mouldering—set down to prance before you in someone else's body? What in fact have you seen tonight?" The answer Arden provides, through King John, is, "A document signed, and nobody knew what for—or at least, nobody knew or could possibly know the ultimate consequences thereof." In this way Arden challenges what he calls the "bad King John" version of history in which "the villainous king [is] brought to bay upon the banks of the Thames on a sunny day in June" (260).

In his influential book *What is History?* (1961), the historian E. H. Carr quotes Benedetto Croce's assertion that "all history is contemporary history," meaning, Carr explains, that "history consists essentially in seeing that past through the eyes of the present and in light of its problems" (22). Carr also explains that "The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present" (29). This statement sheds light on Arden and D'Arcy's attitudes toward history. Several of their plays, including *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* and *The Island of the Mighty*, represent historical situations that are intended in very specific ways to comment on contemporary ones. In "Us, Our Drama and the National Theatre," Edward Bond, who shares many of Arden and D'Arcy's historical preoccupations, writes that "Our age, like every age, needs to reinterpret the past as

part of learning to understand itself, so that we can know what we are and what we should do" (8). Bond's use of the word "reinterpret" brings up a point D. Keith Peacock stresses in *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*:

> A nation's history is not simply a record of events but is an agreed version of the past which embodies present values. As such it is a facet of what Marxists have described as that "ideological superstructure" which encompasses other art-forms, the communication media and the education system and is employed by the ruling group to perpetuate its power and dominance. To question or to attack that mythic history is, therefore, according to one's political viewpoint, tantamount either to mounting a revolutionary assault upon a bastion of the establishment or to committing an act of treason. (2)

This passage, written in reference to Arden and D'Arcy, Bond and others, helps explain both the intentions behind Arden and D'Arcy's plays and reactions to them. In his 1964 piece "Brecht and the British," a review of John Willett's *Brecht on Theatre*, Arden writes that Brecht

> was passionately concerned that the theatre should be something far more than a place of entertainment in the sloppiest sense of the word. He believed that it was a political instrument of social progress; and that the playwright, by reflecting in his work the true image of human society, assisted the members of that society to diagnose the defects in

> the image and thence to improve the reality out of all recognition. (*To Present* 37-38)

Arden explains further that “The ignorant acceptance of wrong situations that can be put right is the main enemy that Brecht set himself to fight. He understood that the traditional bourgeois theatre existed to maintain the status quo.” Brecht, Arden continues, felt that “the true theatre [. . .] was a workshop where every worker was independently and communally dedicated to the construction of an image of society that should express both the fallibility of humanity and also its potential majesty” (40). These comments reveal much about Arden and D’Arcy’s own aspirations, both in terms of their dramatic methods and also their desire for reform and democratize theatrical institutions.

In a discussion of the teleological underpinnings of traditional historiography, Carr explains that “The cult of progress reached its climax at the moment when British prosperity, power, and self confidence were at their height, and British writers and British historians were among the most ardent votaries of the cult” (146-7). Though his views are idiosyncratic, Osborne largely accepts the standards of progress—imperial privilege, economic prosperity, political might—which Carr identifies in the work of British historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Osborne dates Britain’s decline from World War I and locates the apex of the nation’s prestige and power in the Edwardian decade. There is no corresponding moment for Arden and D’Arcy. History is, for them, a discontinuous chronicle of progress and reaction. Carr writes that, for the “prophets of decline,” a “history which

has played so scurvy a trick on them cannot be a meaningful or rational process" (154-5). Though Arden and D'Arcy reject the notions of progress associated with traditional history, they do not see history as meaningless or irrational. This view is available to them because they reject the standards by which progress has most often been measured.

Carr deplores nostalgia for empire in the following passage, in which he is responding to, among other things, the spread of "political consciousness" in the former European colonies of Africa and Asia:

> relative decline is not absolute decline; and what disturbs me is not the march of progress in Asia and Africa, but the tendency of dominant groups in this country—and perhaps elsewhere—to turn a blind or uncomprehending eye on these developments, to adopt toward them an attitude oscillating between mistrustful disdain and affable condescension, to sink back into a paralysing nostalgia [. . .]. (198)

Arden and D'Arcy avoid such nostalgia. They see the dismantling of the British and other European empires as an achievement and, in fact, as a sign of progress of a very different sort than that understood by mainstream British historians. From the introduction to the published text of his 1970 radio play *The Bagman* one can infer Arden's definition of progress. He writes, "I recognize as the enemy the fed man, the clothed man, the sheltered man, whose food, clothes, and house are obtained at the expense of the hunger, the nakedness, and the exposure of so many millions of

others" (380). Progress then must concern the health and freedom of individuals and communities rather than the power and prestige of nations.

In 1959 Stuart Hall wrote of the aftermath of Suez that "the break-up of the cold war truce in 1956" had led to a "gradual unfolding of new opportunities and possibilities—in politics, art, communication and living—which many young people had never glimpsed before in the post-war years" (qtd. in Hewison, *Culture* 107). This trend, he felt sure, would continue into the 1960s. By contrast, in the final chapter of *The Long Revolution* (1961), entitled "Britain in the 1960s," Raymond Williams detects a complacent rather than a progressive consensus in the early sixties:

> [I]t is generally assumed that the democratic process has been essentially completed, with parliamentary and local government solidly established on universal suffrage, and with the class system apparently breaking up. Britain seems [to be] a country with a fairly obvious future: industrially advanced, securely democratic, and with a steadily rising general level of education and culture.
>
> There is substantial truth in this reading. It is not only the general consensus, but most attempts to challenge it seem unreasonable; even powerful local criticisms do not fundamentally disturb the sense of steady and general advance. Yet in deeper ways, that have perhaps not yet been articulated, this idea of a good society naturally unfolding itself may be exceptionally misleading. It is perhaps an intuitive sense

> of this that has given such emotional force to the total denunciations, the sweeping rejections, so characteristic of recent years [. . .]. (293-4)

When Williams speaks of "denunciations" and "rejections," he probably has in mind Osborne, among others. To some degree, both Williams and Hall are correct in their efforts to forecast the mood of the new decade. The sixties, as Hall predicts, witnessed advances in terms of personal freedom and liberal reform, and the growth of the "counterculture." But Williams is uncannily perceptive when he writes that "The contradiction between an apparently contented society and a deep current of discontent emerging mainly in irrational and ugly ways is our immediate and inescapable challenge" (*Long* 354). Disruptions like those Williams describes increased as the myth of classlessness was eroded, the Cold War continued, and violent conflict erupted in many parts of the postcolonial world.

It might seem a simplistic formulation, but there is some value in considering Arden and D'Arcy as playwrights of the 1960s.[46] The trajectory of their politics parallels the growth of vigorous anti-authoritarian movements which, though only a small minority participated in them, are one of the defining developments of the sixties. Arden and D'Arcy supported and often participated in protests against the

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[46] The pitfalls of "decadism," frequently acknowledged by historians and other commentators and perhaps nowhere more problematic than in discussing the 1960s, are exemplified in the subtitles of Arthur Marwick's *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the Untied States, c. 1958 - c. 1974* and Robert Hewison's *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960 - 1975.* In an argument specific to the theatre, Martin Esslin claims rather glibly that the Sixties started in 1956 and "brought us the dawn and the flowering of the new wave of British Theatre" (vii).

arms race, activism on behalf of the civil rights of various minorities, feminist causes and demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

Alan Sinfield writes that "'The 1960s' is of course a myth; but that is an important thing to be" (*Literature* 283). Actually, there are a number of "myths" of the sixties. Hewison identifies two that coexist uneasily when he argues that "The Sixties that form the basis of popular myth lasted for a very short time, from 1964 to 1967, and even then two ideologies were developing in parallel: the affluent and hedonistic Sixties of "Swinging London", and the oppositional culture of the underground" (*Too Much* xiii).[47] The "underground" in these years perceived a revolutionary crisis in which social hierarchies seemed on the verge of collapse. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson support Hewison's description of a dichotomous mythology of the sixties when, in *Resistance through Rituals*, they argue that the counterculture "fragmented in several directions. The two most distinctive strands flow, one way via drugs, mysticism, the 'revolution in lifestyle' into a utopian alternative culture; or the other way, via community action, protest action and libertarian goals, into a more activist politics" (61). Hall and Jefferson conclude that "The new individualism of 'Do your Own Thing', when taken to its logical extremes, seemed like nothing so much as a looney caricature of petit-bourgeois individualism of the most residual and traditional kind," a viewpoint Arden and D'Arcy share (61).

[47] The phrase "Swinging London" was coined late, in 1966, in a *Time* magazine article called "London: The Swinging City." The article states that London was "a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence. [. . .] In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene" (qtd. in Hewison *Culture* 142).

Swinging London, according to Hewison, was a "false image that disguised the reality of economic and political decline" (*Culture* 239). The currency of the myths of classlessness and affluence made that image possible. Hewison claims that "The high-gloss culture of consumption produced a curious parody of itself, a perverse inversion of its commodity values, a mirror image signalled by the prepositions and prefixes 'under', 'anti', 'counter'" (*Culture* 143). Similarly, Dave Laing writes that "The 'Cultural Revolt' of the 1960s [. . .] was a radical consumerism, aimed at the authoritarian figures (parents, police, politicians) who barred the way to new kinds of consumption (clothes, drugs, sex)" (128). These descriptions suggest the containment of apparently radical energies which, in the early sixties, were often disconnected from any coherent radical politics. This containment, Laing and Hewison suggest, was made possible by the dominant myths of affluence.

Hall and Jefferson later explain that "'affluence' assumed the proportions of a full-blown ideology precisely because it was required to cover over the gaps between real inequalities and the promised utopia of equality-for-all and ever-rising-consumption to come" (37). But, as Hall and Jefferson argue, there was, as the sixties progressed, a "rediscovery of poverty and the existence of continual, great inequalities of wealth" which belied the myth of impending classlessness and threatened the security of the postwar consensus, which they prefer to call a "stalemate" (25, 23). An increasing awareness of continuing poverty and inequality, coupled with a growing recognition of the militarism and authoritarianism of both the

British and American governments helped to bring about the more political and occasionally violent aspects of sixties radicalism with which Arden and D'Arcy identified themselves.

The more traditionally liberal, consumerist elements of the counterculture achieved something of an equilibrium with the establishment. Thus, the sixties saw what Hewison terms a "progressive consensus" which allowed "liberalisation in the personal and cultural sphere" (Hewison, *Culture* 139). The lasting and not insignificant monuments to that consensus include the easing of literary and theatrical censorship, the abolition of the death penalty, the relaxation of legislation concerning divorce and the reform (but not abolition) of laws discriminating against homosexuals. This consensus demonstrated a liberal if perhaps paternalistic tolerance on the part of the establishment that Arthur Marwick calls "secular Anglicanism."[48] Marwick wonders whether this tolerance "contributed to a beneficial stability, or to an unfortunate stagnation" (16). An individual's answer to this question would likely provide an index to their political stance. Arden and D'Arcy, to the far left and desiring revolutionary change, saw stagnation where others saw stability. With these questions of dissent and tolerance in mind, Hewison encapsulates the cultural and political dynamic of those years:

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[48] Marwick's "secular Anglicanism," which he revised in *The Sixties* to "measured judgment," is explicitly opposed to the less benign "repressive tolerance" described by Herbert Marcuse (Marwick, *Sixties* 14).

> while the progressive consensus of the sixties had replaced its conservative predecessor with a more expansive and liberal cultural regime, it was undermined by, on the one hand, the forces calling for more radical change than it was willing to grant and, on the other, by reaction against the changes that had been achieved. (*Culture* 157)

Arden and D'Arcy were among those calling for greater change, which, of course, did not come. Hewison continues:

> For those for whom the political changes of the sixties had not gone far enough, there was a sense by 1970 that whatever had been thought was going to happen in 1968 was not going to happen after all. The political drama, heightened by anger at the Vietnam War, obscured the fact that what was often called a "cultural revolution" had been just that. (*Culture* 158).

The failure of the more radical movements of the sixties is one of the main contexts for the left-wing dramatists of the 1970s; it may also explain why Arden and D'Arcy became more openly and aggressively political (some would say doctrinaire) after 1968.

Arden's criticism of the reformist and hedonistic aspects of the sixties counterculture is clear when, in the introduction to a section of his 1977 essay collection *To Present the Pretence*, he recalls that a 1964 piece collected in the volume was written at "the height of 'The Swinging Sixties', with Libertarianism (if

it comes to that Libertinism) the main social creed of the publicly aware artist" (45). In 1974, Arden described the political climate in 1966 as follows:

> The social democratic middle-class-intellectual consensus, in fact, went into a condition of crisis. [. . .] Dissent became subversion, a broad-based-liberal-outlook became the licking of-the-ass-of-LBJ, experimental art became a method of keeping the students untainted by any sort of precise thought, and sexual liberation became the means whereby the younger generation were distracted from politics. Drug-taking likewise was accorded a similar function. (*Island* 13-14)

1966 is a midpoint for Arden in his political development. In the course of this development, he abandoned the ambiguity of his earlier plays, which, though clearly political, made little direct reference to established movements, specific political philosophies or contentious issues.

Arden and D'Arcy's radicalization was accelerated by the events of 1968. In the section of *To Present the Pretence*(1977) called "The Matter of Ireland," Arden catalogs the events of 1968 that were most significant for him. In addition to the revolt in France in May of that year,

> There was the frenzy of police brutality at the Chicago Democratic convention. There was the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. [. . .] There was the prohibition by Stormont Unionism of a perfectly reasonable Civil Rights March in Derry, the incorrect accusation that Northern Irish Civil Rights was a front for the IRA, the savage attack

> upon the marchers who had the nerve to defy the ban, and the inexorable slide of the largely forgotten Irish problem into the maelstrom of blood and bitterness which to this day swirls wider and wider. (83)

Other events in 1968 also suggested that imperial and colonial issues would trouble the British into the 1970s and beyond. These include an eruption of controversy in Rhodesia over demands of the white minority there for independence and membership in the Commonwealth. Immigration policy became increasingly restrictive with the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. Enoch Powell gained notoriety by opposing the immigration of Kenyan Asians and, on April 20, 1968, delivering his infamous "rivers of blood" speech in which he claimed that "like the Romans, I seem to see the River Tiber flowing with much blood" (qtd. in Marwick 169).[49] Also, the neofascist National Front, which would gain strength in the 1970s, had been formed in 1967. The issues raised by these events, along with the inflammation of tensions in Northern Ireland, would preoccupy leftist and left-leaning playwrights and commentators throughout the seventies and focus their attention on interpretations of the imperial past.

1968 is also important in the history of postwar British theatre. Though there was no play as well known as *Look Back in Anger*, and no crisis as severe (in Britain

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[49] Powell's rhetoric is typified by the following quotations. In 1968 he said that "It is [. . .] truly when he looks into the eyes of Asia that the Englishman comes face to face with those who would dispute with him the possession of his native land." In 1976, Powell argued that "The nation has been and is still being eroded and hollowed out from within by implantation of unassimilated and unassimilable populations [. . .] alien wedges in the heartland of the state" (qtd. in Gilroy 43, 45).

at least) as Suez, the year often serves as a point of demarcation in studies of the drama of the period. For John Bull in *New British Political Dramatists* (1984) and Catherine Itzin in *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (1980), 1968 is pivotal. Bull speaks of a "Class of '68," in which he includes Howard Brenton and David Hare, the subjects of my next chapter. And, though she was not writing stage plays then, 1968—and particularly the failures of the left that it witnessed—is crucial to understanding the work of Caryl Churchill. For both Bull and Itzin, Arden and D'Arcy are transitional figures whose work anticipates the growth of left-wing political theatre in the 1970s. They were, in particular, one of the models for the "do-it-yourself" ethic and the effort to find alternative venues that characterized political and "fringe" theatre in the seventies.

By the end of the seventies a sense of crisis would again be widespread, with 1968 still figuring prominently in the imagination of many on the left. Margaret Thatcher's 1979 electoral victory represented a climax of a mood of reaction against the sixties that persisted throughout the eighties. In *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain,* Sinfield argues that "the pattern for current conditions [in 1989] was set by the late 1960s, after the passing up of an opportunity earlier in the decade [represented by, among other things, the 1964 Labour victory] to try once more for a fair society" (4). To dramatize the long term effect of the loss of that opportunity, Sinfield discusses Thatcher's comments about the sixties. Thatcher describes Britain in the fifties as "old-fashioned, structured and courteous" and "clean and orderly"

(qtd in Sinfield, *Literature* 4, 296). She blames “Sixties culture” for destroying that idyll. Thatcher characterized the sixties in this way:

> Permissiveness, selfish and uncaring, proliferated under the guise of the new sexual freedom. Aggressive verbal hostility, presented as a refreshing lack of subservience, replaced courtesy and good manners. Instant gratification became the philosophy of the young and the youth cultists. Speculation replaced dogged hard work. (qtd. in Sinfield, *Literature* 296)

David Hare noted that, even in 1989, “Trendy right-wing politicians [. . .] in hollow affectation, pretend to trace this country’s ills” to the sixties (*Writing* 21). This reaction, exemplified by Thatcher more than anyone, was accompanied by a retreat into an “old-fashioned” authoritarianism against which Arden and D’Arcy (and many other Britons) had protested in the 1960s.

Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance

Set in the second half of the nineteenth century, *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1959) tells the story of Serjeant “Black Jack” Musgrave and three soldiers in his command who return to England after stealing a sum of money and deserting the army in an unnamed overseas colony. Masquerading as a recruiting party, the soldiers arrive in mid-winter in a mining town in the north of England. The town has been

brought to a standstill by a colliers' strike. While town officials receive the soldiers enthusiastically, the strikers and others are less receptive; the townspeople hurl curses and stones at Musgrave's men and the words "Soldiers go home" are scrawled across a door. The soldiers have with them a Gatling gun and the remains of Billy Hicks, a comrade of theirs who was killed in a colonial uprising. Hicks, it is revealed, was a native of the town and had a relationship with Annie, a barmaid at Mrs. Hitchcock's tavern, who has given birth to a stillborn, malformed child as a result. Upon their arrival, the Parson, who is also a magistrate, assumes that the soldiers have come to break the strike. The Mayor of the town (also the colliery owner), encourages Musgrave to recruit the striking miners as a way of ending the strike. Through the Constable, the Mayor provides Musgrave with a list of names of "agitators" including Walsh, whom Arden describes in the dramatis personae as the "earnest collier" (in contrast to the "slow" and the "pugnacious" colliers). In the meantime the Bargee, an important minor character, informs Walsh about the Gatling gun and suggests that he steal it. Meanwhile, one of Musgrave's men, Sparky, persuades Annie to run off with him. Sparky is accused of deserting the deserters, and a fight ensues between Musgrave's soldiers in which he is accidentally killed. The Bargee, who has been bribed by the Parson, alerts Musgrave about Walsh's attempt to steal the Gatling gun. Musgrave apprehends Walsh but, because he feels some affinity for him, hides him instead of turning him over to the Constable. The following morning, Musgrave and the Mayor arrange a celebration intended to encourage the colliers to enlist. Instead, one of the soldiers, Private Attercliffe, assembles and loads the Gatling gun and trains

it on the audience, who in this instance are meant to represent the people of the town. He does not shoot. Then he and his men hoist Hicks's skeleton, still in Redcoat uniform, on the market cross in the center of town. Just before a squad of Dragoons arrive, Musgrave delivers a muddled and messianic speech about the horrors and injustice of colonial war. The Dragoons shoot one of the soldiers as he flees and arrest Musgrave and Attercliffe (12). In the final scene Mrs. Hitchcock, the publican, visits the soldiers as they await execution for desertion.

Musgrave intends to kill 25 people in order to bring home the violence of colonialism and inspire a popular protest against militarism and imperialism. He chooses that number because, in the colony where he and his men were serving, five people were killed in the aftermath of the killing of one soldier (Hicks). Musgrave's "logic" dictates: "One man, and for him five. Therefore, for five of them we multiply out, *and* we find it five and twenty." Musgrave sees this calculation as entirely logical and insists, "Logic to me is the mechanism of God" (97). This calculation is, of course, meant to seem absurd, but so is the event that provoked it: as Musgrave has witnessed, "the people in that [colonial] city was worked right up to killing soldiers, then more and more soldiers should be sent for them to kill, and the soldiers in turn should kill the people in that city, more and more, always" (96). Musgrave's "logic" responds to the irrationality of imperialism and, in its cold quantification of human life, the industrial capitalism represented by the colliery. Arden seeks to demonstrate that these systems, which extol logic, are irrational in human terms.

Arden was influenced in writing *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* by an event that occurred in Cyprus in the midst of the revolt of EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters), a paramilitary group dedicated to "the liberation of Cyprus from the British yoke" and *enosis* (union with mainland Greece) (qtd. in Crawshaw 404). A five-year guerrilla war, begun in 1955, was at its most intense during what came to be known to the British in Cyprus as "Black October" 1958, when the incident took place (Xydis 267). In an interview published in 1964, Henry Popkin asks Arden if he wrote *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* "with a social purpose in mind." Arden replies that "one of the things that set the play off was an incident in Cyprus. A soldier's wife was shot in the street by terrorists [and] some soldiers ran wild at night and people were killed in the rounding-up. The atrocity which sparks off Musgrave's revolt [. . .] is roughly similar." Arden adds that it was "quite deliberate" that in the fictional incident five people were killed (one of them a young girl), as was the case in Cyprus ("Building" 593).[50] The event to which Arden refers is the killing of one Mrs. Cutliffe, the wife of a sergeant in the Royal Artillery on October 3, 1958 in the port city of Famagusta. In response, the British arrested between 650 and 1,000 people, of whom 265 were reported injured and 17 were hospitalized. Greek Cypriot leader Archbishop Makarios condemned both the attack on Cutliffe and the "bloody orgy against Famagusta's Greek population on the part of the security forces" (qtd. in

[50] Accounts vary regarding the number of dead. Figures range from two to five. The 12-year-old girl apparently died of heart failure. One 37-year-old man was found dead with seven broken ribs. A 19-year-old male student died with a fractured skull and cerebral hemorrhage.

Xydis 269). The British press began a campaign of anti-Cypriot rhetoric, accusing Makarios of provoking the attack in a speech broadcast on the day of the murder. The *Times* excused the security forces' actions:

> There is little doubt that the troops who carried out the searches were in the grip of sheer cold rage, and there is no pretence that kid glove methods were used in rounding up the Cypriots. Excesses were probably committed in the heat of the moment—hardly to be wondered at in view of the cold blooded brutality of the murder, which has stunned the British community. ("Englishwoman" 6)

In the play, the soldiers narrate the events that followed Hicks's death and precipitated their return to England. They were commanded to "bring in the killers," who had by that time fled to the mountains (92). Told that "everyone's responsible," they were ordered to "kick front doors down, knock 'em on the head, boys, chuck 'em in the wagons" (93). This account is replicates what happened in Cyprus, where Greek Cypriots were packed into trucks and taken to detention centers. In the play, Attercliffe, the one committed pacifist among the soldiers, accidentally kills a young girl during the search. In the soldier's story, the killers remain free.

Cyprus was a problem for British politicians throughout the fifties. Turkey had ruled the island for more than three centuries, beginning in 1571. An 1878 agreement between Britain and Turkey determined that Cyprus would be administered by the British, though it would remain formally Turkish. In exchange, Britain pledged to defend the Turkish Sultan's territories from Russian encroachment.

In 1914, while at war with Turkey, the British annexed Cyprus. The island was declared a Crown colony in 1925. As Christopher Hitchens explains, for the next several decades, Cyprus "was held as a colony, not so much for its own sake but to guarantee other colonial dispensations in Egypt, Palestine and India" (31). The island served as the base for British operations during the Suez crisis and Britain retains two large bases there to this day. After Suez, Hitchens argues, "British occupation [. . .] became obsolete as well as unjustifiable" (43). But the British government was unwilling to retreat on Cyprus. For a time the British appeared resolute: in 1954 Secretary of State for the Colonies Henry Hopkinson famously said in response to a question about self-determination for Cyprus that "the question of the abrogation of British sovereignty cannot arise [. . .]." "British sovereignty," he insisted, "will remain" (qtd. in Crawshaw 76). Nevertheless, British rule ended when the Republic of Cyprus came into existence in 1960 as the result of a tripartite agreement between Britain, Turkey and Greece (76).[51]

Despite the specificity of the reference to events in Cyprus, Arden intended *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* to make a general statement about imperialism. It is clear

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[51] Hitchens argued in 1984 that "Cyprus is the last real test of British post-imperial policy; a test that so far has resulted in a succession of failures" (12). Before 1960, the British used the threat of Turkish interference or invasion to defuse a growing anti-colonial movement among the Greek Cypriot majority of the population, with the additional result of inflaming ethnic tensions. (The Greek and Turkish Cypriots comprise roughly 82 and 18 percent of the population, respectively.) After 1960 self-government for Cyprus was threatened by the demand, which had been made for decades by Greek Cypriots, for *enosis*. Many Turkish Cypriots in turn demanded either a return to Turkish rule or partition of the island. In 1974 a segment of the Republic of Cyprus National Guard led by officers from the Greek army launched a coup against the Greek Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios. Five days later, the Turks invaded and gained control of the northernmost third of the island. The island has been partitioned along this line ever since.

from the sparse, non-naturalistic staging of the original production and the indeterminacy of the setting—neither the date, the town nor the colony in which Musgrave's men have served are identified—that Arden did not want the play to seem like an exercise in documentary realism. In his introduction to the published text, he claims that "This is a realistic, but not a naturalistic play." "Therefore," he continues, "the design of the scenes and costumes must be in some sense stylised" (11). This effort distinguishes *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* from the older kind of "problem" play that Williams calls "liberal tragedy." In *Keywords*, Williams defines a kind of realism which holds that "there are many real forces—from inner feelings to underlying social and historical movements—which are either not accessible to ordinary observation or which are imperfectly or not at all represented in the way things appear" (260). In contrast to this type of realism, which *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* exemplifies, naturalism appears as a kind of superficial or "photographic" realism. According to Williams, in the non-naturalistic realism he describes an artist sees his or her object "not as static appearance but as the movement of psychological or social or physical forces; realism is then a conscious commitment to understanding and describing these. It then may or may not include realistic description or *representation* of particular features" (261). Brecht's similar conception of realism allows him to declare that "reality can be represented in a factual or a fantastic form" (*Brecht* 110).

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is subtitled "an un-historical parable," suggesting that Arden forgoes strict historical accuracy in order to suggest that the plot is exemplary. Arden writes in the program to the 1965 revival of the play:

> Please don't attach too much weight to the drama critic of *The Times* who says "When [the play] first appeared, its sidelong glances to the Cyprus troubles overshadowed the main content [. . .]. The action has now settled into legend." Cyprus may be a solved problem. May be. Aden? Malaysia? Do I have to list them? Rhodesia was once a Victorian imperialist adventure. Vietnam has never been a *British* Colony, of course, but [. . .] 1965-6 is as ugly a year's end as 1958-9, when this play was conceived and written. I propose to give all my royalties from this production to the Christian Action Funds for relief of political prisoners in South Africa. South Africa is the worst reminder we have of those historical grandfathers of ours who sent the "legendary" Serjeant Musgrave and his men off to the wars. (qtd. in Page 50)

Discussing the play in 1980, Arden stated that he "wrote a play attacking the complacency with which the British public was prepared to regard actions taken by the British Army in foreign parts. The play becomes famous. It is presented as an examination piece for schoolchildren. And the British Army continues to do exactly the same things in Ireland, and has been doing so for ten years" (qtd. in Page 51). At this point, of course, the Falklands war was still in the future, but that conflict would

provide new evidence to support Arden's argument here. That Arden believed his play was an attack on imperialism per se is attested to by the fact that in 1972 he and D'Arcy rewrote the play for John McGrath's 7:84 company as *Serjeant Musgrave Dances On*, in which a British paratrooper returns to England after participating in the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry.[52] Clearly, Arden is not merely concerned with colonial abuses that have occurred in particular places, a treatment of which could allow his audience to call for reform without questioning British imperial prerogative.

Arden's insistence that the play is an attack on the complacency of the British public is supported by the play's most striking dramatic gesture: the doubling of the theatre audience as the townspeople in the climactic scene. This doubling occurs when the Gatling gun, which the soldiers confirm is properly loaded, is aimed out into the theatre. Not only does this gesture shatter the "fourth wall" of naturalistic drama by involving the audience in the action, it clarifies the play's thesis. Arden means the audience, faced with the gun, to question the government's policy in Cyprus and elsewhere and, as Musgrave says of the townspeople, to "turn against the war" (42). The threat of violence against the townspeople of the play implies that the public is not as far removed as they might think from events in the colonies and that they are collectively responsible for the actions of the government.

After the skeleton is revealed, the soldier Hurst address the colliers: "We've earned our living by beating and killing folk like yourselves in the streets of their own

[52] *Serjeant Musgrave Dances On* is unpublished. Itzin describes the production briefly (122).

city. Well' it's drove us mad—and so we come back here to tell you how and show you what it's like. The ones we want to deal with aren't, for a change, you and your mates, but a bit higher up. The ones as never get hurt" (100). Indicating the Mayor, Parson and Constable, Hurst tells the colliers, "Him. Him. Him. You hurt them hard, they'll not hurt you again. And they'll not send us to hurt you either. But if you let 'em be, then us three'll be killed—aye and worse, we'll be forgotten—and the whole bloody lot'll start over again" (100). This dialogue between Musgrave and the colliers follows:

> MUSGRAVE. For God's sake stand with us. We've *got* to be remembered!
>
> SLOW COLLIER. We ought to, you know. He might be right.
>
> WALSH. I don't know. I Don't trust it.
>
> PUGNACIOUS COLLIER. Ahr and be damned, these are just like the same as us. Why don't we stand with them?
>
> WALSH (*obstinately*): I've not got this clear. (100-101)

Walsh is the most perceptive of the colliers and perhaps, along with Mrs. Hitchcock, the character whose views the play comes closest to endorsing. Though he seems sympathetic to the soldiers' cause, Walsh hesitates here and, after hearing of Sparky's death, decides against any action. Walsh's refusal constitutes a criticism of Musgrave's plan and methods, which Arden clearly finds both irrational and inadequate. Arden writes in *To Present the Pretence* that "by his inability to understand the political implications of the labour movement, the striking pitmen,

[Musgrave] fails, and is executed" (155). Later, Walsh comments bitterly that "The community's been saved. Peace and prosperity rules. We're all friends and neighbors for the rest of today. We're all sorted out. We're back where we were. So what do we do?" (105). This statement suggests that Musgrave's actions and the spectacle of his execution will have no effect on the imperial system and that a more reasoned and humane means must be found to bring about change in that system. Walsh's words also imply that the answer to Attercliffe's symbolic question to Musgrave at the end of the play, "They're hang us up a length higher nor most apple trees grow, Serjeant. Do you reckon we can start an orchard?" will be negative (110). Walsh's question, "So what do we do?" suggests that the colliers must find a solution for themselves and that it must be a collective solution rather than the individual martyrdom Musgrave craves. In addition, the irony in Walsh's comment about "peace and prosperity" can easily be seen as a statement on the "affluent" culture of the late fifties. By implication, then, the remark argues that the prosperity and peace of the late fifties are shared unequally, with the working classes experiencing little prosperity and colonized peoples abroad little peace.

Musgrave is fanatically religious, claiming that "my power's the power of God" (11). Arden states that Musgrave is "one of those Crimean sergeants who fought with rifle in one hand, and bible in the other" ("Building" 593). Arden also explains that "Musgrave is a product of moral confusion, of a country that relies on war to solve its problems" (qtd. in Page 47). Before his experiences in the colonies and his subsequent breakdown, Musgrave must have been convinced of the absolute

rightness of the imperial cause. His tragedy is that he has been molded by imperial ideology to such an extent that, when he eventually rejects that ideology, he is unable to express his dissent rationally. As Helen Forsas-Scott explains, “The Serjeant’s strategy for his peace mission is in true military style, the intended climax being the crudely primitive and only too familiar measure of large scale retaliation” (8).

Musgrave’s religious belief is tied to a sense of patriotic duty, two doctrines that, together or separately, have underpinned imperialism. In the following speech to Annie, Musgrave stresses the importance of discipline and duty:

> Our work isn’t easy, no and it’s not soft: it’s got a strong name—duty. And it’s drawn out straight and black for us, a clear plan. But if you come to us with what you call your life or love—*I’d* call it your indulgence—and you scribble all over that plan, you make it crooked, dirty, idle, untidy, *bad*—there’s anarchy. I’m a religious man. I know words, and I know deeds, and I know how to be strong. So do these men. You will not stand between them and their strength! (57)

Musgrave’s values are opposed to “life” and “love,” which are associated with the women in the play. This characterization suggests that there is something exaggeratedly masculine about Musgrave and the military culture he represents. (This opposition and the gender essentialism that underlies it are evident in other Arden and Arden and D’Arcy plays, especially *The Island of the Mighty*.) In the final scene, Mrs. Hitchcock visits Musgrave and Attercliffe in jail. She recalls Musgrave’s words about life, love and anarchy and demands of him: “use your logic—if you can. Look at it

this road: here we [the townspeople] are, and we'd got life an love. Then you came in and did your scribbling where nobody asked you. Aye, it's arsy-versey to what you said, but it's still anarchy, isn't it? And it's all your work." (108). When Musgrave responds, "Don't tell me there was life or love in this town," Mrs. Hitchcock replies that "There was. There were hungry men, too—fighting for their food. But you brought in a different war" (108). Life and love are essential, but, the passage suggests, inadequate in themselves to bring about social change. At the same time, though, life and love reveal the weakness of Musgrave's stern philosophy, a point which Attercliffe, the pacifist, acknowledges near the end of the play: "To end it by its own rules: no bloody good. She's right, you're wrong. You can't cure the pox by further whoring" (108).

Musgrave recognizes that the soldiers and the colliers share a common cause against the factions represented by the Mayor, Parson and Constable. The townspeople, he tells his comrades, are "trembling already into the strikers' riots. Well, their riots and our war are the same one corruption. This town is ours, it's ready for us: and its people, when they've heard us, and the Word of God, crying the murders that we've done—I'll tell you they'll turn to us, and they'll turn against that war!" (42). As we have seen, nothing of the sort happens. Musgrave's failure largely results from his inability to act effectively on the camaraderie he feels with the strikers. He is unable to appeal to the colliers and they (or at least Walsh) are rightly suspicious of his methods and messianic rhetoric. This distrust is obvious from Walsh's first meeting with Musgrave, when he tells him, "There's a Union made at

this colliery, and we're strong." He adds that the soldiers, unlike the colliers, "fight for pay. You go sailing on what they call punitive expeditions, against what you call rebels, and you shoot men down in streets. But not here. These streets is our streets" (38). In an important scene in the tavern, Musgrave addresses Walsh as a "brother." A moment later, Walsh objects to his fellow miners' drinking on Musgrave's money, and this exchange follows:

> MUSGRAVE. [. . .] I wasn't given these—(*he touches his stripes*)—for not knowing men from ninepins. Now I'm telling you one word and I'm telling you two, and that's all. (*He lowers his voice*) You and me is brothers—
>
> WALSH. (*in high irony*). Eh begod! A Radical Socialist! Careful, soldier, careful; Do you want to be hanged?
>
> MUSGRAVE. (*very seriously*). No jokes. I mean this. I mean it. Brothers in God—
>
> WALSH. (*even more scornful*). Oh, hoho, that—
>
> MUSGRAVE. —And brothers in truth. So watch and wait. I said, wait.
>
> WALSH. (*jeering*). Brothers in God.
>
> Gentle Jesus send us rest
>
> Surely the bosses know what's best!
>
> *Get* along with yer— (60)

Musgrave's effort to involve the colliers in his plans, this passage suggests, is thwarted by his religion, which Walsh sees as buttressing the authority of the "bosses." Walsh's ironic description of Musgrave as a socialist suggests that he defines "brotherhood" in terms of class rather than nationality or religion, and that he is skeptical of the ability of a man as thoroughly identified with the imperial hierarchy as Musgrave to mount a meaningful protest against the establishment.

Arden describes the establishment figures (the Mayor, the Constable and the Parson) not as caricatures, but as "silhouettes," indicating that they are not exaggerated, but that the details are left out. "Only the parts of [the Mayor's] character that are important to the play are seen," Arden explains ("Arden" 18). This technique makes the characters seem typical and implies that the relationships between them may also be typical. The Mayor also owns the colliery and the Parson is also a magistrate, details which emphasize the relationships between economic, political and religious power. The absent figure in this picture of the establishment arrives at the end of the play in the person of the Dragoon Officer. In his introduction to the play, Arden calls the officer a "deus-ex-machina" and stipulates that he need only be "tall, calm, cold and commanding" (12). Like the other establishment figures, the officer is a silhouette. Arden argues that, both in Britain and abroad, the military is the ultimate guarantor of the system of power depicted in the play. By refusing this coercive function, Serjeant Musgrave threatens the system, though he is quickly neutralized by the military force he once represented. The importance of military power in maintaining the status quo is highlighted in the Mayor's expectation at the

beginning of the play that the soldiers have come to put down the strike. As Page points out, troops were often stationed in northern towns for that purpose in the nineteenth century (34).

Arden shows that the military also serves to defuse or export internal violence and unrest. The following exchange emphasizes this point. The Parson begins by praising Musgrave and his men:

> PARSON. Fine strong men. They make me proud of my country. Mr. Mayor, Britain depends on these spirits. It is a great pity that their courage is betrayed at home by skulkers and shirkers. What do *you* think?
>
> MAYOR (*looking at him sideways*). I think we'll use them, Parson. Temporary expedient, but it'll do. The price of coal has fell, I've had to cut me wages, I've had to turn 'em off. They say they'll strike, so I close me gates. We can't live like that for ever. There's two ways to solve this colliery—one is build the railway here and cut me costs of haulage, *that* takes two years and an Act of Parliament, though God knows I want to do it. The other is clear out half the population, stir up a diversion, turn their minds to summat else. The Queen's got wars, she's got rebellions. Over the sea. (28)

When the Parson comments that "The soldier's calling is one of honour," the Mayor responds that it is also "bloody convenient" (28). The Parson voices the ideology of

imperial Britain in its purest, most idealistic form. The Mayor does not dissent exactly, but his investment in the ideas the Parson espouses is entirely self-interested. For the Parson the nation is paramount; for the Mayor patriotism is a means of protecting his personal and class interests. The imperial ideology the Parson spouts is exactly what was, for many Britons, discredited in Suez and Cyprus. Introducing the soldiers to the crowd as the play nears its climax, the Parson comments, “And if our country is great, and I for one am sure that it is great, it is great because of the greatness of its responsibilities. They are world wide. They are noble. They are the responsibilities of a first-class power” (85). These are exactly the “responsibilities” (a word choice which points to the way in which colonialism was justified as a “civilizing” mission) that Britain has lost in the postwar years. The Parson continues: “when called to shoulder our country’s burdens we should do it with a glancing eye and a leaping heart, to draw the sword with gladness, thinking nothing of our petty differences and grievances—but all united under one brave flag, going forth in Christian resolution, and showing a manly spirit!” (85). By “petty differences and grievances” the Parson means class differences and economic grievances, which he feels should be transcended by religion and national loyalty. If they are, the play suggests, the imperial and capitalist system would be destabilized. The military can help to prevent this collapse, preferably by siphoning off discontented workers and encouraging patriotism but also, as the play shows, by force if necessary.

In his 1963 introduction to the English translation of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre writes that “Violence has changed its direction.” He

explains, speaking as a citizen of a European imperialist state, that "violence comes back on us through our soldiers, comes inside and takes possession of us" (24).[53] In *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Arden's thesis resembles Sartre's (which is ultimately Fanon's). He wants to show that violence perpetrated in the colonies cannot be contained or held at arm's length. During Musgrave's long speech in the climactic penultimate scene, he exhorts the people: "Join along with my madness, friend. I brought it back to England but I've brought the cure too—to turn it on to them that sent it out of this country—way-out-ay they sent it, where they hoped only soldiers could catch it and rave! Well, here's three redcoat ravers on their own kitchen hearthstone!" (98). Musgrave imagines imperialism as a disease—a madness—that, in addition to inflicting immeasurable suffering on colonized peoples, weakens the imperial nation-state. Ultimately, the cycle of violence that brought Musgrave to the town begins with the imperialist. But the specific sequence of events that brought him there began with a violent anti-colonial action. Thus, the play implies, the imperial state must grapple simultaneously with the violence of its own agents and with the hostility that that violence engenders.

A comparison of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *The Entertainer* makes clear important differences between Arden's and Osborne's attitudes toward empire and helps in understanding Arden's political project early in his career. Both plays

[53] This theme is also dramatized in Edward Bond's *Saved*. Barry, who initiates the infamous attack on the baby in the pram, has served overseas and boasts of "Shootin' up the yeller-niggers. An' cut 'em up after with the ol' pig-sticker" (29). During the attack, Colin tells Barry that the child "Looks like a yeller-nigger" (68).

respond to contemporary events in the empire, and both hold those events at a distance because they are primarily concerned with the meaning of those events for British society. But, unlike Osborne, Arden is deeply concerned with the immorality of imperialism. He demonstrates, without attempting to depict the sufferings of colonized people in great detail, that imperial history is not simply British history, and his play witnesses the effects of imperialism on both the imperialist and colonized subjects. Arden achieves a broad perspective that sees imperialism as a function of power disparities between peoples and draws attention to the violence those disparities make possible. Though he does not examine the subtleties of imperial racism and colonial subjectivities, Arden's move away from an Anglocentric view of imperial history in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* enables him, as becomes increasingly clear in later plays, to see the dissolution of empire not as a passing to be mourned, but as a precondition for the development of more equitable social and economic relationships in Britain as well as abroad.

Armstrong's Last Goodnight

Armstrong's Last Goodnight (1964) concerns the life and death of John Armstrong of Gilnockie, a sixteenth-century Scottish border "reiver," and his fictional dealings with Sir David Lindsay, King James V of Scotland's herald and former tutor. Relatively little historical information is available on Armstrong and Arden admits

that “This play is founded on history: but it is not to be read as an accurate chronicle” (239).[54] The obscurity of this history is compounded by the popularity of ballads narrating Armstrong’s death. Armstrong was killed in 1530, when James V was still in his teens. After a long minority, the king, perhaps anxious to demonstrate his ability to govern, soon earned a “reputation for ruthlessness” and “personal vindictiveness” (Nicholls 82, 83). Mark Nicholls explains that “Some rather dubious circumstances surrounding [Armstrong’s death] impressed numerous contemporaries, which was no doubt the object: trouble from the south was minimal during the remainder of the reign” (82). But the play is not intended merely as a comment on Scottish and British history; Arden draws parallels between the plot of the play and events in the Congo in the early 1960s, suggesting that he is making a more general comment about colonialism and state formation.

James V was the son of Henry VIII’s sister Margaret Tudor, which provided him with a claim to the English throne. He was also the father of Mary Queen of Scots and grandfather of James VI, who would become James I of England. The events of the play occur in the wake of the devastating Scottish defeat at Flodden in 1513, in which James IV was killed. More significantly, the action in many ways anticipates the Act of Union of 1707 and must be interpreted in the light of later developments. During the period in which the play is set, according to one historian, “Out of the parcellized, localized, fragmented authority structures of the late middle

[54] For a useful nonacademic discussion of various accounts of Armstrong see George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets*, pp. 233-237.

ages, a sovereign state arose" in Scotland (Goodare 1). It was also a time when "Scottish governments abandoned their traditional hostility to England and adopted a more friendly stance—varying from distrustful cooperation to enthusiastic support for Anglo-Scottish union" (Goodare 3). For the English, according to John Guy, "the linchpin of Tudor security was the need to control Scotland" (290). For this reason, when James IV entered into an alliance with France in 1492, Henry VII began a complicated diplomacy which led to the treaty of Perpetual Peace between England and Scotland in 1502 and the marriage of Henry's daughter to James IV. By alluding to these circumstances, Arden shows the centralization of power in the British Isles in process and thereby denaturalizes the bases of that power. At the same time, by refusing to appeal to traditional Scottish nationalist sentiment, he avoids the mistake Linda Colley warns against when she cautions her readers against believing "that the Act of Union was a piece of cultural and political imperialism foisted on the Scots by their stronger southern neighbor" (12). Many Scots, as Colley takes pains to show in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, supported the union, and many profited immensely from it.

It can be argued that the central character of *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* is Sir David Lindsay rather than the title character.[55] Lindsay, a poet, diplomat and tutor

[55] Arden was very impressed by a 1949 Edinburgh production of Lindsay's play *A Satire of the Three Estates*. In the play Arden "could discern the possibility of a modern drama that would deal as pertinently with the present ills of the world as Sir David Lindsay had dealt with those of the sixteenth century, and yet would not be compelled to renounce the excitement and splendour of the old theatre I had been brought up to believe in" (qtd. in Page 2-3). Arden also explains that Lindsay's play helped him with the language of *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* by giving him "a sophisticated Scots style as opposed to the rough style of the ballads" ("Who's" 50).

to James V of Scotland tries to bring the border freebooter Armstrong into the King's service and thereby preserve a fragile accord between James V and Henry VIII. After the English objected to Armstrong's raids into England James V outlawed him. Yet after Lindsay offers him a royal pardon and sovereignty over his section of the border, Armstrong proves more and more difficult to control. Much political intrigue ensues between Lindsay, the lowland Scottish Nobles, including Armstrong's liege Lord Maxwell, and the Cardinal of St. Andrews. Eventually, Lindsay promises Armstrong safe passage to meet James V and receive his new title. Armstrong gives up his weapons and is captured and hanged by the king.

Arden is careful not to romanticize Armstrong, who could otherwise be seen as a nationalist hero and martyr. An early scene shows Armstrong accompanying his enemy James Johnstone of Wamphray, with whom he has declared a truce, on a hunting trip. As Armstrong suspects, Wamphray has been bribed to kill him. During the night, Armstrong's men steal or disable Wamphray's weapons. In collusion with Armstrong, Wamphray's sworn enemy Stobs brutally murders Wamphray. No matter that Wamphray is a thoroughly unattractive character, this scene undermines the audience's expectations regarding the protagonist of the drama. Here and throughout the play Armstrong is presented as a crude, vain, and occasionally sadistic warlord. Much as he does in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Arden deprives his spectator of the sort of sympathetic protagonist common to naturalistic drama. Neither the crude Armstrong nor the sophisticated but ruthless Lindsay satisfy that expectation.

The play begins with a conference of ministers representing the Scots and English monarchs. The succession to the Scottish throne, excises and claims for damages have been settled to the satisfaction of the English. The remaining matter is, in the words of the English commissioner, the "bleeding anarchy and murderous rapine" that has occurred on the border. The English make veiled threats and remind the Scots of their defeat at Flodden. Suspecting that Scottish nobles have condoned the raids, the English ministers insist that "the offenders must be punished, at the hand of Scotland's Grace, and he be seen to punish them" (249). This charge provokes the angry counterclaim by a Scots commissioner that "for every heid of cattle the Scots hae grippit, your English carls took twelve" (250). There follows a catalog of outrages committed by Armstrong and his cohorts, and the meeting breaks up as the Scots commissioner declares that Armstrong will not be punished until the English borderers are likewise punished. The scene ends with one of the Scots telling the English, "Aye, ye won Flodden. But ye didna win the kingdom. Nor will ye win it, by ane second cast, nor third, nor fourth against it. We are forwarnit of your malice, lords, and we ken but owerweel whaur the blame for further war will lodge" (252).

This is the diplomatic impasse that Lindsay faces. He is introduced in the second scene of the play. Shedding his official livery, Lindsay speaks:

> This coat is irrelevant:
>
> I will wear it no further
>
> Till Armstrong be brocht

Until the King's peace and order.

I will gang towart his house

As ane man against ane man,

And through my craft and humanity

I will save the realm frae butchery

Gif I can, good sir, but gif I can. (254-55)

This passage indicates Lindsay's faith in his intellect and statesmanship, which will be shaken by the end of the play. Significantly, Lindsay does not specify the source of the "butchery" that threatens the realm. Though the context of his speech suggests mainly the English threat, Wamphray's gruesome death, which dramatizes the destabilizing effects of civil strife, comes two brief scenes later. After Wamphray is killed, Stobs's daughter Meg enters and sings a lament. Lindsay states that "The grief of this woman is the grief of the Common-weal of Scotland. Naebody to hear it, and but few to comprehend it, gif they did" (266). Immediately after this first speech, the Scots clerk tells Lindsay that he must succeed because "Scotland can nocht sustain ane other war with England" (256). In order to protect the state, Lindsay must bring Armstrong into the king's good graces. The only way to prevent war in the long term, Lindsay believes, is to consolidate authority in the Scottish monarch in order to maintain the treaty and balance the power of Henry VIII. Lindsay's allegiance to the monarchy and the state—as opposed to any local or ethnic loyalty—distinguishes him from Armstrong and most of the other characters in the play.

Armstrong's loyalties are fiercely local. His wife declares at one point that Armstrong "is his people, and his people were once the King's, but now they are naebody's. Gilnockie is their ae protection" (270). The Armstrongs' rejection of national identification is clear when Lindsay first arrives at Armstrong's castle. He announces that he has been sent by the king. "And whatten King wad that be?" Armstrong's kinsman asks. Lindsay replies "King James of Scotland: what King d'ye think else?" The kinsman answers: "King of Scotland? King of bloody Lothian. That's the best name he carries here" (268). To counter this localism, Lindsay must make a patriotic appeal to Armstrong, assuring him that James V "wants to prevent ane English conquest of the kingdom" (275). Lindsay also invokes Bannockburn, from whose victors Armstrong believes himself to be descended, and tells Armstrong that "English policy sin the time of heroic Wallace is the domination of Scotland and the destruction of her rulers" (275). Lindsay then changes tack and tries to diminish Armstrong's sense of his own position, especially relative to the king. He tells Armstrong that he is "ane inconvenience [. . .] ane tedious nuisance to the realm. Ye are indeed cause for ane itchy paragraph or twae in some paper of state" and insists that he must not continue to provoke Henry VIII (273). The mention of the "paper of state" emphasizes Lindsay's power with language (Armstrong, by contrast, has a severe speech impediment) and illustrates the codification of James V's state apparatus. Armstrong accepts these appeals (along with a royal pardon and the titles "Warden of Eskdale" and "Free Lieutenant of the King") and, for a time, suspends the raids (276). But when, largely because of the jealousy of Lord Maxwell, Lindsay

can’t deliver on his promises, Armstrong again strikes out on his own. It is at this point that Lindsay decides to have him killed. In the penultimate scene the king appears, initially in disguise, and condemns Armstrong for having “embroilit and embranglit us with England the common enemy: and by dint of malignant faction ye have a’ but split the realm” (347).

The resort to violence is a defeat for Lindsay. Early on he alludes to the story of the Gordian knot and asks “Why in God’s Name could [Alexander] no be a human man instead and sit down and unravel it?” (256). After he decides to eliminate Armstrong, Lindsay returns to the story:

> Through craft and through humanity—
>
> Alas, and mortal vanity,
>
> We are but back whaur we began.
>
> A like coat had on the Greekish Emperour
>
> When he rase up his brand like a butcher’s cleaver:
>
> There was the knot and he did cut it.
>
> Ane deed of gravity. Wha daur dispute it? (340)

In the repetition of the words “craft and humanity” from his first speech, Lindsay recognizes his arrogance and, perhaps, his condescension toward Armstrong. There is, apparently, no place for “craft and humanity” in the politics of the play. At the end of the play, the king asks Lindsay to “recount to [the English ambassador] the course of our Royal justice here at Carlanrigg” (349). Lindsay knows exactly what this rough justice has accomplished, and he tells the king that “The man is deid, there will be no

war with England: this year. There will be but small turbulence on the Border: this year. And what we hae done is no likely to be forgotten: this year, the neist year, and mony year after that" (349). For Arden, this fragile and temporary peace stands as an indictment of a political system in which authority is maintained by force and coercion. The play ends with Lindsay's anecdote about the tree from which Armstrong was hanged:

> It did fail and it did wither upon the hill of Carlanrigg, as ane dry exemplar to the warld: here ye may read the varieties of dishonour, and determine in your mind how best ye can avoid whilk ane of them, and when. Remember: King James the Fifth, though but seventeen years of age, did become an adult man, and learnt to rule his kingdom. He had been well instructit in the necessities of state by that poet that was his tutor. (350)

The poet who aspired to intervene in politics has become, against his intentions, an example to the ruthless monarch. The implication is that dishonor is inherent in politics, at least in this system. While state building may benefit some, the play suggests, there is always a cost in lives and freedom. The image of the dead tree recalls Attercliffe's question about the apples and the orchard at the end of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. The absence of the interrogative in *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* suggests a grimmer assessment of the political situation depicted in that play.

In *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, Arden draws attention to important issues of nationality and the modern state that will come to the fore in *The Island of the*

Mighty. In her analysis of the creation of the modern British state, Linda Colley writes, "if we accept that, historically speaking, most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties" (5). Arden makes a similar point in *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*. By demonstrating that nations and national identities are neither timeless nor natural, Arden demands that his audience reexamine these concepts. He hopes this effort will reveal that "inventing" a nation is more difficult than securing borders and eliminating enemies. While such material considerations are important, the ideological task of installing a cohesive national identity is at least equally important. In this play, we see that effort complicated by preexisting national and subnational loyalties to the extent that it can be only partially successful. Still, in *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* Arden is concerned firstly with the material and political aspects of nation-building. In *The Island of the Mighty* and *The Hero Rises Up*, both written with D'Arcy, the focus shifts to the mythological and ideological underpinnings of British identity.

Armstrong's Last Goodnight was initially presented at the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre in 1964 before transferring first to the Chichester Festival and then to the National Theatre at the Old Vic in 1965. Arden sees the play's enthusiastic reception in Glasgow as a result of the audience's "experience of Scotland—of a discontented 'region' of the United Kingdom aware of its historical claim to its own unique

identity and language, and aware of a theatrical reflection of that claim in the play upon the stage, a reflection consciously projected by the actors in response to a realized demand for it" (6). For such an audience there is an inherent appeal in seeing neglected histories and hearing unofficial, regionally inflected language on the stage. Nationalist and anti-imperialist cultural movements often strive for effects of this nature. But Arden does not provide his Scottish spectators a familiar nationalist polemic. To take this play as such, the audience would have to ignore not only the subtleties of Arden's ideas about nationality, but also the numerous instances in which he points out the mistrust, factionalism and bigotry that divide the Scots of the Highlands, the Lowlands and the Borders. He dwells on feuds between the Scottish nobles and political intrigue involving the nobles, the monarchy and the church. In these ways, Arden recognizes that, as Tom Nairn has written, "Different as English speaking Scotland was from its southern neighbor, it actually contained a much greater internal differentiation within its own historical frontiers" (147). Similarly, Colley observes that "in terms of language, religion, levels of literacy, social organisation and ethnicity, Scottish Lowlanders had far more in common with the inhabitants of northern England than they did with their own Highland countrymen" (14). At one point, Lindsay proposes that a buffer state be declared between Scotland and England. He asks his secretary McGlass to recite this adage: "The English of the North and the Border Scot / Are ilk ane like the ither: / Their tongue is the same and their life is the same / Ilk man is as puir as his brither" (324). Though Lindsay's proposal is impractical, it acknowledges the flexibility of borders and the political

expedients by which they are sometimes determined. Though *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* is in the end a nationalist play, lines like these make it a demanding one. Even a very sympathetic audience would have to undertake some rather complex historical reflection in order to comprehend Arden's arguments fully. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that it is anachronistic to speak of a Scottish nation in the modern sense in the sixteenth century, a time when, throughout the British Isles, local and regional identities often remained more powerful than emergent national ones.

Near the end of act one, a Protestant Evangelist arrives at Armstrong's castle with an English Bible. In the note that precedes the play, Arden acknowledges that he has "made rather free with the date of the Reformation," which suggests that the incident is important to the meaning of the play (239).[56] A discussion involving the secretaries to Lord Johnstone, Lord Maxwell and the Cardinal shows that these elites perceive the Reformation as a dire threat. Motivated by an uncertain mixture of political expediency and a desire to be washed "white in the blood of the Lamb," Armstrong embraces the new faith (333). It is not entirely clear why Armstrong is attracted to the Evangelist's teachings, but they suit his individualism and allow him to defy Lindsay by saying "I am naebody's man but God's" (333). In an argument Armstrong witnesses, the Evangelist quotes this passage from Ephesians against Lindsay: "For we wrastle against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against

[56] Though perhaps not too free. English-language new testaments translated by William Tyndale were available in London no later than 1528, and in 1530, the year Armstrong was killed, a man was burned at the stake for possessing an English Bible. Thus the presence of a single itinerant evangelist in possession of an English New Testament in Scotland in 1530 is not impossible.

spiritual wickedness in hie places" (284). This episode suggests that, for Armstrong, Protestantism justifies his rejection of hierarchy and James V's authority, a reading supported by the fact that, when Armstrong believes himself to be back in the King's favor, he repudiates the Evangelist.

For my purposes, Lindsay's interest in the Evangelist is more significant.[57] We see him purchase an English Bible from the Evangelist. The Evangelist recites the Bible verse quoted above in response to Lindsay's citation, also from Ephesians: "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters" (284). For Lindsay, Protestantism sanctions his service to the king. Hugh Kearney explains that "The Bible in English was to prove to be a formidable instrument of anglicisation" (*British* 158). According to Kearney, the Reformation "provided an additional impulse toward the assertion of full cultural dominance by the south over the rest of England and Wales and in due course Ireland and Scotland" (*British* 145). By working to secure peace between the two nations, Lindsay is furthering a process that would culminate in the Act of Union. And Lindsay's interest in Protestantism links him with Henry VIII in the minds of the secretaries; the Cardinal's secretary is suspicious of Lindsay, asking the others, "And this is the man the king has sent to safeguard the English

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[57] The historical Lindsay's *A Satire of the Three Estates* is, among other things, a defense of Protestants who had been burned at the stake and an attack on the church hierarchy. At one point the figure Verity, persecuted by a Bishop, prays as follows:

> Get up, thou sleepis all too lang, O Lord,
> And mak some reasonable reformatioun
> On them that does tramp doun Thy Gracious Word,
> And has a deadly indignatioun
> At them that maks maist true narratioun. (73)

Verity carries with her an English New Testament.

Border?" He speculates that Lindsay "is nae Luther yet. Likewise we think the King of England is, as yet, nae Luther" (297). Lindsay's attraction to Protestantism is Arden's way of recognizing that the Reformation, in the long term, will bring Scotland and England even closer together than will political union.

Arden records that the idea for *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* came from two sources: the ballad called "John Arm-strongs last Good Night," which was published in three versions in Francis J. Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1889), and Conor Cruise O'Brien's *To Katanga and Back* (1962), a memoir of the 1961 United Nations mission to the Congo (*Plays: One* xv). Arden explains that he reread the ballad after moving to Co. Galway in 1962 and that he "imagined the events of the ballad emanating" from a sixteenth century Gaelic Irish castle in the area, suggesting that he sees Ireland and Scotland as having been subject to a similar history (*Plays: Two* xv).[58] Then, Arden recalls, with the themes of the ballad still in mind,

> I read [O'Brien's] book about Katanga and considered *that* as a dramatic subject. But I knew nothing about Africa—besides there was a language problem. Congolese Negroes talk French some of the time and their own tongue at others. How was I to find an equivalent for

[58] "The Gaelic Irish," he explains, "had much the same reputation with the anglophone citizens of the nearby colony-town of Galway as had the Armstrongs with the farmers of Cumberland and Northumberland" (*Plays: Two* xv).

> that on the English Stage? But once I had connected the book with the ballad, I was happily back in the old North again. ("Who's" 50)

These comments reveal Arden's ambition to make a broad comment about colonialism as an international phenomenon not limited to Scotland or Ireland or even the British Empire. At the same time, however, it shows a lack of confidence in treating contemporary situations directly. This uncertainty, and the indirection it produces, makes the play more interesting as a comment on state formation in early modern Europe than on imperialism and decolonization in the twentieth century.

The three versions of the Armstrong ballad reprinted by Child vary in emphasis. One version enumerates Armstrong's successes against the English, lamenting that "Scotlands heart was never so wae" as when he and his men were killed and explains that the Armstrongs should be remembered "Because they savd their country deir / Frae Englishmen; nane were sae bauld, / Whyle Johnie livd on the border syde, / None of them durst cum neir his hald" ("Johnie Armstrong").[59] All three, however, focus on Scottish treachery. In one account, Armstrong is slain by a "falce" and "cowardly" Scot. This version ends with an image of Armstrong's son on his nurse's knee and asserts that "if ere he live'd for to be a man, / O the treacherous Scots revengd hee'd be" ("John Arm-strongs"). It is this aspect of the story on which

[59] These lines are closely echoed in Arden's play. One of Armstrong's kinsmen sings:

> Of a gentleman I sing a sang
> Sometime called Laird of Gilnockie.
> He aye wad save his country dear
> Frae the Englishman. Nane are sae bauld
> While Johnny doth ride on the border-side
> Nane of them daur come near his hauld! (321)

Arden focuses, and which prevents his play from being a simple anticolonial or nationalist polemic. Though in his later collaborative plays with D'Arcy he would take an open anti-imperialist stance, Arden avoids such a position in this play. By showing disunity and betrayal among the Scots he achieves his stated goal of including "checks and balances" to complicate the politics of the play (qtd. in Page 77).

But the cultural associations of the ballad tradition tend to make Arden's subject matter here more readily available for nationalist appropriation. Child and others compiled ballads and songs in order to preserve "authentic" folk cultures which they felt were being destroyed by industrialization. At least since Wordsworth, ballads have been associated with Romanticism and related notions of the "folk." As is very clear in much nineteenth-century Irish nationalist literature, the folk culture represented by ballads has often been defined as a specifically national tradition, even when the nation in question is not congruent with a modern political state.. Arden recognizes some of the implications of the ballad tradition when he comments, "I think most people are still affected by the romanticism of border ballads, outlaws, and all the rest of what Walter Scott brought in" (50).[60] Arden's play profits by drawing on ballad and folk traditions to provide color and apparent authenticity, and to appeal to an audience likely to dissent from mainstream notions of Britishness. This appeal, however, could run counter to Arden's intentions in the play. That he struggles

[60] According to Fraser, "It is not too much to say that Scott made the legendary Border as most people understand it" (6).

against this romanticism, as I have said, is evident in the way he portrays Armstrong first as a cold-blooded murderer and later as a vain, lecherous and foolhardy adventurer.

The nuances of Arden's use of O'Brien's memoir are difficult to ascertain and create a problem in interpreting *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*.[61] Some historical background on the Congo crisis is required. The Belgian Congo was the site of some of the worst abuses of imperialism. The atrocities there sparked what is often considered the first modern civil rights campaign, largely among the liberal press in Britain and the United States.[62] From 1908 to 1960, the Belgian Congo, which replaced the privately owned Congo Free State, remained a lucrative colony in which African political associations were outlawed. In response to a growing anti-colonial movement, the Republic of the Congo was hastily granted independence on June 30, 1960. Within a week, its feeble governmental institutions collapsed. President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba, founder of the Congo National Movement, each tried to dismiss the other, and the army mutinied on July 5. Then Belgian paratroopers intervened. On July 11, Katanga, the Congo's richest province, declared itself independent under Moise Tshombe. Tshombe and Katanga had substantial Belgian support. The following day, Kasavubu and Lumumba asked the United

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[61] The play is dedicated to O'Brien with a flattering epigraph from John Skelton.

[62] For a recent account both of the abuses and of the protests against them, seem Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*.

Nations for assistance. Thus began what was at the time the UN's largest military mission.

The Katanga secession, which lasted until January 1963, is the focus of *To Katanga and Back* and the element of the Congo Crisis that most interests Arden. The secession ended only after violent conflict between UN forces and the European-trained (and possibly European-commanded) Katanga gendarmerie. O'Brien participated as one of the main UN negotiators in the Katangan capital of Elisabethville, trying to negotiate the end to the secession and the removal of European mercenaries and military advisors. O'Brien's account is mostly pro-UN. He essentially agrees with "the point of view of the Central Government, and of its friends abroad" that "these revolutionary proceedings amounted to annexation, for the benefit of foreign interests, most of the resources and a large part of the territory, of the newly independent Republic of the Congo" (88). This is an anticolonial position, aligning the Irish diplomat with the newly independent African and Asian states at the UN. For O'Brien and others, Katangan independence represented a reassertion of colonial relationships and hierarchies. The UN, however, had no mandate and no inclination to end the Katanga Secession by force. Nevertheless, the UN intervention was understood to support the central government of the Republic of the Congo. The mission was largely supported in the UN by African and Asian states, while most objections came from Western Europe, including Britain, which threatened to withdraw support for the mission on a number of occasions. As John Darwin explains, "The emphatically pro-Western stance of the Katanga government, its close

cooperation with European mining interests, the large European element in its administration and its friendly relations with the Federal government in Salisbury [Southern Rhodesia] incited much British sympathy" (253).

Arden protests that "The characters and episodes of the play are not based upon originals from the Congo conflict; all I have done is to suggest a basic similarity of moral, rather than political, economic or racial problems" (239). Nevertheless, two parallels suggest themselves, linking Lindsay with O'Brien and Armstrong with Tshombe. Others, such as a possible correlation between the leaders of the Republic of the Congo and James V or the Scottish nobles are less clear and too speculative for my purposes. Muddying the waters further, Arden points out correspondences even as he disavows them in the National Theatre program: "The play is dedicated to Dr O'Brien, but Lindsay does not represent him, as Gilnockie [Armstrong] does not represent Tshombe nor Wamphray Lumumba" (qtd. in Page 84). Still, he explains that

> When I envisaged the combined Scots and English Commissioners entrusting the Armstrong negotiations to David Lindsay, I remembered the United Nations appointing Dr Cruise O'Brien for a somewhat similar job in Africa—to end the secession of Katanga just as Lindsay had to abort the *de facto* independence of the border mosstroopers. (*Plays: Two* xvi)

By suggesting a parallel between Armstrong and Tshombe, Arden discounts the extent to which the latter represented neocolonial interests. Armstrong in the play is

not a puppet in the way Tshombe is, nor does he represent English interests, as the parallel would seem to require. The Republic of the Congo was superimposed upon older regional and ethnic identities, and Arden's antipathy for centralized government colors his comments on both Tshombe and Armstrong. In particular, he seems more sympathetic to Tshombe than O'Brien's account warrants. Arden does recognize that "Tshombe of Katanga was a threat to the central government of the Congo if he remained a separatist leader. But he was not his own man. He was backed by Belgian interests and also by governments whose activities bear a certain resemblance to the activities of Maxwell and his friends in Edinburgh" (qtd. in Page 84). Here more than ever it seems that Arden is pushing the case too far or, in Page's words, "protesting too much" about the parallel, and it is not clear that Tshombe was a legitimate "separatist" leader (84). As Page points out, "If [Arden] had not told us, we would not see the 1961 Congo Events in his drama" (84). Because of the obscurity of the reference, whatever comment Arden wished to make on the Congo cannot have registered with the audience. Though his exact purposes in including the parallel are unclear, the effort suggests a desire to comment on contemporary postcolonial issues. But Arden's strategy for doing so reveals an inability to address the matter directly.

Arden's interest in O'Brien (and his depiction of Lindsay) introduces a subject that will appear in several of his subsequent plays, especially *The Island of the Mighty*: the political roles available to the liberal intellectual or author. *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* suggests that liberal intellectuals are either unfit for diplomatic or governmental service or that they are sullied and demeaned by such service.

Lindsay's failure is apparently that he cannot grasp the character of a man like Armstrong. McGlass tells him, "Lindsay: ye have ane certain weakness, ye can never accept the gravity of ane other man's violence" (336). This comment comes after Lindsay insists that Armstrong "yearns in his mirk bowels [. . .] for ane practicable rational alternative" (328). The message is clear, McGlass tells Lindsay, "your rationality has broke itself to pieces [. . .] There is naething for you now but to match that same fury, and with reason and intelligence, sae that this time you will win" (337). Lindsay's intelligence is reduced to the mere cleverness that he needs to trick Armstrong. By allaying his intelligence with a base political motive, Lindsay, in his own words, "Will win and win damnation" (337). When they return to this subject in later plays, Arden and D'Arcy focus more consistently on revealing the inadequacies of the liberal political philosophies intellectuals are seen to represent.

In contrast to the refined Lindsay, Armstrong is uncouth, violent and inarticulate, suffering, as I've mentioned, from a speech impediment. This difference is thematically significant, especially if Arden intends to comment on the politics of imperialism. It casts Armstrong in the role of a practically voiceless native. In his lack of manners and his violent emotions, Armstrong, according to Arden, resembles nationalist and postcolonial politicians:

> Armstrong will be a character rather like some of these African politicians. There's a type of man present in these new countries in Africa who seems to have this curious combination of practical ruthlessness with almost hysterical emotion, which you don't find in

> European politicians much these days but which certainly you did in the sixteenth-century. (qtd. in Page 84)

Arden indulges the commonplace image of Africans as emotionally unrestrained semi-savages. And, by linking sixteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century Africa, Arden implies that African societies are less evolved civilizations rather than ones that have been systematically underdeveloped by the West. This conception of the evolution of civilizations is typical of imperialist discourse.

The complexity of the politics in the play is deliberate and meaningful. But Arden seems to be motivated more by an anarchistic revulsion toward politics than by any clear political agenda. Arden even refers to Lindsay's "belief in the necessity of government" as the root of his problems (qtd. in Page 77). He writes:

> I find the whole sequence of events in the play so alarming and hateful (while at the same time so typical of political activity at any period) that I have—perhaps rashly—taken for granted a similar feeling among the audience. [. . .] When I see a play about issues of moral importance, I very much dislike having their implications forcibly drawn to my attention. [. . .] Every play that tries to deal seriously with its subject must contain as many checks and balances as are compatible with normal theatrical length, if there is to be any degree of honesty in it. [. . .] My views on the Armstrong story are positive enough—Lindsay was wrong. But as to what he should have done to

> avoid self-destruction: there is a question I cannot pretend to answer. (qtd. in Page 77).

As a political play, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* is most successful in denaturalizing the historical bases of the supposedly unitary British state that came into being after 1707. Written for a Scottish audience, the play contains a nationalist message about the status of "minor" nationalities within the United Kingdom. Arden also demonstrates a distrust of an overly powerful state centered in London. But the form these messages take is complex, and Arden tries hard not to cater to nationalist pieties. In what he sees as a system of "checks and balances," he subjects Scottish nationality to much the same scrutiny as he does Britishness. The play is less successful as a meditation on European overseas colonialism. The parallels with events in the Congo would almost certainly have been more obscure for the audience than those Arden constructs between the events of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and the news from Cyprus. While at times in *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* Arden is able to use history to make important political points, at other times—particularly when he suggest parallels between sixteenth-century Scotland and the Republic of the Congo—he seems rather casual in molding history to serve his purposes.

The Hero Rises Up

Arden and D'Arcy's *The Hero Rises Up* debunks myths about Admiral Horatio Nelson, whom the authors refer to in their introduction to the published text as "the last uncontested hero-figure of our own history" (14). But, though Arden and D'Arcy delight in showing unsavory aspects of Nelson's character and conduct, the play becomes more than a debunking as the authors scrutinize the social and historical circumstances that allowed Nelson to achieve his iconic status. In the end, the play presents a sometimes subtle analysis of the historical roots and ideological underpinnings of British national identity in a crucial and formative period. Though *The Hero Rises Up* is anything but naturalistic and emulates the popular theatrical entertainments of Nelson's time, it contains a substantial documentary element. The play reflects thorough research by the authors and, with one or two exceptions, all of the significant events of the play have a solid foundation in fact. The authors quote from Nelson's letters and even the fanciful resurrection of the executed Neapolitan Republican Caracciolo has a factual basis, as his sunken corpse did in fact rise from the floor of the Bay of Naples. The vanity, ambition, bloodlust and almost pathological hatred of the French that Arden and D'Arcy attribute to Nelson are well documented.

The play begins with a prologue spoken by a pedantic "Academic Representative of the Authors." It reads, in part, "When Lord Nelson and his woman are summoned before us, I want you all to observe them: what they do, and what they

say: and to learn from it such lessons for your future as you may. *That* is the part of the proceedings in which I have no competence to guide you; if you are wise, you will benefit: if you are foolish, you will not" (15). With this admonition, Arden and D'Arcy demand of the audience an intellectual effort which will likely, considering the content of the play, lead them to reflect on questions of patriotism and national identity. The prologue describes Nelson as "A man [. . .] abundantly commemorated both by the established ruling circles and the undifferentiated popular sludge" (14). This broad "classless" appeal, which leads Christopher Hibbert to call Nelson Britain's "first truly national hero to be accepted as such in his own day," will be the object of Arden and D'Arcy's scrutiny (385). Hibbert means that, in addition to appealing to a wide range of classes, Nelson was the first true all-British (not merely English) hero, a notion which is crucial for Arden and D'Arcy. The wars in which he fought were among the most important factors in establishing a British (as opposed to English, Scottish, Welsh) identity. In this period, Colley explains, there arose "a new unitary ruling class in place of those separate and specific landed establishments that had characterised England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the Tudor and Stuart eras" (161). For these people, "England usually meant much more than just one part of the island they inhabited. The term became for them (as it did for Horatio Nelson at Trafalgar) a synonym for Great Britain as a whole" (162). Nelson's appeal crossed class and regional barriers that, under the pressure of the French threat, were already eroding. For this reason, he is an ideal vehicle for an examination of British

nationalism, the modern rise of which Colley, Gerald Newman, Eric Hobsbawm and others date to this period or slightly before.[63]

Arden and D'Arcy present their subject matter in a way that reflects the currency of the rhetoric of decline in postwar Britain. But they seek to call that rhetoric into question. Their ironic advertisement, which precedes the published text, instructs the audience, "DO NOT FAIL to attend this Momentous Celebration of the Historic Grandeur of our Island Race: DO NOT FAIL to see What Once We Were: DO NOT FAIL to make the Dismal Comparison with What We Are Now!" (11). Arden and D'Arcy suggest that the rhetoric of decline is a function of the ideological constructions of Britishness that Nelson embodies and that recognizing this fact could constitute significant progress in the postimperial era. (Hence the "lessons for [the] future" mentioned in the prologue.) The prologue comments that "We live today, it is generally recognized, in an age of despair: and the search for a truly heroic, god-like figure to lead us out of our trials and tribulations, is common to us all. Even in the regrettable realms of radical-syndicalist-insurrectionary leftism there are the potent mythical figures of Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung" (14). The description of an "age of despair" is tongue-in-cheek, but the play takes very seriously the desire for heroes and the ill effects of that desire. The authors, though they verge on hagiography in *The Non-stop Connolly Show* (1975), here seem to be reacting against what Carr refers to as Carlyle's "unfortunate assertion that 'history is the biography of great

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[63] See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780.*

men'" (61). Thus, though he dominates the action, Nelson is decentered as a protagonist; the main interest of the play most often lies in the political and social contexts that made his career and his celebrity possible. Arden and D'Arcy identify economic and political forces as historical determinants, arguing not simply that these are more powerful than individuals, but also, in this case, that they create the need for heroism and determine its particular objects.

Subtitled "A Romantic Melodrama," *The Hero Rises Up* takes its form from ballad opera as typified by Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Like the ballad opera which, though in subsidence by Nelson's day, still informed much popular and comic theatre at the start of the nineteenth century, Arden and D'Arcy's play contains many songs set to popular and traditional tunes. In addition, the sensational subject matter lends itself to melodrama, though, as Albert Hunt explains, "into the melodrama has been injected a detached and ironic intelligence, which uses the form both to celebrate and to question an English myth" (128). This "intelligence" complicates the meanings associated with the forms of the ballad opera and the popular songs. Rather than becoming an exercise in nostalgia, the play appropriates these forms to convey an alternative history and to show patriotic and, occasionally, oppositional ideologies at work at a popular level.

Hunt also claims that "The style of *The Hero Rises Up* is the most consciously Brechtian and anti-illusionist that the Ardens [sic] have developed" (129). Though neither *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* or *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* are naturalistic in the Ibsenite sense, Hunt is right that no previous play so willfully departs from that

tradition. Brecht's influence in the play is compatible with the ballad opera form, particularly considering Brecht's own interest in popular genres. This affinity is, of course, evident in Brecht's own use of *The Beggar's Opera*, and the Brechtian influence is sometimes difficult to distinguish from that of the "native" popular traditions. The effects that Hunt identifies as Brechtian include placards, "two dimensional" characters, the use of song and doggerel verse, and the third-person narration that accompanies many scenes.

The titles on the placards in particular are exemplary of a Brechtian alienation technique. They are crucial to the method and meaning of the play; the authors, though they insist that "there is no appropriate strategy for the presentation of this play," stipulate that "The titles to each scene ought not to be omitted" (8). Brecht uses similar titles, either projected or painted, in numerous plays, including *Mother Courage* and *The Threepenny Opera*. In his notes on the latter play, Brecht explains that "The screens on which the titles of each scene are projected are a primitive attempt at literarizing the theatre" (*Brecht* 43). What Brecht means by "literarization" is suggested in "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre." Brecht claims in that essay that "Reading seems to encourage the audience to adopt the most natural attitude towards the work" (*Brecht* 38). By a "natural attitude" Brecht means one that recognizes the artificiality of the spectacle and which allows the audience a more active and intellectual role in the production of meaning. This effect is an affront to naturalistic practice; as Brecht explains, "The orthodox playwright's objection to the titles is that the dramatist ought to say everything that has to be said in the action, that

the text must express everything within its own confines. The corresponding attitude for the spectator is that he should not think about a subject, but within the confines of the subject" (44). The titles acknowledge the audience and signal the mediating presence of the author. The author's heightened presence, in turn, suggests the constructedness of the entertainment and, in a historical play like *The Hero Rises Up*, the interpretive element of the narrative.

The third-person narration provided by Nelson's stepson Captain Nisbet also contributes to a Brechtian alienation effect. Nisbet becomes the main vehicle for Arden and D'Arcy's criticism. Early on, Nisbet tells Nelson, "make sure that you tell the truth. And do not compel me to correct you" (20). He then sings:

> I was there and I saw it, the start of your story
>
> Was not at any moment of victory and joy:
>
> But a time of confusion and bloody-minded treason
>
> When the honour of old England melted away. (20)

Nisbet refers here to Nelson's intervention in the republican rebellion against the Bourbon King Ferdinand of Naples. Contrary to orders, Nelson restored the king to his throne by force. Motivated largely by Nelson's relationship with Emma Hamilton, whose husband was the ambassador to Naples, this interference, the play suggests, the most objectionable episode in Nelson's career. In delivering these lines, Nisbet very nearly becomes a mouthpiece for the authors, providing a counterpoint to Nelson's self-aggrandizement. Though the historical Josiah Nisbet may have resented Nelson's treatment of Lady Nelson, Nisbet's mother, it is unlikely that he held the vehement

political opinions he expresses in the play, which further supports the suggestion that the authors are ventriloquizing through Nisbet.

The final scene, depicting Nelson carried to heaven in a golden chariot, foregrounds theatrical illusion and reveals the mechanisms of the theatre to a greater degree than any earlier scene. According to the stage directions, the scene should be "reminiscent of the popular twopence-coloured prints of Nelson's own period" (100). These prints often featured the same shell-shaped marine chariot, angels and sea nymphs that the authors require for the scene.[64] The scene is, of course, parodic. The illusion, unstable because of its conspicuous artificiality, is further undermined by the appearance of Nelson's servant Allen. Nisbet supplies the other characters with fresh costumes "of a pseudo-classical type, liberally spangled and be-tinselled" (100). The costumes are put on and the properties of the previous scene are removed in full view of the audience. But Allen remains in his work clothes. Nelson, who has been reanimated, chastises Allen, who seems to have stumbled inadvertently into the scene. While rebuking Allen, the actor's "voice falters, and a tremor of disturbance runs through the cast as if they are suddenly conscious of their own artificiality" (102). As the chariot rises, Allen exhorts unseen seamen to haul away and the flight is accompanied by their cries and the sounds of ropes and pulleys. These anti-illusionistic methods are what the authors have in mind when they write in the

[64] See the exemplary *Britannia Bringing Her Dead Hero to Britannia's Shore*, reproduced in Christopher Hibbert's *Nelson: A Personal History*, plate 35. But the scene also recalls Benjamin West's painting of the apotheosis of Nelson, which shows the admiral conveyed from Poseidon to Britannia by a winged Victory. This resemblance suggests a continuity between popular and high-art representations.

introduction that they "meant to write a play which need not be done properly," a comment that recalls Brecht's rejection of naturalistic conventions (5). Brecht argues in his notes on the *Threepenny Opera* that "Today we see the theatre being given absolute priority over the actual plays. The theatre apparatus's priority is a priority of means of production." "The necessity to stage [a new play] correctly," Brecht continues, "matters more for the theatre's sake than the drama's" (*Brecht* 43).

In their introduction, the authors use the terms "rectilinear" and "curvilinear" to define Nelson's character, a distinction to which they will return in *The Island of the Mighty*. Briefly, according to Arden and D'Arcy, the Romans, the archetypical rectilinear people, believed in symmetry, efficiency and doing things "properly." In contrast, the Celts were asymmetrical and passionate and resisted "improvement." The English, a "churlish" people, admired and emulated the Romans (*Hero* 5). Such comments reveal a striking and reductive essentialism regarding national characteristics. Nevertheless, these are the terms by which we are meant to understand Nelson's character. The authors explain:

> This play is about a man who was, by accident of birth and rearing, committed to a career governed by the old Roman "rectilinear" principles. He himself was of asymmetrical "curvilinear" temperament to an usually passionate degree. But the English soon discovered how to handle him. He was done properly: wasted his extraordinary energy, courage, and humanity, upon having men killed (in the end himself killed): and then finally was installed as a national monument. (5)

This passage suggests that Nelson's character is separable from the circumstances in which he lived, when in fact there was very little "accidental" about his career. It also suggests an opposition between Nelson and "the English," which can be misleading. Nelson, though something of an outsider from Norfolk, was, with the help of influential connections, able to exploit the English social and political systems to his advantage. He did so largely through an ostentatious patriotism that, while it was certainly self-serving, was not insincere. As Colley points out,

> it is easy to dismiss [Nelson's] profoundly romantic but also self-interested patriotism as something quite exceptional. [. . .] But Nelson only practised to a remarkable degree what the cult of individualism fostered very broadly among the class he aspired to. [. . .] Splendidly, unabashedly and utterly successfully, Nelson did what the majority of the men who dominated Great Britain sought to do more elegantly and discreetly: use patriotic display to impress the public and cement their own authority. (183)

Arden and D'Arcy's attention to the ways in which Nelson was atypical and, by implication, un-English makes clear their view of the English as inherently militaristic, authoritarian and orthodox. But the play is most interesting when it demonstrates the congruence between Nelson's attitudes and the prevailing national ethos. Thus, for example, his hatred of the French and his unquestioning belief in monarchy can throw into relief the circumstances in which Britishness was defined in the early nineteenth century.

Arden and D'Arcy write that "The public, like Lord Nelson, is inherently 'curvilinear' but under compulsion rectilinear" (8). This notion suggests a model of society in which authority is imposed from above by a powerful minority on a benighted populace. The comment also introduces another major theme of *The Hero Rises Up*: the oppression of the subservient classes, especially as they are represented by the adoring crowds that cheer Nelson and by the sailors on his ships. But though Nelson's popularity among the lower classes was remarkable, it is difficult to see him in a position analogous to theirs relative to state authority, as Arden and D'Arcy's comment seems to require. As Colley shows, images and accounts of the deaths of Nelson and other high-ranking officers indicate "A highly selective cult of heroism, never focusing on ordinary soldiers or seamen but only on those commanding them" (180). Nelson's fame and fortune then could exist only through the effacement of the labors and sacrifices of numerous members of subordinate classes. The play also argues that those labors furthered the oppression of those classes; this apparent contradiction, the authors imply, is made possible by what Marxists have called false consciousness. False consciousness of this kind, Arden and D'Arcy suggest, is a function of ideology (particularly nationalist ideology) and must be constantly and actively maintained by the dominant groups in society.

The notion that popular patriotism is a means by which the masses are kept in line is attractive to Arden and D'Arcy. But, as Colley and others show, it may not present an accurate picture of the ideological processes involved in nation-building. This question recalls the controversy surrounding E.P. Thompson's *The Making of*

the English Working Class, which concerned, in addition to the subtleties of Thompson's model of class formation, what Geoff Eley refers to as "the balance of coercion and consent in the governing system" (12). Thompson acknowledges this continuing controversy in his generally favorable 1990 review of Colley's *Britons*, writing that "Despite her high intelligence and liberal disposition, [Colley] has written a 'top-down' history" and explaining that he is skeptical "As to how far the common people participated in this new loyal British consensus" ("Making" 378). Thompson is concerned that Colley's account "sometimes suggests that [the development of a British national consensus] came about in a determined way, and without sharp conflict or purposive agency" (380). Thompson, in addition to being a major historian, was an activist, championing the working class as an agent against oppression. Arden and D'Arcy share similar motives, and Thompson's agonistic view of social relations is readily compatible with what Malick calls that "plebeian bias" in Arden and D'Arcy's plays (139).

For the authors, Nelson's ambition, combativeness and bigotry provide an index to the values of a bellicose and insecure ruling class struggling to consolidate its power against internal and external threats. In their discussion of Nelson and Admiral Edward Vernon, a naval hero from earlier in the eighteenth century, Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers explain that

> Naval biographers have assumed that the popularity of admirals flowed naturally and spontaneously from their spectacular victories and exemplary feats of valor. This may be taken as a truism. But it

> does not entirely explain their appeal. Equally important is the way in which their exploits were inserted into contemporary political discourse, how they captured the public imagination and exemplified the values that society, or specific sections of it, held dear. (202)

The judicious qualification at the end of this quotation is significant, emphasizing that, though a national consensus seemed to be growing, it was never complete. In fact, the presence of dissent, which Arden and D'Arcy take pains to demonstrate at a number of points in the play, could help to explain the enthusiasm with which the majority embraced its heroes and the vigor with which the ruling class prompted them.

Colley, Newman and others have established that, more than in any earlier period, Britishness in the eighteenth century was relational with respect to other European national identities, especially French identity. War, of course, was largely responsible for this development, but the particular qualities of the conflicts of that era were crucial. Revolutionary France was seen as a threat not only to Britain's armed forces and its global ambitions, but also to its domestic security and even the nation's political system. In addition, as Clive Emsley remarks, "The war against revolutionary France had an ideological aspect new to the eighteenth century; the popular radicals in Britain openly subscribed to the enemy's ideology and condemned the continuance of a war 'for the manifest purpose of destroying the Liberties of France, and insulting those of the British'" (49). In this context it is easy to see, for example, the connection between Nelson's almost pathological hatred of the French

and the Alien Act of 1793, by which William Pitt's government exerted unprecedented power over foreign nationals.[65]

One of the most significant episodes of the play, as I've suggested, concerns the execution of Francesco Caracciolo, a Neapolitan naval officer, after a summary trial hastily arranged by Nelson. Caracciolo, apparently under some duress, agreed to command the navy of the Parthenopean Republic, which had been proclaimed by Neapolitan Jacobins and was supported for a time by the French army. Caracciolo had surrendered peacefully to the loyalist Cardinal of Calabria. In the play, the Cardinal argues that Caracciolo should be granted clemency, as had been agreed in the terms of surrender. Nelson, however, sides with the King of Naples and has Caracciolo killed. This was, as Hibbert records, the beginning of weeks of executions (190). Nisbet's narration of Nelson's return from Naples helps to clarify the significance of the Caracciolo episode: "Upon Lord Nelson's arrival in London they filled every street with carnival! And what came they out into the wilderness to see? The man who hanged Caracciolo? God help us, out of one hundred in that multitude there might possibly be a single informed person who had at least a notion of who Caracciolo was" (48). This comment suggests that patriotism of this sort is fostered by ignorance and supports the view that patriotism is a means of social control, an idea that is emphasized in Nisbet's song that follows immediately:

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[65] Hibbert quotes Nelson, for example, telling a young sailor whose father was a Francophilic Whig that he was required to "hate a Frenchman as you do the devil" and, in a separate instance, proclaiming that "I have an antipathy to Frenchmen, which is so powerful that I must, I think, have received it from my mother at my birth" (43, 153).

For had they all known who he was –

Being ragged dirty British skin-and-bone –

It is just possible they would have cried

For a bold Caracciolo of their own.

It is just possible, but not much more:

We live upon an island, as you know,

We're proud of that, however poor we are,

We're proud of that and want to keep it so.

A little island in our island home

Is made of stone: they call it Newgate Gaol.

We have a floating island made of wood:

The fleet that won the Battle of the Nile.

If you don't like the one, then try the other:

The King and Parliament have made quite sure

That angry ragged men have no third choice—

We're on an island and we're at war. (48)

The mention of king and Parliament in the last stanza suggests that revolution was avoided by the efforts of the government and ruling classes to win consent by depriving the masses of political agency and by keeping them uninformed. But the

more subtle critique here is of British exceptionalism; the rhetoric of an “island race” is deflated and shown to promote a harmful insularity and complacent conservatism.

The fear of a revolutionary contagion spreading across national boundaries motivates Nelson’s savage repression of the Neapolitan uprising and his treatment of Caracciolo in particular. He reasons that Caracciolo must be killed because, if he were allowed to live, “a hundred like him / As fierce as he, but not so old, / Will fill their own fresh hearts with courage / And serve their lives up into Bonaparte’s hold” (36). Before he is killed, Caracciolo speaks of Naples as a “goddess stretched out on a bed.” But, he says, a wind lifting the coverlet will reveal a “great foul heap” of “rotten bones / And half-chewed limbs and dripping eyes and ears, / Skulls, bladders, children’s feet” (34). Arden and D’Arcy intend Caracciolo’s awareness of social injustice to be seen as the result of a movement by which oppressed classes across Europe began to develop a revolutionary consciousness. Caracciolo explains that “The wind that did reveal [the heap of bones] blew straight to Naples out of France.” He asks, “How long before the French wind turns about and reaches England, Admiral Nelson? Will you English see what I saw when your own bedspreads are lifted up?” (35).

Caracciolo also tells Emma Hamilton that “the Irishmen have quick eyes, and sensitive nostrils too,” meaning that they will be receptive to the influence of the French Revolution (35). The assertion that the revolutionary “wind” will be felt first in Ireland suggests that the political situation in Britain’s troublesome colony is more volatile than that on the British mainland, where, presumably because of the efficacy

of patriotic ideologies, dissidents faced a greater disadvantage. The passage also, of course, alludes to the 1798 Irish rebellion. Arden and D'Arcy make this reference explicit when Nelson tells Caracciolo that "We had our own abundant treason there in ninety-eight, and it was, thank heaven, nipped in the bud!" (36). The United Irishmen, led by Theobald Wolfe Tone, had forged an alliance with the French government. After two abortive attempts at landing a French invasion force in 1796, fighting broke out in Dublin in May 1798, culminating with the rout of the rebels at Vinegar Hill in June. The French force that landed in Killala, County Mayo in late August was too little and too late to turn the tide and it was decimated a few days later. The episode, however, raised British anxiety to a pitch, providing further impetus to political forces in support of the Act of Union of 1800. Emma expresses this imperial anxiety: "I am myself of Irish blood: / I know the murderous heart that beats / At large within the poisoned wood." The Irish in 1798, she continues, "killed the baby in the womb, / And plundered house and home and tower" (35). The image of the Irish as uncivilized, violent and conspiratorial has persisted at least since the sixteenth century and probably longer.[66] Later Arden and D'Arcy use similar language to represent attitudes toward the French (see the Host's speech cited below), suggesting the extremity of the British ruling class's fears of revolution. The plundered house specifically evokes the fears of the Anglo-Irish ruling class in their "big houses."

[66] See, for example, R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, pp. 15-35 and Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, pp. 9-16.

These references to Ireland are also significant because *The Hero Rises Up* premiered about a month after the first serious violence in the renewed "Troubles" in Northern Ireland.[67] The play was first produced on November 6, 1968 at the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA), a subsidized facility which, after moving to a location off Trafalgar Square in 1968, became associated with the late-sixties counterculture.[68] For the liberal, left-leaning ICA audience, Arden and D'Arcy's references to events in Ireland in 1798 add meaning to the play by showing both the events of the play and the contemporary violence to be part of a larger pattern of conflict arising from British colonialism.

In Nelson's victories (and particularly in his death), Arden and D'Arcy show, albeit in an ironic way, the triumph of the ideals he represents. Thompson has written that "there was a marked change in popular responses between the first and second French Wars. [. . .] In the second war—the truly "Napoleonic War"—there was a powerful surge toward national patriotic and anti-Gallician sentiment" (379). In this atmosphere, Nelson's death became the ultimate expression of duty, sacrifice and service to king and country. The triumphalism evident in written and visual representations of Trafalgar, which is parodied in the final scene of *The Hero Rises*

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[67] On October 5, 1968 violence broke out between police and protesters at a civil rights march in Derry. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was founded the previous year. That some of those involved were members of the Wolfe Tone Society testifies to the continued resonance of 1798.

[68] See Nannette Aldred, "Art in Postwar Britain: A Short History of the ICA" for more information about the venue. In the 1970s, the subsidiary ICA Theatre would become a major outlet for alternative theatre before it was closed abruptly in 1976. See Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution*, pp.264-7 for a discussion of the odd circumstance surrounding the closure of the ICA Theatre.

Up, indicates that the victory was perceived not merely as a military achievement. The prospects of republicanism in Britain, already diminished by events in postrevolutionary France, were dealt another serious blow, and beliefs concerning Britain's exceptionalism and its unique claim to liberty seemed to be confirmed. As Jordan and Rogers explain, "as Napoleon's territorial ambitions became clearer and as many radicals and reformers became increasingly disillusioned with the course of the Revolution, naval victories became less politically contentious and more univocally nationalist" (214).

But it is important to remember, as Thompson would have it, that consensus was not universal and consent was not always voluntary. Beginning in the 1790s, reform and resistance were, in Gerald Newman's words, "stalled under a wave of repression," features of which included

> the suspensions of Habeas Corpus; the legislative acts banning correspondence, political assemblies, and demonstrations; the imposition of tough new standards of blasphemy, treason, and sedition; the heavy taxes on reading material and the banning of books; the use of paid police informers and agents provocateurs against supposedly conspiring traitors; the treason trials. (230)

Speaking broadly of the era in which Britain became an imperial power, Tom Nairn explains that the ruling faction in British society, because it was "so largely concerned with overseas and naval-based exploitation required, above all, conservative stability at home. It demanded a reliable, respectful hierarchy of social

estates, a societal pyramid to act as basis for operations of the patrician elite"(21-2). Arden and D'Arcy parody the anxiety of these elites in act two when Nelson, Lady Nelson, Emma, her husband and Nisbet attend a party given by an unnamed Host. Also in attendance is an unidentified Prince, presumably the Prince of Wales, with whom Nelson was familiar.[69] The Prince finds a volume by Voltaire in the Host's library and launches into a tirade:

> You're no better than the Frogs. All those books they wrote in France and we know what happened there. Now the rot has spread to England. I took occasion, just a few minutes ago, to wander round the library in there—and by Gad sir, I found this! [. . .] Voltaire, by all that's treasonable! Anti-church, anti-monarchy, and anti-good-morality! (61)[70]

The scene degenerates into a book-burning, with the Prince looking at Nelson and proclaiming, "Deeds, d'you see, deeds, none of your confounded words: and only by means of unquestioning deeds can we achieve a sound morality!" (62). "Unquestioning" is the key word here; the Prince refers to the sense of loyalty and unthinking duty which is expected of Nelson's sailors and which Nelson himself accords royalty. Throughout the play, Arden and D'Arcy show this sense of duty to

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[69] The party may well be modeled on one which occurred at the house of Arthur Davison and at which the Prince of Wales and William Pitt were present, though the book-burning that follows seems to be an invention. See Hibbert, p. 228 and Oman, p. 361.

[70] For a thorough discussion of the influence of Voltaire in Britain see Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*.

be a coercive principle by which social hierarchies are maintained for the benefit of the few. The Prince's resentment is directed against a Francophilic and intellectual upper-class faction that increasingly became an object of hostility as the wars with France progressed. In addition to Voltaire, the authors burned include Rousseau, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Diderot and Thomas Paine. When *The Rights of Man*, appears, the Prince exclaims: "Good God he was an Englishman—I burn him personally. Goddamnit!" (65). The Host, after a half-hearted protest, is browbeaten by the Prince and others into participating. The Host then declares:

> Your Rousseau and Voltaire are scarcely worth the paper—
> Scatter them and tear, and every other faker
> Who'd turn your brain to mud, your will to milk and water,
> You'd watch without a word a man who'd rape your daughter,
> Shoot and kill your dad, hit you on the head,
> Shed your mother's blood with cruelty amazing:
> So, leave them no excuse, your culture you must lose,
> It's nothing but abuse: so set it all a-blazing. (64)

Here a coercive and aggressively anti-intellectual patriotism gives rise to the most bigoted and paranoiac view of France. Again, Britain is seen as a bastion of liberty and security that must be protected from the germ of revolution. Arden and D'Arcy show that this ideological defense necessitated an assertion of British exceptionalism and the willful cultivation of an extreme xenophobia.

But ruling-class hegemony is threatened not only from without, and agitation for reform and even revolution could not always be dismissed as the influence of an alien ideology. In a scene set during the brief peace created by the 1802 Treaty of Amiens, Nelson's relatives search the newspaper for rumors of war. Emma has removed the pages containing foreign news to conceal them from Nelson, and the relatives are left with the national news:

> Bread riots in Manchester. [. . .] There are always riots in Manchester—why don't they send in the dragoons—? Rick-burnings in Dorset—workmen's' combinations broken up in West Hampshire [. . .]—presumed Jacobins under surveillance in the suburbs of Sheffield—nothing at all about the war. (84)

These details, inserted conspicuously into the scene, evoke both agrarian and industrial unrest in Britain and support a thesis similar to Thompson's claim that, "Even in the darkest war years the democratic impulse can still be felt at work beneath the surface" (*Making* 181). (Though this incident occurs when the nation is technically at peace, the ongoing conflict has clearly not ended.) "Beneath the surface" is a significant figure of speech by which Thompson indicates events elided by traditional histories. This is the single instance in the play where the "surface" narrative is ruptured in this way. By 1802 or 1803, when this scene is set, workers unions (or "combinations") had been outlawed by the Combination Acts of 1799-1800. As *The Making of the English Working Class* records in detail, Sheffield was home to the largest radical corresponding society outside London and a hotbed of

Painite agitation. “Presumed Jacobins” indicates the eagerness with which dissent was attributed to foreign influence and the unwillingness to acknowledge native dissidence. Other details in this passage can be linked associatively to two significant later events in the history of the early nineteenth-century reform movement: the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 and the Tolpuddle Martyrs incident of 1834. The first occurred in Manchester when a reform meeting was broken up by yeoman cavalry—admittedly not dragoons as in the passage above—leaving 400 people wounded and 11 dead. In 1834 in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle, six “martyrs” were sentenced to seven years’ transportation for forming a union, even though the Combination Acts had by then been repealed. The harsh sentences were handed out because of the government’s fear of rural unrest, including rick-burning and machine-breaking. Arden and D’Arcy use these references to create a cross-referencing effect in order to relate “official” and “alternative” histories. This effort could produce meaningful and, in the political atmosphere of 1968, volatile political insights for the authors’ left-leaning audience.

In the early nineteenth century, ruling-class anxieties were manifest not only in a nearly hysterical fear of dissent, but also in an equally extreme glorification of hierarchy and authority, even in their most abstract forms. This impulse is apparent when Nelson proclaims his unwavering belief in monarchy, a sentiment which, especially in this exaggerated form, would be unlikely to find sympathy at the ICA in 1968. In defense of his actions in Naples, Nelson declares,

> For to me the English people

Or the people of any land

Are incarnate in the crowned head

Of the king upon his throne. (17)

Nelson rhetorically asks if the preservation of monarchy "is not why the war [in Naples] was fought? (17). The extremity of his sentiment, which could be seen as a caricature of the fervent antirevolutionary rhetoric espoused in this period by Edmund Burke and others, is emphasized a few minutes later when Nelson defends the ridiculous King Ferdinand of Naples: "He's a pot-bellied timorous mountebank: but by Christ he *is* a King!" (25). Nelson also argues that, "in the end of course the French realized that without their King they were nowhere: so they had to construct one. But you can't do that—royalty is not to be put on and taken off like a topman's tarpaulin coat" (17). This remark conveniently elides seventeenth-century British history and suggests the ideological means by which the British monarchy was naturalized as a timeless institution. This ideological project was particularly urgent in the period between the Hanoverian succession, which left George I with a tenuous claim to the throne, and the middle of George III's reign during which, according to Colley, "the monarchy became a focus for patriotic celebration" to a much greater degree (210). Colley writes that "The same period [the late eighteenth century] that saw the making of the British ruling class would also see the British monarchy assuming many of the characteristics and much of the patriotic importance which it retains today" (193). With these developments in mind, the class inflection and self-interest of Nelson's feelings about kings becomes apparent. To Arden and D'Arcy's

audience, however, Nelson's fanatical monarchism would suggest that the French wars were fought to preserve the ruling class against the threat of what promised, initially at least, to be an egalitarian revolution.

In the form of Britishness that became dominant during Nelson's lifetime, loyalty is defined by obedience to the monarch. For many among the lower classes, this loyalty was made possible by a belief in a uniquely British claim to liberty which initially might seem incompatible with monarchism.[71] The contradictions Arden and D'Arcy see in this ideology are revealed in a song sung by Nelson's sailors:

> King George's ships are on the tide
> Sing ho for liberty
> With our rows of guns on every side
> We've come to make you free. (30-1)

The implication here is not only that people are not likely to be made free by the British navy, but also that the sailors themselves are less free than they imagine. As Colley shows, the exaltation of a uniquely British liberty was closely linked to Protestantism, as was monarchism during the Hanoverian era. (These beliefs would, of course, serve well in a time of war against a Catholic enemy). In Colley's words, "An extraordinarily large number of Britons seem to have believed that, under God, they were peculiarly free and peculiarly prosperous" (32). They also believed that the

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[71] That these beliefs were in fact compatible is evident in Burke's assertion that "The people of England [. . .] look upon the legal hereditary succession of their crown as among their rights, not as among their wrongs; as a benefit, not as a grievance; as a security for their liberty, not as a badge of servitude" (23).

French suffered terribly under the tyranny not only of their political leaders, but also that of the Catholic church. That the British people were heavily taxed, generally very poor and often subject to what was, even compared to other European nations at the time, a repressive penal system was deemed insignificant. “Like all sustaining national myths,” Colley explains, “the idea that Britain was a chosen land and therefore fruitful, did not depend for its effectiveness on being true” (33). Colley acknowledges that many people did not believe the myth but her focus, like Aden and D’Arcy’s in this play, is on the majority that did.

The sense of duty Nelson espouses raises a question Colley spends much time considering. Why, she wonders, were British men so willing to fight and die for their country during wars with the French in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Arden and D’Arcy suggest an answer to this question late in the play. Before the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson’s flagship signaled the famous message, “England expects that every man will do his duty.” Arden and D’Arcy dramatize this moment and include the following exchange between Nelson and one of his captains, which is interrupted by Nisbet’s narration:

> NELSON. England confides that every man will do his duty.
>
> NISBET. But they couldn’t hang up “confides” without using too many flags so—
>
> HARDY. So what about “expects”. I suggest to you “expects”, my lord, that entails no more than three flags. (96)

In all essentials, this account is historically accurate (Hibbert 366). The detail may seem insignificant, but it exhibits the accidental nature of one of the totemic phrases of British patriotism. As soon as the signal was hoisted, the sailors are reported to have cheered. In Arden and D'Arcy's account they react differently. A seaman replies: "Do our duties—stands to reason: we're paid for it, we're well trained. But what the devil has England got to do with it at this minute? If we don't do our duty, the Frogs'll do theirs and we'll be floating on the wavetops like boiled mutton in a copper" (97-8). This depiction conflicts with the image of patriotic British tars fighting for king and country and further undermines the pieties of British history. A moment later, Nisbet speaks: "*La France expectera que tous les hommes allons faire leur devoir*. My French is very bad: but when Boney put the same message on a bronze medal he had cast, I have no doubt that every loyal Frog threw his hat in the air and cheered" (98). This comment denaturalizes patriotism as a particularly British trait and suggests that nationalism is an international phenomenon with dire effects. Duty and loyalty are not, Nisbet argues, uniquely British qualities. To understand why people were able to discount the patriotism of their enemies, we return to the special claims for British liberty. Colley documents the common belief that the French were subject to unimaginable tyranny (34-5). Surely, then, French soldiers must be fighting against their will? Later Arden and D'Arcy include a scene in which a British man is "torn in a classical fashion from the arms of his wife" by a press gang. The wife sings "They've shipped him awa' foreign wi' Nelson / Beyond that

salt sea— / Oh the weary cutters, / They ha' taen my love frae me" (68). This episode again suggests that the British were subject to tyranny as well.

In the final scene, Nisbet speaks these lines:

> Equality, Fraternity, and so on never came:
> And where we were then, now we are just the same.
> This Hero fought for us 'gainst all the odds:
> It did not help. So: now he's with the Gods.
> We all are gathered here to send him off.
> It would be better not to scoff.
> We needed him: he did what we required:
> He goes to heaven: that is his reward.
> All of us, for whom he died,
> Have no reward, because we never tried
> To do without him on our own. (101)

The notion that Nelson did what the British people required—when in fact he served the interests of a single class—suggests that the play is more about the need for heroism than the hero. Arden and D'Arcy highlight the ways in Nelson's iconic status helped the ruling class make their own interests appear to be national ones. Perhaps, as Irving Wardle suggests, the authors' statement on heroism is much like Brecht's in *Galileo*: "Happy is the land that needs no heroes" (qtd. in Page 46). The admonition that people must learn to do without heroes epitomizes the message of the play in 1968: not only does Britishness need to be reimagined on a personal level, but

modern Britons must also question their history and revalue the emblems of that history. The clergyman who presides at Nelson's funeral comments that "In the face of militant atheism, religious values, as of old, reassert themselves in England." Arden and D'Arcy believed in 1968, especially after the events in France in May of that year, that Britain and the other nations of the West were facing a potentially revolutionary crisis in some ways analogous to that of Nelson's day. The clergyman's comments indicate that they also recognized the potential for a conservative backlash.

Nelson enters at the beginning of the play with a challenge to the audience: "If you don't know who I am you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, God damn your eyes. You are, I take it, Englishmen?" (16). This charge implies that Britishness requires knowledge of and an attitude of patriotic reverence toward national history. "I marvel," Nelson continues, "that you do not—at this point—throw your hats in the air and cheer. It is customary to do so" (17). Arden and D'Arcy move quickly to dispel such reverence, which, given the play's original audience, was not likely anyway. But even if the play only confirms the audience's existing opinions, it might solidify those views or provide them with a stronger historical basis.

The Island of the Mighty

Arden and D'Arcy's *The Island of the Mighty* (1972) is a long, three-part retelling of the story of King Arthur. The play, set in the sixth century, radically

revises the myth and historicizes its protagonist. In fact, there is very little heroic about Arthur, who is represented as an aging, Romanized British general trying to hold on to the last remnants of Roman prestige in a complicated and threatening postimperial political environment. In his preface to the published edition, Arden remembers that his interest in Arthur began about 1945 when he was studying Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Tennyson's "Morte d'Arthur." He found Tennyson's relatively sanitized version, with its "Gothic revival intensity," distasteful and preferred Malory's more realistic narrative style (9). After reading Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, Arden came to believe that there was a "'hidden' substratum of the narrative" in Arthurian myth, a "buried pre-Christian, indeed pre-Celtic world [. . .] surviving, fragmentarily, in the odd illogical anecdotes of Malory" (10-11). The palimpsest of narratives suggested by Arden's interpretation of Graves is analogous to his conception of British history as the imposition over time of invading cultures upon preexisting ones. These impositions do not entirely efface the older cultures. In *The Island of the Mighty*, the overlapping and interpenetration of cultures demonstrates that there is little natural or unchanging about British identity. The authors go on to suggest, as they do in *The Hero Rises Up*, that the forms of that identity have been constructed over time for specific political purposes. And, by showing the creation of new myths and the revaluation of old ones as an ongoing process, the authors argue that myth is no more natural or enduring a basis for national identity than is history. This understanding leads Arden and D'Arcy to write

in the dedication of *The Island of the Mighty*, which is addressed to "some politicians of our day," that

> Neither Heath nor Wilson dares to understand
> Green fields of Britain were always someone else's land.
> Eat the flesh of Irishman
> And Welsh and Scot (and Englishman):
> Remain eternally unsatisfied
> Though for each dinner-time of power yet one more living creature
> died. (5)

These politicians, both Conservative and Labour, are the "Usurpers of the imperium of this nation" (5). This description suggests that authority is constructed by the few against the interests of the many, an important theme throughout the play. The word "always" in the second line quoted here indicates that Arden and D'Arcy do not allow an original, authoritative claim to the land; the history of invasions makes any such claim unavailable. The parenthetical inclusion of "Englishman" in the list of oppressed minorities not only puts the English on the same level as the other ethnic groups of the British Isles, but also suggests that the dominant factions in society have used an apparently inclusive form of British identity to their advantage.

D'Arcy comments that the authors' trip to India in 1969 "made me see both Ireland and Britain in an altogether new perspective. For the first time I thought I understood the Arthurian age. A continuous struggle was taking place within the new post-imperial state: tribal, religious and familial loyalties were in constant conflict

with the centralized secular administration at New Delhi" (19). These remarks indicate that *The Island of the Mighty* should be read not only as a comment on the state of postwar Britain but also as an observation of the lasting effects of empire on subject peoples in the postcolonial era. I am most concerned, however, with the play as a comment on postwar British politics and accept Shepherd and Womack's argument that *The Island of the Mighty* "demystifies the contemporary United Kingdom in two ways—by a historical placing (these bloody events are its origins) and by a transhistorical analogy (this political order, like our own, is sustained by the cultural scraps of a lost empire)" (317).

The contexts which inform the play changed during its long gestation, but each left it mark on the 1972 playtext. The play was written and revised a number of times, first by Arden alone in 1953. Arden was working again on the play in 1956 and recalls that "By the beginning of 1956 the corrupt chicanery of the Suez Canal War was about to explode on us: and I was very conscious as I wrote that British imperialism in decline had much in common with its Roman precursor" (*Island* 12). In 1966, the BBC commissioned Arden to write three television plays about Arthur, and the play that became *The Island of the Mighty* was revived. This time the immediate context for the play was Vietnam, as Arden explains in his preface. Because of the war, Arden explains, "the Pentagon (and its subordinate establishments in other Western countries), which had earlier been seen by such people as a blundering but on the whole democratically-instituted apparatus, now began to take on the sinister appearance of a totally malignant monster" (*Island* 13).

This comment suggests that, though England was forced to act only as an accomplice to US adventures (except in Ireland), an imperial mindset persisted in British politics. Arden didn't finish the play until 1969, by which time the BBC commission had fallen through. A new offer came from the Welsh National Theatre as Arden and D'Arcy departed for an extended tour of India, during which Arden fell seriously ill. It was about this time, with the Welsh National Theatre's deadline approaching, that D'Arcy began to work on the play. Despite her efforts, the Welsh project also fell through and the play was eventually selected for production by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre in 1972. By that year, the Northern Irish conflict had escalated and the British Army had been, in D'Arcy's words, "revealed as an obvious oppressor" (19).

The analogy linking Britain and Rome as imperial powers has a long history in both literature and political discourse, and it takes on a particular resonance in the postwar period. According to Norman Vance, by the middle of the Victorian era, Rome "insistently proposed itself as a model and a warning in a Britain which had become a consciously if controversially imperial power" (197). Though "The pride of Britain had once been humbled when the country had succumbed to Roman legions and the future colonizer had become a colony," Vance explains, "that pride could be restored by the reflection that Britain might well be or become a new and greater Rome" (198). More recently, the analogy framed James Morris's trilogy on empire, the first volume of which, *Pax Britannica*, begins with a chapter called "The Heirs of Rome." But the parallel has also been used for anti-imperial purposes. Even in the

Victorian era, Vance points out, the Roman analogy could be used "to make the point that the experience of demoralization under and after imperial rule was one of the darker parts of Britain's own national experience and should not lightly be inflicted on others" (229). In fiction, James Joyce draws parallels between Rome and Britain as oppressors of, respectively, the Jews and the Irish.[72] And, though not for clear anti-imperialist purposes, Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* famously reflects that Britain was "also [. . .] one of the dark places of the earth" before and during the Roman occupation (29).[73] Lurking behind most of the analogies writers have made between Rome and Britain in the last two hundred years or so is Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon's work had by the twentieth century long served both as a blueprint and as a cautionary tale for the makers of the British Empire. Of particular interest is Gibbon's influence on Winston Churchill.[74] As the centrality of Gibbon to the discourse on empire would suggest, the parallel between Britain and Rome also supported notions about the inevitability of the rise and fall of empires that haunted the imagination of many imperialists.

Arden and D'Arcy write in the introduction to *The Hero Rises Up* that

> When the Romans came to Britain, they came as a determinedly "rectilinear" people of very *progressive* inclinations. Everything in this *conservative*, "curvilinear" island was to be IMPROVED: and the

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[72] See Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race and Empire*, pp. 188-9.

[73] Conrad's (or perhaps Marlow's) main point though is how tough it must have been on a centurion.

[74] See Roland Quinault, "Winston Churchill and Gibbon."

> improvement (roads and so forth, for the movement of troops: chesters and so forth for the accommodation of troops; offices and so forth, for the administration of troops . . . always troops first, the local people second) was to be carried out with symmetry and efficiency, and, above all, *done properly*. The native Celts never entirely submitted. Then the Romans left us: and the English arrived. They found the military virtues of the Celts had been sufficiently smothered by the Romans and eventually they conquered these natives, despising them for their comparative lack of power, and—by extension—for their "curvilinear" asymmetry. (5)

This conception has some precedent in the way Romans were perceived by the Victorians. Vance argues that "The age-old fascination with ancient Rome continued and flourished in and beyond the nineteenth century, not merely surviving alongside but in some cases powerfully collaborating with a politics and culture which placed a high premium on modernity, progress and reform" (5). Whether or not it is fair to label groups of people "rectilinear" or "curvilinear," Arden and D'Arcy's characterization of the Romans provides them a potent means with which to critique the British and, less directly, American governments, which they felt in the late sixties and early seventies were becoming increasingly authoritarian. These Roman characteristics are linked to an evangelical belief in "civilization" and the justification of imperialism in terms of the material and administrative benefits provided to colonized peoples. Like many British imperialists, the Romans, in the words of one

prominent historian, "did not acknowledge any limit on their right to expand their rule: indeed they saw it as a divine mission" (Salway, "Roman" 3).

Several elements of the staging of *The Island of the Mighty*, as the authors intended it, announce the artificiality of the theatrical performance.[75] In these elements we see a continuity of method becoming increasingly apparent in Arden's and Arden and D'Arcy's plays. The authors stipulate that the action of *The Island of the Mighty* take place on a "stage-upon-the-stage." The actors are seen to wait for their cues, slipping in and out of character. This effect, Arden and D'Arcy argue, will break down "any intense subjective/naturalistic/historical/poetical/classical sentiment which may be begotten" by the performance (*Island* 23). Apparently these methods were largely introduced by D'Arcy when she adapted the teleplay commissioned by the BBC for the stage. She writes that "what was lacking in the TV scripts was a sense of precise sociological realism—there was altogether too much importance given to picturesque historical detail and not enough consideration accorded to the fact that even during the most frenzied periods of economic and political disturbance people still have to go on living" (20). As in Brecht's understanding of the term, "realism" here has little to do with the quasi-pictorial realism of much historical drama, which can, as D'Arcy argues, distract from the sociopolitical content of a play. The stage directions to the final version dictate that the backdrops be deliberately crude and non-naturalistic. Description of character is minimal; detailed

[75] I discuss the reasons why the play was never performed as they intended it below.

descriptions are, the authors believe, “liable to produce excessive attempts by some actors at ‘involvement’ with their roles in a way that inhibits a clear rendering of the stories of the plays” (*Island* 24). The actors must, the authors stipulate, deliver their lines rapidly, “without the usual self-indulgent break for the audience to appreciate how well [they are] acting” (*Island* 25). This emphasis on narrative is characteristic of the Brechtian epic theatre, as is the rejection of naturalistic styles of acting. But in addition to long-standing Brechtian influences, the authors were inspired by the popular drama they witnessed in India. This experience moved their practice even further from that of naturalistic drama. D’Arcy explains that “the structure of the scenes was devised to suit a kind of staging like that we saw in India, and the naturalist prose of the dialogue was replaced by a combination of song, prose, various measures of verse, and directions for dancing” (*Island* 21). These are elements which, with the exception of formalized dance, were already common in Arden and D’Arcy’s drama. In the Indian drama, according to the authors, “the main emphasis was always toward a strong and vivid story-telling, and where the plot became too diffuse for ‘dramatization’, the action was hurried forward by means of rapid verse narrative, songs, and instrumental music,” techniques which will become even more apparent in *The Non-stop Connolly Show* (*Island* 20).

Part one begins with Arthur, his nephew Medraut (who is later revealed to be his son) and Merlin in camp with Arthur’s army. After they receive news of an English invasion, Merlin is sent to arrange defenses on the coast and warn the local inhabitants. He comes too late to a village that has been destroyed by the English.

Here he encounters the twin brothers Balin and Balan, the only survivors of the English raid.[76] Balin decides to fight with Arthur against the English, but Balan is skeptical of Arthur's authority and strikes out on his own. In a fight between them, Balan inflicts a deep wound on Balin's cheek. Balin journeys to Arthur's stronghold where, initially, he is imprisoned. Meanwhile, the Prince of Strathclyde, another of Arthur's nephews and Medraut's brother, asks that Arthur join him in a campaign against the Wild Cat Picts in Galloway. The Picts send an ambassador, who is also their princess, and their chief poet to Arthur's court to sue for peace. The hot-headed Balin, having escaped custody, kills the ambassador with her own sword. Though this means war between the Strathclyde and the Picts, Arthur decides that he will fight the English. In the meantime, Balan arrives in the Picts' territory. Initially he is mistaken for Balin, who has murdered the princess, but is saved because he does not have a gash on his cheek. After fighting valiantly for the Picts, Balan is subjected to a complicated ritual in which he is placed on a small island and forced to fight the lame and poorly armed king of the Picts. Balan kills the king easily, becoming king himself, and weds the Pictish princess, the daughter of the murdered ambassador. As part of the ritual, however, Balan is maimed and confined to the island. In the following scene, Balin meets the thief Garlon and his Bondwoman. Balin kills Garlon and accompanies the Bondwoman. Balin is trying to reach Pellam, a hostile northern king who proclaims Arthur an antichrist and claims to possess the Roman spear that

[76] The Balin/Balan plot is radically revised from Malory.

pierced Jesus's side at Calvary. The meeting between Balin and Pellam becomes hostile because Garlon was in Pellam's service. A fight ensues in which Balin mortally wounds Pellam with the reputed Roman spear. Arthur then conducts a raid in which the Bondwoman and Pellam's men are killed. Balin departs for Ireland but is washed up in Galloway, where he is captured by the Picts and sent to the Island to fight the lame King, Balan. In the ritual fight, both Balin and Balan are killed, signaling, apparently, the demise of the Picts of Galloway.

The Romans were probably entirely gone from Britain by about 450, and in the sixth century Britain was characterized by a power vacuum in the wake of the Roman retreat. Peter Salway explains that "After the break with Rome the Britons [. . .] lived under *tyranni*, or 'usurpers', best interpreted as local potentates who had filled the vacuum left by the removal of legitimate authority" ("Roman" 58). In *The Island of the Mighty* these figures are represented most prominently by Arthur, but also by his rival Pellam and his semi-independent subordinate Strathclyde. Arthur struggles against further disintegration of a formerly centralized authority. In this sense, the political landscape resembles modern postcolonial nations more than it does postwar Britain.. This reading is supported by the fact that Arthur is not himself Roman but a colonized subject seeking to occupy the position vacated by the colonizer. At the same time, however, Arthur is meant to represent those elements of British society after World War II that longed, nostalgically and unrealistically, for a return to imperial greatness.

The power vacuum, however, would soon be occupied by Germanic invaders including the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. The Angles—explicitly distinguished from the Saxons—are the "English" of Arden and D'Arcy's play. The British victory at *Mons Badonicus* (Badon Hill), with which Arthur is often credited and which took place around 500, was, in the long term, only a minor setback for the invaders. At this stage, the "British" people were primarily of Celtic but also of Roman descent. They were probably Christian and Romanized (at least to the extent that they could be distinguished from the Picts, Scots and other Celtic peoples that had not been colonized).

Arthur's questionable historicity allows Arden and D'Arcy much room for interpretation, and their depiction of the hero is deliberately unconventional. The most uncharacteristic aspects of their representation of Arthur are his tenuous grasp on authority, his physical frailty and, most importantly, his Roman pretensions. Badon Hill is supposed to have occurred twenty years before the events in *The Island of the Mighty* and Arthur is now aged and nearly lame. By its variance from traditional Arthurian legend, Arden and D'Arcy's play strives to demonstrate the inventedness of those traditions. The authors exaggerate the distortions of mythmaking when Balan tells Merlin, "Oh yes. I have heard of the Battle of Badon Hill—there were man-eating giants destroyed there by a famous hero called Arthur. He had to help him a red dragon, breathing fire . . . But I did not know he was still alive. I did not know he had verily existed" (38). At the same time, especially when they refer to the invaders as "English," Arden and D'Arcy point out the irony in

celebrations by the modern English of a warrior who fought against the most direct forbears of their own culture. D'Arcy clarifies this aspect of the play when she writes at first she "failed to realize that Arthur stood for exactly the kind of thing I had always supported—i.e. the struggles of the Welsh against English domination" (18).[77] At the same time, however, this comment is anachronistic and perhaps self-serving—though a historical Arthur may well have spoken a form of Welsh, there is little ground for associating him with the historic Welsh nation.

Near the beginning of the play, Merlin sings, "The emperor of the world is gone. / But Arthur son of Uther here / In Britain raised his dragon-flag / And trained and lead his men to cruel war—Romans once more" (34). The ultimate futility of this self-deluding nostalgia is borne out by later events. Merlin's description of Arthur's efforts also brings to mind the last gestures of British imperialism in the twentieth century in Suez, Cyprus and elsewhere, actions which, even to Conservatives, often seemed self-parodic. Merlin sings of Roman emperor:

> Around his boundaries he set
>
> A ditch, a wall, a palisade.
>
> The wild men outside were kept
>
> Outside, until one day he was betrayed,
>
> The wall fell down, the wild men
>
> Did jump across it and then ran

[77] This point is not consistent with the play's criticism of Arthur as an aging, deluded imperialist. The interpretation D'Arcy suggests here is almost entirely written out of the final version.

Down every road that led to Rome—

They broke to bits the Emperor's golden crown

Kicked over the throne. (31-32)

Malick points out that these walls, boundaries and fortifications "are associated with rulers and former Roman conquerors and their 'rectilinear' (that is coercive and antifreedom) attitudes" (154).[78] As Salway explains, the greatest difference between Roman society and that of the Celtic peoples they conquered was that it was "dominated by the rule of law, which closely regulated the relation between the individual and the state and between one man and another" ("Roman" 3). Arden and D'Arcy's politics always contain a strong anarchic element, and the Roman retreat from Britain was, in their eyes, a positive development. The broken walls herald a new and greater freedom that will, as the play shows, be short lived. Arthur's belief in the rightness of his authority and his unflagging desire to take that authority upon himself dramatizes Salway's point that, "For Britain, it was not only the great events of the subsequent history of the [Roman] empire that directly affected her destiny, but also the extraordinary success the Romans had in transmitting their values to the populations they absorbed—particularly to the native ruling classes" ("Roman" 7).

[78] This notion is also embodied by the wall in Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971). Bond's play focuses on authority, kingship, and the experience of common people in a somewhat similar setting to *The Island of The Mighty*. As Patricia Herne point out in the annotated edition of *Lear*, the King's salutation to one of his regiments, "Greetings to my glorious ninth," is borrowed from Julius Caesar. "Lear thus places himself within a great military tradition," Hern explains (90). But Bond does not develop the Roman parallel.

The physical and ideological ruin of the Roman imperialist enterprise is dramatized when Balin and the Bondwoman come upon the ruins of a Roman villa. Balin asks, "What kind of house do you imagine this was once before the bushes grew all over it?" The Bondwoman responds, "House of a great man—Some Roman very probably. Birds live in it, and badgers. End of all great men" (76). This episode posits the inevitability of the decline of empires. A receptive audience could then see the dissolution of Britain's empire as the culmination of a historical process rather than as cause for nostalgia or regret. The description of "wild men [. . .] kick[ing] over the throne" evokes the fears of twentieth-century imperialists at the advent of colonial independence movements.

Part one ends with an important monologue in which Arthur makes a case for his continued command. He outlines a claim to hereditary authority based on his descent from Magnus Maximus, a Roman General who gained a victory over the Picts in 382. The victory provided Maximus the prestige necessary to proclaim himself emperor (as Medraut does late in the play) and eventually to rule, for five years, the Gallic Prefecture, comprised of Britain, Gaul, and Spain (Salway, "Roman" 55). Arthur then asserts,

> The enemy is most ferocious. We will fight against him ruthlessly, we will defeat him without mercy. In the name of Christ, let me remind you, we are not predestined to win. Too much pride in our past glory may lead us toward carelessness, lack of discipline, foolhardiness, disorder, and the destruction of all that we stand for. Companions: you

> alone are responsible for the continued religion and civilization of Britain. This Island has been called by her poets "The Island of the Mighty". Do not betray that title. (100)

Arthur's appeals to an idealized past and his conviction regarding his civilizing and evangelical mission echo the language of latter-day imperialism. The fear of disorder and societal breakdown, anxiety about the loss of power and prestige, and the exhortation to fulfill a debt to the glorious past all resonate with the jingoistic appeals made by British politicians during and after the World Wars. There is also a connection here, not explicit but available to the audience nonetheless, between Arthur's foredoomed adventure and the fiasco at Suez, which, as we have seen, was very much on Arden's mind in the early stages of the composition of the play.

One question raised by the first part of the play concerns the significance of the Picts. Though the authors do not articulate an authoritative claim to possession of the island on the Picts's behalf, and their rituals are shown as to be unsavory and cruel, the Picts are treated more sympathetically than any other ethnic group in the play. At the same time, they are exoticized and, to some degree, romanticized. In an allegorical reading, they could represent the modern peoples of the so-called Celtic Fringe.[79] The Picts are shown fighting a defensive battle against encroachment by the

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[79] Arden makes an analogy between Roman attitudes toward the Celts and contemporary British attitudes toward Ireland in a 1969 article called "Politics and Police." He writes that "The damage to the Belfast water supply, and the threats against the Prince of Wales's mini-coronation, though serious enough in themselves, do not, I think, justify the Government falling victim to the sort of 'Celto-Phobia' that Livy reports in Rome at the time of the Gaulish attack on the city. The Roman populace, wrote Livy, told each other horrific tales of the giant size of these Trans-Alpine adversaries, with their wild braided hair, their huge beards and their incredible battle frenzy" (*To Present* 90). The reference

Prince of Strathclyde, Arthur's nephew and satellite. They are a matrilineal society (in contrast to the emphatically masculinist culture Arthur embodies) that has been subject by the Christian Britons to gross stereotypes focusing on their "disgusting sexual customs" (47). Taliesin, Strathclyde's poet, argues that the Picts "are heathen [. . .]. And therefore by nature malignant" and he justifies the incursion of Christian settlers on the Picts' land by arguing that "If [the settlers] graze cattle, they also evangelize / They convert the tribesmen upon their lands" (47, 51). This rhetoric clearly recalls the racism and the belief in a civilizing mission that has characterized modern imperialism. Also suggested is an allegorical relationship between the Picts and modern anticolonial guerilla fighters. Merlin comments that the Picts do not fight like the Romans or Arthur's army. Instead they fight

> [. . .] like the mountain cats themselves who hide
> And glowering glide
> Among the rocks and golden gorse
> They wait to spring and then run back
> Into their holes and none can find
> Upon the stony ground the secret track
> Of their attack. (63)

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to the Prince of Wales concerns his 1969 investiture at Caernarfon Castle in Wales. This ceremony, apparently a reaction to "nationalist fervour" in Scotland and Wales, refurbished "an ancient symbol of English domination of the Welsh" (Hewison, *Culture* 194).

In his 1971 preface to his radio play *The Bagman*, Arden approves the tactics of Maoist guerrillas in India (*Plays: Two* 378-9). In light of these comments and considering Arden and D'Arcy's politics, the similarity between this description of Pictish military tactics (about which almost nothing is known) and those of modern guerrilla and paramilitary groups like the Viet Cong and the IRA must be deliberate.[80] Thus, the Picts are aligned with anti-imperialist groups with whom the authors are sympathetic. Merlin comments after a Pict victory, "And so the stronger soldiers go / Betrayed, defeated, all in tears. / The weaker ones who conquered them / Have conquered all their weakness and the fears / Of a hundred years" (64). These lines suggest that Arden and D'Arcy see nationalist violence as an empowering response to colonialism (64). The reference to "the weaknesses and fears" of colonized peoples points to an analysis of the psychological effects of imperialism that Arden and D'Arcy develop only sporadically in this play, but which becomes more prominent in *The Non-stop Connelly Show*.

Glimpses of Celtic peasants, outlaws and slaves reveal the "plebeian bias" Malick identifies in Arden and D'Arcy's plays even when the narrative seems narrowly focused on Arthur. Malick, referring to Arden's drama in general, explains that "Arden's dramaturgic practice of setting the action within, and in implicit or explicit relation to, a sharply polarized sociopolitical universe has the significant

[80] It is possible to push the analogy further—admittedly without explicit textual support—and imagine that, if Arthur represents authority and government in modern Britain, his subordinate Strathclyde, who depends on him for military assistance, represents the ruling classes in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. The Celtic Picts whom Strathclyde opposes would then stand for the Nationalist factions in the province.

consequence of dialogizing every viewpoint and voice within the multivocal structure of a play" (141). This dialogic element is enhanced by the fact that nearly all the characters represent particular social groups. These groups are differentiated by class, ethnicity or, often, both. D'Arcy writes that

> We have attempted no more than to indicate—from a rocking and sinking and post-imperial standpoint—[. . .] something of how the early history of Britain foreshadows twentieth-century turbulence. "Kynge Arthur is nat dede"—but he seems to have changed sides. The true voice of liberty is more likely to be heard today from the kind of men and women who have little part to play in the traditional tales: I mean the ones who did the work, who fed and housed the noble warriors, and equipped them for their fight. (qtd in Hunt 158)

Most often in *The Island of the Mighty*, the "ones who did the work" are shown to be Celtic "outsiders." Peacock's argument in *Radical Stages* registers the extent to which D'Arcy's sentiment here mirrors "The emphasis placed by Marxist and Socialist historians upon the part played in history not only by political leaders but also by ordinary people and their attempt to offer an account of the experiences not only of the winners but also of the losers of the past." This concern, he continues, "stood in direct opposition to the individualism of bourgeois history" (16). The grievances voiced by characters like the Bondwoman or the thief Garlon reveal the partiality of the standard historical narratives of princes, admirals, ambassadors and kings. For example, Garlon recounts,

> I had a corn field and an orchard, five pigs and a black-and-white cow. But the Prince of Gwynedd took them off me, grabbed my wife to be his mistress, turned me out of my cottage. For what reason? I was in debt to him, rent and so forth. Interest upon money lent me. Said I was bound to him as a serf for evermore if I could not pay it. (72)

Recalling that his grandfather was a serf in Roman times, Garlon comments that "For a Roman it was natural he should enslave the men of Britain" (72). This assertion contains a claim to an ethnic solidarity that is violated when Britons oppress Britons. The field, orchard and livestock represent a self-sufficiency compromised by exploitative economic relationships. When the Bondwoman tells Balin, who has stolen Garlon's plunder, that with "the great big / Sack full of gold" they "have a whole great island full of trees and mountain water / And no one to control us wherever we shall wander," she is expressing an anarchic, utopian desire for an independence outside the prevailing economic system (75). In the society depicted in the play, such independence can be won only through crime. The Bondwoman, speaking to Balin of Pellam (and the authority he represents), recognizes that she is oppressed not only as a peasant, but also as a woman: "He will make me a slave of his bed, and you too will be his slave. Look, forget you are a nobleman. If you must live a life of fighting, why not fight in defence of me? There are so many like myself—everything that is ever done in the name of God or good order becomes done

against us" (79).[81] She then suggests that Balin join forces with Garlon. This proposition recognizes social and political affiliations which can respond to existing structures of power and authority more effectively than can Balin's vengeful anger or Garlon's criminality alone. In addition, the notion that "God and good order" can be invoked to sanction oppression reflects a criticism of the "law and order" rhetoric of British politicians in the sixties and seventies. In time Balin achieves a radical insight similar to the Bondwoman's, but only after he has killed Garlon and the Bondwoman has been trampled by Arthur's warhorses.

Part two introduces the important character Aneurin, poet to the Prince of Gododdin. In the first scene, Aneurin is denied the title of Chief Poet when he produces an irreverent and satirical poem on a topic chosen by the College of Bards, which includes Merlin and Taliesin. The topic is "The Burial of the Head of Bran the Blessed." This myth plays a major role in the remainder of the play. Bran is, in the play, a quasi-mythical figure whose head, buried on the banks of the Thames, is said to ensure against a successful invasion of Britain. As it turns out, Arthur has exhumed the skull and affixed it to his standard, leaving the island without magical protection. Arthur discovers that the English, who we are told have been driven to Britain by famine, have established a military presence on the island and plan to wait out the winter for reinforcement and continue their conquest in the spring. It appears that the

[81] Connolly expresses a similar idea in *The Non-stop Connolly Show*. He speaks of his wife, Lillie: "Very well, perhaps I do shed blood / Perhaps I do make war / For no-one else but her— / What's wrong with that: she is a legion, I can't count / How many of her there are" (415). Both these passages point to feminist arguments that are increasingly prominent in Arden and D'Arcy's plays of the late sixties and seventies.

Prince of Gododdin has invited the English into the country. The scene then shifts to Gododdin, where Gwenddydd, Merlin's estranged wife, is staying with Gwenhwyvar, Gododdin's sister. Gwenhwyvar, who has apparently murdered her first husband, is having an affair with Aneurin. Through the Prince of Gododdin, Arthur arranges a marriage between Medraut and Gwenhwyvar, but then decides to marry her himself. The marriage is entirely, in the bride's words, "expedient and political," and it provides a test by which Arthur can prove himself "still virile." (129). Through Aneurin, Gwenhwyvar hears the tale of the Daughters of Branwen. Aneurin has acquired this information from Morgan, Arthur's elderly half-sister who is discovered living in a derelict mill. The Daughter of Branwen is, according to legend, the descendent of the first Queen Branwen and the rightful queen of Britain. Gwenhwyvar, it turns out, is the daughter of Branwen and so must choose a king. Choosing Medraut, she marks his forehead with her fingernail. It is subsequently revealed that Medraut is the son of Arthur and his sister, the Princess of Strathclyde, who was the Daughter of Branwen in her generation and whom Arthur killed because she, obviously, knew who Medraut's father was. He also tried to kill Morgan. Medraut then claims the title of Emperor, which Arthur has refused, and marches against Arthur. The forces meet in rainstorm at Camlann and are set upon by the English. Both Arthur and Medraut are killed and their armies destroyed. This defeat, Merlin imagines, will mean that "Five hundred years of history will all be overwhelmed, / Swilled away to nowhere in a pagan bog of blood and mud" (141).

In part two, the authors initiate a prolonged consideration of the role of the poet or artist in society, focusing especially on his or her relation to political authority. The significance of this theme for Arden and D'Arcy is confirmed in Arden's *The Bagman*. Concerned with similar issues, the play is explicitly autobiographical. The narrator introduces himself as "John Arden (thirty-eight) of ancient family, / Writer of plays for all the world to see." He continues:

> I could not boast, like Cicero,
>
> That I had saved the state,
>
> Nor yet, like Catiline, that I had tried
>
> My fiercest best to have it all destroyed. (401)

Arden would clearly prefer to see himself in Catiline's role, but accuses himself in the sometimes self-lacerating preface to the play of fencesitting, especially regarding the Northern Ireland situation (*Plays: Two* 377). Arden expresses his conviction about the political nature of writing when he writes that, during their trip to India, he and D'Arcy were detained and several books (including Mao and Lenin) of an "anti-state nature" were confiscated from them. In this incident, he explains, "the dangerous potentialities of literature were, for the first time in my life at first hand, made clear to me" (*To Present* 380). In *The Bagman*, Arden attacks, in Hunt's words, "the position that it's possible, in our present barbarous and unjust state of the world, to make art that is neutral, uncommitted, objective" (151). The plot concerning Merlin, Taliesin and Aneurin in *The Island of the Mighty* have the same import.

But the play also warns that literature can become propaganda. The three poets prominent in the play can, like Cicero and Catiline, be classified by their adherence to the status quo represented by Arthur and Strathclyde, Taliesin's patron. Taliesin and Merlin are both faithful servants to the state; the difference is that Merlin is more troubled by his role, as in his comment after the Bondwoman's death that

> My words are ever willing
>
> In the service of [Arthur's] sword—
>
> Oh my merciful Lord
>
> It was not me who called
>
> The hard horse-hoof
>
> Upon this tender head stark dead! (86).

Before the battle at Camlann, Arthur tells Taliesin, "I will help [Arthur] to gain the victory / Though it cost me my life / And my truth and my poetic integrity" (88). Aneurin, on the other hand, is uncouth and anti-authoritarian. In response to the College of the Bards' request that he compose a poem on the story of Bran, Aneurin challenges the myth: "We are told that so long as [Bran's skull] remains there, beneath its cairn of stones, no invader can successfully cross the grey sea and take possession of this Island. We are told so and we all believe it. Nevertheless, the Romans came" (104). These remarks provoke a response from Taliesin that exemplifies his attitudes toward authority:

> I insist on pointing out the lack of logic in his argument. The Romans did indeed come, and for four hundred years they stayed here. They

> intermingled with our people, they gave us government, built stone roads, and fortified towns, they provided us with the inestimable blessing of the Gospel of Christ. Not at all the sort of invasion against which we are defended by the Buried Skull of Bran. (104)[82]

This imperialist apologia, resembling modern British arguments in defense of the empire, especially in India, mirrors Taliesin's attitudes toward the authority of kings and the church. Aneurin's very different views become clear when it is revealed that he is the author of a blasphemous song sung earlier in the play by Garlon. In this song, John the Baptist, wearing a hair shirt, proclaims as he returns from the desert, "Beware beware— / The naked man has come to steal your coat!" He meets Jesus, who is "dressed in cloth-of-gold." John the Baptist takes Jesus's shirt and is executed. The song continues:

> Who fetched the King's soldiers to run him in?
> Lord Jesus who was both Priest and King,
> Who forgave the rich men all their sins
> So long as they said that they loved him
> And would whip their people till they loved him too—
> Lord Jesus, a great revenge is coming upon you! (73).

[82] This apology can be compared to Arthur's willful ignorance concerning the more distasteful aspects of imperialism. After Pellam is killed, Arthur admits to his companions that the Roman built the empire "all for their own enrichment and the oppression of their people," but insists that this "is not the sort of Empire I choose to remember. Rather justice, restraint of power, protection of the weak" (83).

The song is an attack on the involvement of Christianity with power in the society of the play. But it is also, by extension, a criticism of how Christianity has been used for political advantage in later British history, especially during the age of empire. When Aneurin expresses satisfaction that the song has circulated, Merlin counters that "The man who sang it to me had never heard your name." Aneurin replies that this is "Not important," suggesting a very different idea of the function of art within society and a questioning of artistic individualism (106).

Later Aneurin and Morgan discuss his song. She tells him that "In little dripping cottages and forest shelters from the Firth of Clyde to Bodmin Tor there are men and women who sing that song and it says to them one thing. [Arthur's] dragon banner must be broken and the Daughters of Branwen called home" (149). The circulation of Aneurin's song reveals an oppositional culture critical of the authority of the state and the myths and ideologies that support it. This network consists of the dispossessed classes (at a time when, in Aneurin's words, "Two thirds of the men of every land / Are fugitives in this murderous age") and women (228). The breaking Arthur's staff envisioned in the song symbolizes the anarchic overthrow of masculinist authority. For different reasons, breaking the staff is, initially, the object of Medraut's opposition to Arthur, which is why Gwenhwyvar chooses him as her champion. Medraut, however, proclaims himself emperor, which even Arthur had not dared. This move represents the betrayal of the revolutionary impetus of the Branwen myth; Medraut, Morgan laments, "is nothing better than [Arthur] made young" (163).

In an important exchange between Merlin and Morgan, the poet says, "I ornament with polished euphony the coarse words of the General's thought. And the General's thought is always of dead men—you can't ornament those." Morgan replies, ironically, "Sweet and decorous, they tell me, to lie down dead in battle on behalf of your native land" (218). The simultaneous allusion to Horace and Wilfred Owen is significant for a number of reasons. First, through Owen, it recognizes the currency of classical rhetoric in the patriotic and imperialistic language of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain. (This modern use of the classics provides yet more evidence of the historical potency of the analogy between Rome and Britain.) Second, Morgan's use of the phrase in this context again calls attention to the variety of the roles available to poets; Horace, seen through this line at least, is a jingoist, but Owen questions the use of poetry to maintain the authority of the state. After Arthur's death, his lieutenant Bedwyr wants to find Merlin because, in Bedwyr's words, "He was the voice of the General. [. . .] Never can you find warriors that will fight without a poet to make it known for what reason they should muster" (184). When Bedwyr reluctantly asks Aneurin what to do about Merlin, the young poet tells him to leave Merlin be:

> He has been used by far too many far too long.
>
> He desired to be a poet: he desired to make a song.
>
> He desired to make it for himself alone
>
> And for a girl, could he find one to love. (213)

Later Aneurin, referring to these lines, recognizes that "What I said to Bedwyr about the loneliness of the poet is not true." Later he explains, "The poet without the people is nothing. The people without the poet would still be the people [. . .] All that we can do is to make loud and to make clear their own proper voice" (232). Thus Aneurin, like Arden in *The Bagman*, rejects the idea of poetry as apolitical, personal and impartial.

The myth of the Daughter of Branwen circulates among the same people who recite Aneurin's song, countering the myth of the buried head of Bran the Blessed. As Aneurin tells the story of the Daughter of Branwen, the island was "once inhabited by huge ladies of great beauty." Gwenddydd adds that "they were all driven out, you see, they were destroyed by armed men." Gwenhwyvar then elaborates: "Starving crazy for land, I suppose. Once they took it they sat down upon it and they said, 'This has always belonged to us.'—and if the huge ladies they destroyed had left little daughters behind them, they took hold of those girls, and they said, 'Belongs to us, she has always belonged to us!'" (131). Aneurin feels that he must believe that the Daughters of Branwen will return and that Arthur's standard will be broken. He explains:

> For how else can I believe that justice will ever be done
> For men who have lived ever without it, who they are I do not know—
> The very names of their tribes by some conqueror have been imposed,
> Forced under is their ancient language by an alien tongue that will not
> flow,

> Generation after generation while the long sword has been walking
> over,
> They have lived and lurked under—altogether without hope
> Except that they have constructed their foolish hope of their own:
> Queen Branwen, they will say to you, once ruled through nothing
> but Love— (156-57)

Several details here, including the destruction of the language and landlordism, suggest an Irish context. The Branwen myth, like those associated with Irish nationhood, has attained an underground currency among an oppressed population. The revolutionary content of the myth, the authors argue, has the potential to undermine the foundations of the masculinist, militaristic and hierarchical system Arthur represents. The passage also demonstrates that the discursive power of myth can be a last (but not for that reason insignificant) recourse for people excluded from more concrete forms of power. Here Arden and D'Arcy posit for Britain an origin myth which represents the nation as feminine, much as many varieties of Irish nationalism do. This strategy, however, could be complicit with imperialist strategies which have sought to feminize colonized peoples by attributing to them weakness, irrationality, emotionalism and other stereotypically feminine traits.

Part three, concerned primarily with Merlin's activities after the death of Arthur, begins with an extended flashback to the night before the battle. We discover that Merlin had the opportunity to prevent the battle but that, despite his duty as a poet to reconcile the commanders, he stayed with Gwenddydd. He views Taliesin's

efforts to prevent the battle as a betrayal of Arthur, whose glory he wants to see enhanced by victory. When Taliesin accuses Merlin of ignoring his duty and allowing the battle to occur, Merlin stabs him with a spear. Merlin then suffers a breakdown and, imagining himself a bird, flees into the forest. Bedwyr, who has become extremely religious, sets out to find and "cure" Merlin, who now resides in the Glen of the Madmen. Bedwyr wants Merlin's advice, particularly regarding Arthur's dying request that Bedwyr "drown" Arthur's Roman sword in a lake. Aneurin is also trying to find Merlin so that Bedwyr will free Gwenddydd, whom he has imprisoned to blackmail Aneurin. With the help of a miller, Gwenddydd escapes and joins Aneurin in his search for Merlin. Soon Aneurin and Gwenddydd conceive a child, but are forced to flee an English attack with a group of peasants. Bedwyr, unable to fight the English, throws away the sword and is ordained a priest. In the meantime, Morgan has joined Merlin. Together they are rejuvenated, but Morgan perishes in a fall from a cliff. Several weeks or months later, at Bedwyr's instruction, a Cowman's Wife begins to leave food for Merlin, who is still living in the open. Though she is initially frightened, the Cowman's Wife and Merlin become friendly. Just as Merlin seems to be recovering, the Cowman discovers him with his wife and kills him.

The play concludes with Aneurin singing a song about Lazarus. Lazarus, raised from the dead but stinking and decomposed, relates, as sung by Aneurin,

> I found underground
>
> Two thousand or three
>
> Of stinking corpses

> Just like me.
>
> And when the big boots
>
> Dance on the grave
>
> It is the corpses
>
> They will raise
>
> For you went and buried them
>
> With all the life inside
>
> That they could not live
>
> While they were alive.
>
> We are going to come back
>
> And we are going to take hold
>
> So hideous and bloody greedy
>
> We take hold of the whole world! (235)

These lines are a final appeal on behalf of the "losers" of history. The implication is that the postimperial moment, whether in the sixth century or the twentieth, is inherently revolutionary in the minimal sense of historical rupture; further, Aneurin suggests, it provides an opportunity for a truly revolutionary reconstruction of society. With Labour Party socialism discredited and the persistence of class and ethnic divisions, such change was obviously not happening in Britain in the sixties and early seventies. Thus, the last lines have a tone of exhortation rather than celebration. In the play, the revolutionary moment is passing with the advance of the English invaders. In addition to the radical response Aneurin advocates, the play

presents several alternative reactions to this potentially revolutionary situation, all of which are shown to be inadequate. Bedwyr articulates one of these responses when he speaks these lines: “The Hand of God, His chastisement. Innocent you are, all of you; but all the land has been chastised. And we must learn to comprehend it” (229). This thinking suggests a resignation and fatalism associated with the end of empire, a conservative response that accompanies Bedwyr’s retreat into religion. At the same time, Arthur’s attempt to uphold imperial traditions by force fails spectacularly. And the elegiac tone of Arthur’s and Taliesin’s comments about the legacy of the Roman Empire is characteristic of yet another response that the authors show to be self-deluding and reactionary.

The Island of the Mighty prompts allegorical readings that are perhaps not as well conveyed in performance as on paper, though the play has never been performed in the way the authors intended it.[83] Arden and D’Arcy describe their relationship with the ICA, where *The Hero Rises Up* was first performed, as a conflict with “Roman” official bodies (*Hero* 7). Yet the conflict was much more pronounced in the case of *The Island of the Mighty*. The play was performed in 1972 by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych theatre, after the playwrights picketed the rehearsals. The production of *The Hero Rises Up* had demonstrated for the authors

[83] In “Playwrights on Picket,” Arden and D’Arcy write, “But what about the actual production of *The Island of the Mighty* at the Aldwych? Did it in any way, after all the trouble, recapture the authors’ intentions. They do not know: they never saw it. They had their names removed from the program, in the hope that the critics and the public would realise what was on stage was alone the work of the RSC—based admittedly on an Arden/D’Arcy script—but abridged and interpreted finally without reference to the authors and their desired meaning” (*To Present* 171).

"the limitations of such bodies [as the ICA] as midwives of free experiment" (*To Present* 84). Arden and D'Arcy quarreled with the ICA over aspects of the production and the right to compose publicity material. In their quarrel with the RSC, they demanded to attend rehearsals and to execute necessary revisions to the text, for which they had contracted. They claimed that the RSC, subsidized by the Tory government in order to "cultivate bourgeois society on a consumer level," staged an "anti-imperialist play so that it glorifies imperialism" (qtd. in Brustein 25). In their essay "Playwrights on Picket," Arden and D'Arcy argue that their play was censored. They explain that

> The great difficulty is that dramatists will rarely be told: "Your play is subversive: we are imposing a political restriction upon its performance": an aesthetic or bureaucratic reason will rather be advanced. The play is too long; the cast is too large; the project does not qualify for a grant because of some unfortunate technicality, perhaps the author's normal residence is outside the UK [by this time Arden and D'Arcy were living in Ireland]. (*To Present* 157)

Arden claims that he was told that "a new play could be commissioned—provided that it was *a genuine Arden work*," which he took to mean one that was not co-authored with D'Arcy (*To Present* 157). The conflict led Arden and D'Arcy to become affiliated with the newly formed Theatre Writers Union and to turn their attention increasingly to alternative venues outside London.. The authors' next play, the distinctly unallegorical *Non-stop Connolly Show*, probably could not have been

performed in a subsidized theatre because of its subject matter alone.[84] This later play marked Arden and D'Arcy's complete break with mainstream theatre. They gave up appealing to the middle-class theatre audiences that frequented London venues, and focused instead on working-class, student, and trade union audiences.

In *The Island of the Mighty*, Arden and D'Arcy, if you believe their account, tested and then exceeded the limits of official tolerance as embodied in the policies of the Royal Shakespeare Company. They write that "a national theatre has one main purpose: artistic prestige. If that purpose is attained the subsidies will continue despite financial loss, provided the loss is not too outrageous" (*To Present* 172). A play like *The Island of the Mighty*, which sought to undermine British national ideologies, Arden and D'Arcy suggest, jeopardized this prestige. These arguments aside, the play must be judged a failure simply because no audience has seen it performed the way the authors intended (and very few any other way). In addition, because of its length, complexity and confrontational politics, the play could only have succeeded with the most indulgent and sympathetic of audiences. So, though the authors express through their characters—particularly Aneurin—a desire to speak for "the people," this play failed either to speak to "the people" or to speak effectively on their behalf.

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[84] Catherine Itzin provides persuasive "'analogous' evidence" that *The Non-stop Connolly Show* was, or at least would have been, censored. She points to the case of Kenneth Griffith's television documentary on the life of Michael Collins, which was "banned outright" around the same time (34-35). Arden at one point suggested a radio play on Connolly, upon which "The BBC dropped the commission like a hot brick. A play on such a subject, they said, might 'inflame passions in Northern Ireland'" (*To Present* 110).

Conclusion

After *The Island of the Mighty*, Arden and D'Arcy increasingly turned their attention to Ireland. *The Ballygombeen Bequest* (1972) and *The Non-stop Connolly Show* (1975), based on the life of the Irish nationalist and socialist James Connelly, draw attention to aspects of Irish history which the authors consider important and, in many cases, neglected. These plays also contain explicit references to events in Northern Ireland in the late sixties and early seventies. In "A Socialist Hero on the Stage," their essay on the production of *The Non-stop Connolly Show*, Arden and D'Arcy argue that "There still exists [. . .] an unconcluded Civil War throughout the whole of Ireland, inseparable of course from the war in the North against imperialism and the heritage of colonial plantation" (*To Present* 120). Both plays also support the authors' contention that, "Although Ireland is nominally an independent sovereign state, economically it is still very much a colony of Great Britain" (*To Present* 164).

Neither play was intended to be performed in the mainstream theatre. *The Ballygombeen Bequest* was first preformed in May 1972 at St. Mary's College of Education on the Falls Road in Belfast, just a few months before Arden and D'Arcy's final break with the "legitimate" theatre during the production of *The Island of the Mighty*. *The Non-stop Connelly Show*—actually a series of six plays that totaled 26 hours in performance—was performed in its entirety only once: on Easter 1975 at Liberty Hall in Dublin, the former headquarters of the Irish Transport Workers Union, where Connelly once worked. The authors declare that *The Non-stop Connelly Show*

was “aimed directly at audiences of Socialists and Republicans” (*To Present* 119). By this time, Arden and D’Arcy felt that their political project could not be realized in mainstream theatres, subsidized or commercial, and their unabashed desire to speak to a particular (and partisan) audience is a sign of their rejection of such venues.

Though its Irish subject matter does not warrant extended consideration here, *The Non-stop Connelly Show* contains numerous passages relevant to my arguments in this chapter. In one of these, Connelly comments after a police attack on supporters of the 1913 general strike in Dublin that “Sunday was called Bloody Sunday / It was not the first nor would it prove to be the last / In Irish and in English history (302). This passage, of course, refers to the killing of 14 Catholic civilians in a civil rights march in Derry in 1972 (and also possibly to the Black and Tan attack on a football crowd resulting in 12 deaths in 1920). Connelly’s comments break with naturalist conventions by referring to events that occur after his death. This perspective adds weight to Arden and D’Arcy’s arguments about the inevitability of violence in a colonial context and the importance of historical inquiry in understanding the colonial or postcolonial present. Connelly underscores this last point when, referring to himself and the other Easter rebels, he asserts that “We were the first. We shall not be the last. / This was not history. It has not passed” (448). He continues:

> We were the first to roll away the stone
>
> From the leprous wall of the whitened tomb
>
> We were the first to show the deep dark hole within
>
> Could be thrown open to the living sun. (448)

The “leprous” tomb calls to mind the image of the decayed Lazarus given voice in Aneurin’s song at the end of *The Island of the Mighty*. And the image of darkness thrown open to the sun recalls Caracciolo’s lines about pulling back the bedcovers to reveal the “great foul heap” of “rotten bones” in *The Hero Rises Up*. Connolly is speaking here from beyond the grave. This is one of several moments in Arden and D’Arcy’s plays which witness, in one form or another, the return from the dead of victims of oppressive regimes and ideologies. *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* reaches a climax with the appearance of the skeleton of Billy Hicks; in *The Hero Rises Up* Caracciolo’s body is reanimated and speaks from under the sea; Aneurin speaks for Lazarus in *The Island of the Mighty*; and the ghost of Padraic O’Leary, beaten to death by the police after he is falsely accused of being an IRA Volunteer, wreaks havoc in the final scene of *The Ballygombeen Bequest*. In the revised version of that play, *The Little Gray Home in the West*, Padraic speaks “as a dead man:”

> This is my only voice.
>
> For I am dead and murdered. Out of my grave
>
> I cannot walk alive
>
> Except in an actor’s mask. My tongue in another’s throat
>
> Explaining, arguing, persuading fruitlessly how it should all come
>   about
>
> That I am dead and cannot walk alive upon my own
>
> And yet for nothing that I myself had done
>
> For only that which I myself had been

In life before my life, before I was even born. (191)

These lines recall Lazarus's description in Aneurin's song of the innocent casualties of wars and the victims of kings: "For you went and buried them / With all the life inside / That they could not live / While they were alive" (235). These moments, perhaps more than any others, epitomize Arden and D'Arcy's project in these plays. D'Arcy encapsulates their attitude toward history when she writes that:

> most of history in fact consists of gaps. To fill them would be to direct the flow of interpretation from a comfortable "mainstream" into a series of eddies representing the socalled "losing" side in one historical conflict after another. "Mainstream" is winners' history: eddies and backwaters are where the losers still survive, refusing to be entirely written out. (qtd. in Malick 139)

Arden and D'Arcy intend to create a "history from below" by narrating imperialism and other forms of tyranny from the perspective of the oppressed. As I have suggested, this effort parallels both the work of postwar historians and the development of the discourse on imperialism and colonialism in the period.

Arden and D'Arcy were among the first British playwrights to write dramatically effective plays in a recognizably Brechtian style. Artistically, the most successful of these are *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *The Hero Rises Up*. Brecht's methods add dramatic force to their pioneering interrogations of British national identities and imperial ideologies. Arden and D'Arcy were also among the first postwar playwrights to take an unmistakable anti-colonial stance. These efforts

clearly influenced the authors I discuss in later chapters. But the largest debt Hare, Brenton and Churchill owe Arden and D'Arcy is for their attempts to find alternative venues and forge new institutional arrangements. By doing so they, along with a few others, laid the groundwork for what would become know as the "fringe" theatre movement in the late sixties and early seventies.

While Arden and D'Arcy's plays are valuable literary and historical artifacts, few were at all successful by commercial standards, and several were disastrous. Only *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* has been successfully revived in a professional theatre. In hindsight, it seems that Arden and D'Arcy overestimated the potential of the theatre—an increasingly marginalized institution in postwar Britain—to bring about social change. But box office totals and critical acclaim are not the only standards by which the success of a play can be measured. Arden and D'Arcy's objective was always to change the political opinions of individual audience members. By this standard, their plays may well have had some success, though the extent of those effects is impossible to gauge.

CHAPTER THREE

Howard Brenton and David Hare: The People's War and the Failure of the Left

Howard Brenton and David Hare both began writing plays in the turbulent late sixties. And though their politics are by no means identical, both are recognized as leading exponents of socialist theatre in Britain in the 1970s. In addition, Brenton and Hare have collaborated a number of times, most notably in writing *Brassneck* (1973) and the very successful *Pravda* (1985). In 1976, Hare directed Brenton's *Weapons of Happiness*, the first new play to premiere at the National Theatre. There are, however, dangers in conflating Brenton and Hare's ideas and work. For one thing, their plays are usually quite different. Hare's work is more personal than Brenton's and usually smaller in scale, and it more closely resembles the naturalistic drama that dominated British theatre earlier in the century. Brenton's plays are often larger and more theatrically ambitious than Hare's, and they are more firmly rooted in a tradition of leftist drama. Especially significant for my argument is the fact that Brenton has been much more deeply influenced by Brecht than has Hare, a distinction that is no less clear when Brenton consciously reacts against Brecht's influence.

Brenton and Hare are prominent members of what John Russell Taylor famously if imprecisely defined as "the Second Wave" of postwar-British drama.[85] Taylor distinguished Hare, Brenton, Tom Stoppard, Peter Barnes and others from

[85] See Taylor, *The Second Wave: British Drama for the Seventies*.

Osborne, Wesker, Arden, Pinter and other playwrights who began working professionally in the late fifties and early sixties primarily on generational grounds. Taylor simplistically identified a "process [. . .] by which inexorably the revolutionaries of one generation overthrow the establishment only to become the establishment for the next" (11). In addition to discounting continuities across time and suggesting antagonism that may not exist, this concept of literary and artistic generations de-emphasizes the social and material bases that underlie changes in artistic cultures. Simon Trussler's more rigorous effort to account for the changing theatrical climate in the late sixties and early seventies in his introduction to *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies* (1981) is typical of later accounts.[86] Rather than viewing young playwrights as adolescents rebelling against their elders, as Taylor does, Trussler links the changes in the theatrical world that began around 1968 to a broad range of historical circumstances. He explains succinctly that "the theatrical changes of 1968 were not only a response to but an organic part of a movement for social and political change which had swept the western world" (*New Theatre* xii). Catherine Itzin concurs, adding that

> 1968 [. . .] marked the coming to consciousness—to political consciousness—of the war-baby generation, to an awareness of environmental plundering and pollution, to cold-war imperialism, to conspicuous consumption in the first and second worlds and to the

[86] Also notable among these accounts are Catherine Itzin's *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (1980) and John Bull's *New British Political Dramatists* (1984).

> struggles of the third world. The response was disillusionment, despair, pessimism—and anger. The significant thing was that this response—the rebellion—did not remain random but became a movement of the political left, appealing (however confusedly) to Marx as a symbol of the revolutionary transformation of society. All of this came to be reflected in the theatre. (3)

These developments produced what Michael Billington remembers as a "frenzied volatility" (1). The theatrical "movement" that grew out of this anger and upheaval soon became know as the "fringe."[87] Notable among the fringe companies that appeared beginning in 1968 were Red Ladder, John McGrath's 7:84, General Will, Pip Simmons, the (Brighton) Combination, Portable Theatre, Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment. These groups were extremely diverse in their aims and methods: the plays they produced varied from the aggressively confrontational to the polemical and didactic; subject matter ranged from the historical to the immediately contemporary. Nevertheless, the fringe shared a generally leftist politics, though that politics was often incompletely formulated.

The fringe companies of the late sixties and seventies are primarily remembered now as a nursery for playwrights—including Hare, Brenton, David Edgar and Caryl Churchill—who would gain prominence later in the decade in the mainstream subsidized theatres, including the Royal Court, the National Theatre and

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[87] Itzin's book is the most thorough history of alternative theatre after 1968. David Edgar's "Ten Years of Political Theatre, 1968-78" provides a concise introduction.

the RSC. In addition to nurturing young playwrights the fringe experimented, often successfully, with the forms and methods of political theatre, and exhibited a remarkable resourcefulness in the face of financial hardship.[88] The fringe also undertook a search for alternative venues, including regional arts centers, outdoor spaces and working-class club venues. Most importantly, perhaps, the fringe provided a major outlet for new plays and enabled unproven playwrights, including many women, minorities and members of the working class, to see their work produced. Itzin records that, while in the sixties there were only a handful of fringe playwrights, there were, by 1978, "at least 250 British playwrights who worked part, if not full, time in alternative theatre" (110-11). In Robert Hewison's view, alternative theatre became "the principal form through which the politics of the counterculture found their most lasting expression" (*Too Much* 189). Though it could be argued that the subversive energies of the fringe were largely contained through the politics of subsidy, Hewison sees the success of the alternative theatre as proof that "1968 was not a complete failure; the success of the fringe theatre in evolving its own economy and its subsequent cultural integration [. . .] shows that at least one medium was found for the messages of 1968" (*Too Much* 284).

Hare and the playwright Tony Bicat, both former Cambridge students, founded the fringe company Portable Theatre in 1968. Brenton, who was also at

[88] Though they often succeeded in making a virtue of financial necessity, many fringe companies eventually received substantial subsidies through the Arts Council, though these were minuscule compared to those provided for the National Theatre, the RSC and other "prestige" theatres. Whereas in 1971-72, the Arts Council gave two avowedly socialist theatre companies £ 10,363, in 1976-77, 18 such groups received £ 421,093 (Edgar 27).

Cambridge (though he did not know Hare at the time), joined the company soon after. The group's work often, according to John Bull, consisted of "assault courses in which the audience was frequently as much the target as the ostensible subject matter. The dominant image was of an England in the final decadent stages of decline, and on the eve of cataclysmic, but undefined change" (*New British* 17). Hare recalls that "In the days of Portable Theatre, when booed off the stage by whole audiences, we would cheer ourselves up by insisting that the violence of the reaction was a measure of the success with which we hit our targets" (*History* 12).[89] Hare even went so far as to profess his "basic contempt for people who go to the theatre" ("Humanity" 20). "A 'good' play," he remembers, "could only be one which shocked and disturbed an audience into realizing that the ice they were skating on was perilously thin" (*Writing* 15). Of the writers associated with the Portable Theatre—Brenton and himself, Snoo Wilson, Stephen Poliakoff, Trevor Griffiths and others—Hare comments that "What we had in common was that we thought we were living through a period of extreme decadence, both socially and theatrically. We just couldn't believe the official culture was incapable of seeing the extreme state of crisis that we thought the country was in" ("Commanding" 117). These attitudes and methods contrast with the agitprop and

[89] Similarly, Brenton comments of Portable Theatre that "We have a very bad record with working class audiences—we've hardly played to any. Our weapon has always been a middle-class, middle-brow weapon really. But we used to have a percentage of what we called Agro dates. [. . .] You knew from the start you were doomed. All you could do was hope to spread the maximum bad vibration amongst the audience" (qtd in Bull, *New British* 18). These remarks suggest that Portable Theatre was, in John Bull's terms, an avant-garde rather than an agitprop company. See Bull's chapter "1968 and All That: Agit-Prop or 'Avant Garde'" in *New British Political Dramatists*. McGrath's 7:84 is representative of the second category.

didactic techniques of other theatre groups, such as Red Ladder or 7:84, which espoused a more coherent socialist politics and strove to develop a working-class constituency. Though both Brenton and Hare would eventually develop a more considered approach to politics and political theatre, their roots lay in this anarchistic, confrontational work. Brenton himself testifies to Portable Theatre's lack of political sophistication when he remembers that "Part of the energy behind Portable was simply: the bastards won't do our plays, we'll do them ourselves" (qtd. in Itzin 189).

Before joining Portable Theatre, Brenton worked with the Brighton Combination, a community theatre group which sought to attract a heterogeneous audience of workers, students and professionals. In the later 1970s, he began an occasional association with Foco Novo, another seminal fringe touring company which would, in 1984, produce his *Bloody Poetry*. Hare also continued to work in the fringe after the Portable Theatre collapsed in the wake of its troubled 1972 production *England's Ireland*. In 1973, Hare, along with David Aukin and the director Max Stafford-Clark, founded the Joint Stock Theatre Group, which would, over the next few years, produce Hare's *Fanshen* and Brenton's *Epsom Downs*, along with Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Cloud Nine* and *Fen*.

In contrast to Brenton and Hare, John McGrath, the Scottish playwright and director went to great lengths in the seventies and eighties to formulate and promulgate a theory of political theatre. I do not wish to suggest that McGrath has theorized what Brenton and Hare have practiced. His project is, in many ways, very different from Brenton and Hare's, but those differences help to illuminate the nature

of their work. McGrath defines three primary aims for political theatre: “first, the struggle within the institutions of theatre against the hegemony of bourgeois ideology within those institutions; secondly, the making of theatre that is interventionist on a political level, usually outside those institutions; and, thirdly, and most importantly, the creation of a counter-culture based on the working class” (qtd. in Itzin 126). This third point marks the biggest difference between McGrath and Brenton and Hare, who have never courted a working-class audience to the extent McGrath has. The question of what can be accomplished inside and outside the institutional theatre, as posed by McGrath’s first two points, is also important for my analysis. Brenton and Hare have, in different ways, attempted the first of McGrath’s tasks; but the assertion that political intervention can be most effective outside the mainstream theatre runs counter to Brenton and Hare’s belief. McGrath claims that, despite the efforts of dramatists such as Brenton and Hare during the seventies, “the audience has changed very little in the theatre, the social requirements remain constant, the values remain firmly those of acceptability to a metropolitan middle-class audience, with an eye to similar acceptability on the international cultural market” (*Good* 15). This assertion applies to Brenton and Hare who have not attempted so much to alter the composition of their audiences as to influence the political views of their largely middle-class spectators. Brenton justifies this focus when he argues that a socialist playwright’s “work has to be at the service of the working class. But in ways that are difficult to describe because you are not performing to the working class. Therefore you are addressing them to people who are a potential political vanguard” (qtd. in Itzin 196).

Describing the efforts of Brenton, Hare and others as an attempt to "infiltrate" the mainstream "bourgeois" theatre, McGrath argues that "It is no doubt useful to the general movement of socialist ideas to have them aired prominently." But, he explains, "They become 'product' and the process remains the same: they are in constant danger of being appropriated in production by the very ideology they set out to oppose" ("Theory" 46). Thus McGrath discounts the argument implicit in Brenton's statement in 1974 that he "want[s] to get into bigger theatres, because they are, in a sense, more public. Until that happens you really can't have any worth as a playwright" ("Petrol" 10). Similarly, as the seventies progressed without substantial violence or revolution in Britain, Hare "found [himself] making crab-like progress towards two of the central institutions of the culture, fascinated by the challenge of how to write plays which filled up the huge stages of the National Theatre, and delighted at the opportunity of reaching the huge public who still watch drama on the BBC" (*Writing* 17). Though this controversy over the possibility of subversion and the inevitability of its containment is not easily resolved, it is crucial to understanding Brenton and Hare's work. An anxiety about the possibility of institutional and commercial containment, in fact, haunts their comments about their own work, especially early in their careers. As Richard Boon points out, Brenton and Hare have "never been entirely confident in the capacity of the theatre to make a significant contribution to the radical social change they believe in" (*Brenton* 1).

After his move toward the mainstream had begun with the Royal Court production of *Magnificence* the previous year, Brenton claimed in a 1974 interview

that his “generation” of playwrights believed that “the theatre not only describes but actually shows new possibilities, that you can write so forcefully that a possibility of a new way of looking at the world, a new way of living can actually be found through the theatre” (“Petrol” 10). In the same interview, which shows Brenton at a turning point in his career, he questions whether the fringe is a venue through which such changes can occur:

> I think the fringe has failed. Its failure was that of the whole dream of an “alternative culture”—the notion that within society as it exists you can grow another way of life, which, like a beneficent and desirable cancer will in the end grow throughout the Western world, and change it. What happens is that the “alternative society” gets hermetically sealed, and surrounded. A ghetto-like mentality develops. It is surrounded, and, in the end, strangled to death. [. . .] The truth is that there is only one society—that you can’t escape the world you live in. Reality is remorseless. (“Petrol” 10-11)

The insistence that there is “only one society” seems to have motivated, or at least justified, Brenton’s movement toward the larger stages and his implicit rejection of the possibility of a class-based theatre as imagined by McGrath. Brenton’s attitude here recalls Osborne’s belief that a truly national audience for the theatre still exists, while McGrath’s stance testifies to the breakdown of consensus. Hare likewise eventually committed himself to working regularly, though not exclusively, on the largest (and most prestigious) stages available. Finlay Donesky argues persuasively

that Hare's choice reveals his "hostility to any less-than-national basis of solidarity" (7). Both playwrights felt that the large subsidized theatres were the best venues for plays dealing with the crucial issues that faced Britain in the seventies and eighties, including economic failure and the continuing problems associated with decolonization and immigration.

These convictions again raise questions of subversion and containment—does subsidy provide a unique opportunity for political theatre or does it demonstrate that the establishment is secure enough to countenance the protestations of its political opponents? When *Weapons of Happiness* was in production at the National Theatre in 1976, Brenton commented in the *Times* that "David [Hare, the director] and I regard ourselves and our cast and our production team as an armoured charabanc full of people parked within the National walls—we've brought our own concept in with us because we want consciously to use the National facilities to show off our work to its best advantage" (qtd. in Morley 9). This statement typifies the conception popular in the seventies of "strategic penetration" of establishment institutions. Brenton stated in a 1978 interview that "I'd rather have my plays presented to 900 people who may hate what I'm saying than to fifty of the converted" ("Interview" 133). These comments indicate a survival of the confrontational impulses that fueled Brenton's and Hare's earliest work, but leave the question of containment unresolved.

In a discussion of what he calls "performance efficacy," Baz Kershaw notes that theatre which hopes "to alter, or confirm, their audiences' ideas and attitudes, and through that to affect their future actions sets itself a high standard of performance

efficacy and opens itself to charges of failure and futility" (2). Kershaw asks, "once the audience has dispersed and reentered the realm of socio-political action, how are we to measure accurately any influence that the performance may have on their behavior?" Unable to answer that question, Kershaw points out that "the crucial problems facing a useful discussion of performance efficacy emanate not from the nature of the theatre-in-itself but from theatre's relationship with the wider social order, in all its discursive and institutional complexity" (2). Beyond simply observing that the truly socialist government Brenton and Hare desired did not come to power in Britain, the political efficacy of their theatre is difficult to judge. After Thatcher's election victory, it became clear that, in Catherine Itzin's words, "The political theatre movement had failed to reach and convert or mobilise the mass of the population, even if it had managed to raise the consciousness of many individuals in pubs, clubs and work places" (338). In the absence of political change, the efficacy of radical theatre can be only registered in the minds of audience members. Even if we accept Brecht's assertion that "There is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way or other affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience," such changes are intangible and impossible to quantify, especially after twenty or more years (*Brecht* 151).

Brassneck

Brassneck premiered in 1973 at the Nottingham Playhouse, then under the direction of Richard Eyre, a friend of Brenton and Hare's who did much to advance their careers. Hare directed the play, and Eyre was credited as "associate director." Peter Ansorge, who chronicles the fringe in *Disrupting the Spectacle*, claims that *Brassneck* was the "first major event of this field to take place in a mainstream theatre" ("Nottingham" 64). Ansorge also notes that the play won "almost unanimous praise from the national critics [and] the Playhouse was packed throughout the fairly substantial run" (*Spectacle* 18). Harold Hobson gave a largely favorable review in the *Sunday Times*. Michael Billington's *Guardian* review praised the authors' willingness to indict "left as well as right," a tendency that, he felt, "lift[ed] the play above agitprop" (qtd. in Page, *File* 22). The play was judged worthy for television and a filmed version was broadcast on the BBC on May 22, 1975. Despite Ansorge's assertion that *Brassneck* marked the emergence of the fringe into mainstream theatres, the play represented for the authors the beginning of a move away from the fringe. Brenton and Hare would retain some aspects of fringe theatre practice after their move to the large subsidized theatres, but, as I have shown, both authors by this time had serious reservations about the political efficacy of the fringe.

Three of the plays I discuss in this chapter—*Brassneck*, *The Churchill Play* and *Plenty*—look to World War II as a point of reference by which postwar history can be understood and critiqued. It is thus important to recognize not merely the

material effects of the war but also—especially when considering authors born during or after the war—the symbolic weight ascribed to it. Both Brenton and Hare see the war as a moment of large-scale cooperation and economic planning that could have served as the blueprint for a truly socialist Britain. Both view the result of the 1945 election as the expression by a large mass of the people of a desire for change that has been betrayed in the decades since. On the other hand, both see ominous signs in some aspects of how the war was conducted, and both suggest that the British people may have learned the wrong lessons from the war. The meanings they assign to the war, in combination with their feelings regarding the aspirations and failings of the 1960s counterculture, are at the root of the utopian element present in Brenton and Hare's writing—an element paradoxically expressed most clearly and powerfully through the depiction of various dystopias.

In the introductions to both *The Early Plays* and *The History Plays*, Hare credits Angus Calder's 1969 book *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* as an influence on his politics and his drama. Brenton has acknowledged a similar debt (Peacock, *Radical* 13). In 1978, the year *Plenty* premiered, Hare wrote that

> Reading Angus Calder's *The People's War* changed all my thinking as a writer; an account of the Second World War through the eyes of ordinary people, it attempts a complete alternative history to the phony and corrupting history I was taught in school. Howard Brenton and I attempted in *Brassneck* to write what I have no doubt Calder would write still far better than we, an imagined subsequent volume *The*

> *People's Peace*, as seen, in our case, through the lives of the petty bourgeoisie, builders, solicitors, brewers, politicians, the masonic gang who carve up provincial England. (*Early* 7)[90]

This passage is preceded by Hare's assertion that "For five years I have been writing history plays. I try to show the English their history. I write tribal pieces, trying to show how people behaved on this island, off this continental shelf, in this century. How this empire vanished, how these ideals died" (*Early* 7). Hare conceives an almost anthropological perspective for the playwright, much like that he and Brenton adopt in *Brassneck*. The play is a showcase for the bad behavior of the Bagley family and the politicians, both Labour and Conservative, with whom they are associated, and the audience is permitted little or no identification, in the traditional dramatic sense, with the characters. This detached spectatorship is combined with a strong documentary element, including a thinly veiled allusion to the Poulson scandal of 1971-1972, to produce a didactic element not unlike that championed by Brecht.

The lost ideals to which Hare refers above are enumerated in a famous 1940 *Times* leader, which Calder quotes in *The People's War* as "a favourite text thereafter for the prophets of the New World":

> If we speak of democracy, we do not mean a democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live. If we speak of freedom, we do not mean a rugged individualism

[90] That Kenneth O. Morgan titled his history of postwar Britain *The People's Peace* might also testify to the influence of Calder's book.

> which excludes social organisation and economic planning. If we speak of equality, we do not mean political equality nullified by social and economic privilege. If we speak of economic reconstruction, we think less of maximum production (though this too will be required) than of equitable distribution. (qtd. in Calder 137)

Coming from the relatively conservative *Times*, this passage suggests a widespread consensus during the war in favor of a radical reordering of society. In *Brassneck*, Brenton and Hare focus on the preservation of privilege and the cult of individualism and entrepreneurship as a sign that, in the long run, little changed. As part of the first postwar generation, Brenton and Hare, born in 1942 and 1947 respectively, see this wrong-turning reenacted in what they perceive as the failure of the postwar governments of the sixties and seventies to address Britain's fundamental problems. Most prominent among these failures is the Harold Wilson Government elected in 1964; Hare comments in 1972 that "The only political experience I had had [when he began writing plays] was believing passionately in the Labour Government of 1964, and watching that government sell everything down the river" ("Commanding" 115). Surveying the postwar era through the lens of Calder's book, Hare sees Wilson's failure as part of a deepening malaise into which the country, and especially the left, had sunk since the war. In his introduction Calder writes that

> Those who made the "People's War" a slogan argued that the war could promote a revolution in British society. After 1945, it was for a long time fashionable to talk as if something like a revolution had in

> fact occurred. But at this distance, we see clearly enough that the effect of the war was not to sweep society on to a new course, but to hasten its progress along the old grooves. (17)

Calder's argument gave authoritative voice to Brenton and Hare's feelings about recent history and pointed toward the central theme of *Brassneck*: the persistence of inequitable social structures despite superficial change. Charlie Hammett, a disillusioned Labour politician in Hare's *The Great Exhibition*, laments that "Those of us who believed that the world would get better have been brought up short. The thing gets worse not just because of what happens, but because the weight of knowledge of what ought to happen gets greater" (*Early* 130). Hammett's last phrase points directly to the significance of Calder's book to the authors of *Brassneck*, which is haunted by an awareness of historical roads-not-taken. The failure of the Wilson Government to deliver radical change also produced the frustration expressed in *The New Left May Day Manifesto* of 1967, edited by Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. The text reads in part: "After those years of shared effort, we are all, who worked for the Labour Party, in a new situation. For the sense of failure—a new kind of failure, in apparent victory—is implacably there, in every part of the Left" (qtd. in Bull, *New British* 6). A similar frustration—and especially the irony of "failure, in apparent victory"—fuels the satire of *Brassneck*.

Calder also provided Hare a new insight into the political potential of historical drama. *Brassneck* was, Hare writes, his "first step into the past." Previously, he explains,

> I believed in a purely contemporary drama; so as I headed backward, I worried I was avoiding the real difficulties of the day. It took me time to realize that the reason was, if you write about now, just today and nothing else, then you seem to be confronting only stasis, but if you begin to describe the undulations of history, if you write plays that cover passages of time, then you begin to find a sense of movement, of social change, if you like; and the facile hopelessness that comes from confronting the day and only the day, the room and only the room, begins to disappear. (*Early* 7-8)

Hare's reference to "the room" links the hopeless stasis he describes to the conventions of naturalist drama. If *Brassneck* is a play about the lack of change, the chronological scope of the play (it takes place over a period of nearly thirty years), allows the playwrights to point to historical failure rather than simply railing against present iniquities. Crucially, this perspective makes possible the implication, present throughout the play, that things could have been different, a crucial element in the Brechtian epic theatre *Brassneck* in some ways resembles.

"Brassneck," an authors' note explains, "is a Midlands word meaning 'cheek' or 'nerve'. It has criminal connotations" (7). These connotations convey an accusation against the political and economic establishment represented in the play. The title and the characters' accents immediately signal the distance of the play's events from London and the power and wealth it represents; they also suggest an

interest in events and issues important to the audience at the play's premiere at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1973.

As the audience entered the theatre they saw projected on a screen a photograph of Winston Churchill and the Royal Family on VE day. Projections continue at the beginning of scenes throughout the play. Scene two is preceded by pictures from the 1945 election, including Churchill and Attlee, polling booths, newspaper headlines and election posters, all accompanied by a chorus of "The Red Flag." Before a later scene, images of ration books, food queues, slum houses and signs proclaiming nationalization appear. For an episode set in 1953, images of the Queen's Coronation and a triumphant Edmund Hillary are displayed. Act three begins with photographs of housing estates and office towers accompanied by the Rolling Stones's "You Can't Always Get What You Want," with projected lyrics.

As the play begins, Alfred Bagley appears on a bare stage. Bagley is the patriarch of the family whose fortunes over the next thirty years will be the focus of the play. A London draper whose wife was killed in the Blitz, he is returning after the war to his childhood home in the fictional Midlands town of Stanton. With compensation he has received for his two bombed-out drapery shops and his savings, Bagley speculates aggressively in the postwar housing market. Eventually, he is able to establish his nephew Roderick in the construction business. Roderick's family consists of his wife Vanessa and their children Sidney, Martin and Lucy. Other main characters include James Avon, his son Clive and Duncan Bassett, all members of the local Tory establishment. Harry Edmunds, a former union leader, is Stanton's new

Labour MP, swept into office with Attlee. Tom Browne, Edmunds's protégé at the beginning of the play, has left the Communist Party to further his career in local politics.

Bagley approaches Avon, an estate agent, about buying houses. He intrudes on a scene of consternation among the town's "Tory bigwigs," who are reeling from their election defeat (12). Hearing that there is a red flag flying over the Town Hall, one of these bigwigs, Duncan Basset, announces that his father "taught [him] that there is class war. Which you neglect at your peril" (12). When Avon suggests that they will have to "live with" the election result, Basset responds, "Live with it? Live in it, more like. Soviet State" (14). Speaking of his return from the war, Basset exclaims, "Dear Lord God, and I thought I were coming back to England" (14). To an audience aware of the course of postwar-British history, the Tories' panic will likely seem a humorous overreaction. The main specter the Conservatives fear is nationalization, as is evident in Avon's comment, "Pulls the carpet out, doesn't it. Here I am trying to earn a living and any moment they may nationalize the land" (14). In the midst of the furor, Bagley, prophetically, predicts that Attlee will not follow through on all his promises.[91] While the Stanton establishment is concerned merely to defend their interests against nationalization, Bagley, who at this point has some cash but no substantial property, seeks aggressively to exploit the uncertain situation and,

[91] Though certain key industries and services including coal, steel, electricity, railways and the Bank of England were nationalized, the measures came well short of the Tories' worst fears. Shareholders were well compensated and the public sector never accounted for more than about 20 per cent of the GDP (Carter 670). The "mixed economy" was, for the most part, accepted by a consensus of Labour and Conservative politicians until the Thatcher Government began its privatization program in 1981.

in the end, reaps tremendous rewards. He is determined to buy as many houses as he can, telling Avon, "I don't mind if they're slums," a comment which suggests a connection between Bagley's unscrupulousness and the crumbling tower blocks his nephew Roderick will build years later (16). Bagley has already arranged to join the Conservative Club and, by the end of the scene, he is set to join the local Masonic Lodge. Bagley sees both of these measures purely as practical means to ingratiate himself with the local establishment as quickly as possible.

The following scene shows Bagley being initiated into the Masonic Lodge. The Master of the Lodge is terminally ill and a struggle ensues over his replacement, with the Tories trying to prevent the position going to the Labour politician Edmunds. As a stopgap, the Tory members nominate Bagley. Edmunds, however, realizes that Bagley's membership might tip the scales against him and proposes Browne, the lapsed communist, for membership as a countermeasure. Browne, in order to advance his career, has already petitioned Edmunds to support his membership in the Lodge. He broaches the subject to Edmunds on the golf course. Edmunds plays well but cheats, while Browne plays poorly and enters cursing: "Oh shit. Shit. I'm trying hard to fake it. Trying hard to take fake pleasure in this meaningless bourgeois game" (27). These episodes suggest that postwar politics resembles the rituals of a cabalistic secret society or the vagaries of sport. The Labour politicians participate both cynically and enthusiastically, though Browne is hesitant at first.

From this point the play charts Browne's disillusionment and his increasing willingness to act out of pure self-interest. He tells Edmunds on the golf course:

> I used to think I would spend the whole of my life in draughty halls, pamphleteering, be a crank with a megaphone at the factory gate, be locked in smoke-filled attic rooms, endlessly discussing, dotting the I's—that's what happened to my father—romantic—died cursing his friends for minor misinterpretations of the exact meaning of revolution—that mustn't happen to us, Harry. (27)

This apparent pragmatism is, Brenton and Hare suggest, a sophistry by which Browne can justify his compromises. Browne has forsaken what the play suggests are his authentically radical working-class and Communist Party roots in order to join the Labour Party and thereby participate in a kind of politics which, the authors imply, is merely a "bourgeois game." When Browne comments that he "didn't know the Masons were that strong," Edmunds replies, "It's not that they're that strong. It's just . . . You 'ave to join that's all" (28). Along with the medieval rituals to which Bagley must submit during his initiation, the necessity of joining the Masons in order to participate in local politics suggests the irrationality and obsolescence of British political institutions, both formal and informal. The play suggests that the true betrayal of postwar history lies with the Labourites who, once they achieve power, immediately begin to compromise. The Conservatives, Brenton and Hare seem to say, merely acted as Conservatives always do.

In a short scene which represents a dream of Bagley's, he appears in the Vatican and is crowned pope by a pair of demented Cardinals. The Cardinals refer to Bagley as "Alonso de Borja" and "Callistus III," the name Alfonso di Borgia assumed

upon becoming Pope in 1455.[92] Note the similarity between the names Alfred (Bagley) and Alfonso (de Borja). Carol Homden identifies further parallels between the names used in the play and those of the Borgia family: Callistus III was renowned for the favors he accorded his nephew Rodrigo (Roderick). In addition, Homden points out that Rodrigo's daughter, the infamous Lucrezia, like Lucy Bagley, was married three times for largely political reasons. She and Cesare (Sidney) were born to Rodrigo's mistress Vanozza (Vanessa) Catanei (32).[93] Though Callistus III was pope for only a little more than three years, he secured the long-term influence of the family, and Rodrigo eventually became Pope Alexander VI. Even at the time Callistus was accused of avarice and nepotism. Brenton and Hare's implication is that the capitalist establishment of modern England operates on the same underhanded, even gangsterish principles that prevailed in Renaissance Italy. The nature of these principles, however, is conveyed clearly enough by the explicit content of the play and it is not clear that the elaborate allusions to the Borgias would have had much impact on the audience at the Nottingham Playhouse—beyond their recognition of an infamous name. In a 1978 lecture, Hare comments that "The traditional function of the radical artist—'Look at those Borgias; look at this bureaucracy'—has been undermined. We have looked. We have seen. We have known. And we have not

[92] The family name altered from de Borja to di Borgia when they migrated from Spain to Italy in the fifteenth century.

[93] Homden comments that the schema "omits only Martin," Roderick's second son (32). The name, however, is not arbitrary. Pope Martin V appointed Alfonso di Borgia Cardinal in 1429 in return for his diplomatic efforts in reconciling the Pope with King Alfonso V of Aragon. This appointment launched Alfonso's ecclesiastical career.

changed. A pervasive cynicism paralyses public life" (*Writing* 27). The name "Borgias" links this comment explicitly with *Brassneck* and the remark suggests, albeit indirectly, that Hare has judged the satire of the play to have failed. Bagley's coronation dream, nevertheless, is dramatically effective because the imagined ceremony is quickly dispelled by the interruption of a train announcer with a Midland accent, making clear the extent of Bagley's delusions of grandeur. His fantasy also reflects Bagley's lack of commitment to the notoriously anti-Catholic Masons.

The next scene shows Roderick and family meeting Bagley at Stanton station. Bagley encourages Roderick to give up his teaching job in order to "Make a myth" (38). "The Bagleys," Alfred insists to his nephew, "should be builders" (38). Roderick responds enthusiastically, vowing to take on "Something massive. And straightforward. A great many men. A great deal of . . . yes. Great deal of well-directed effort. Honest toil and welcome reward. Everyone having a job to do. And taking a pride" (39). Bagley replies with obvious relief: "Knew you had it in you. God's own Englishman" (39). These remarks represent the language of capitalism and empire, suggesting that the entitlement of the upper classes is guaranteed by hard work, when it is in fact based largely on exploitation and social inequity. There is, however, an obvious contradiction in Bagley's thinking: If "God's own Englishman" is a leader of industry and empire, the epithet can apply only to certain segments of society (the gendered term is, of course, telling) which are, the prevailing ideology maintains, naturally suited for leadership and management. But it is the accident of his uncle's good fortune that allows Roderick to take on this role, one to which he is

not, in fact, well suited. In the type of capitalist system Bagley envisions, the mass of the people, Roderick's "great many men," must be subordinate. The myth of national superiority evoked here will, ideally, ensure that these subordinates are satisfied even though the full privilege associated with the title "Englishman" is reserved for the few. Bagley does not belong to the class of great colonizers and industrialists, but the upheaval of the postwar years has allowed him to aspire to an equivalent status. Suddenly a small-time shopkeeper like Bagley can rise above his station. But the roles themselves are unchanged. Bagley's desire that Roderick "make a myth" results only in the cynical reenactment, with different agents, of an old, repressive myth.

Clive Avon, one of the Tory bigwigs, is also an architect. His rivalry with Roderick embodies the conflict between the old and new establishments. In response to James Avon's assertion that his son Clive "is a far more experienced architect" and that he "was an officer in the Royal Air Force" and therefore should receive the contract to build a new hospital instead of Roderick, Alfred Bagley stresses to Avon the importance of "New ways of looking at things." He explains that "We've all got to put our tenders in, and the lowest always gets the job. But here's the new way James. [. . .] We all put our tenders in. But first everyone reveals them to me. I reveal them to Roderick. Who puts in the last. And lowest. And wins" (42-43). This subterfuge is an assertion of the ascendancy of the upwardly mobile class Bagley represents and demonstrates the unfamiliarity of the new terrain on which the old establishment Avon represents is now forced to operate. Bagley continues: "Then, when he's won, I foresee: problems on the site, weather, that sort of thing, costs will

rise during the building, we'll have to revise the estimates. Revise the profits. Slightly. Often. Upwards" (43). The elder Avon, unaccustomed to such undisguised corruption, insists that Clive, who "enjoys an enviable reputation in this town for absolute integrity," would never agree. Bagley responds by asserting that Clive, who claims to have been injured in a raid over Germany during the war, has in fact inflicted the wounds himself with a Boy Scout knife. Avon's silence suggests that this information is accurate. With his military service in question, Clive's status among "God's own Englishmen" is jeopardized and he and his father submit to Bagley's blackmail.

The long scene which provides an early climax at the end of act one depicts the politically and financially motivated wedding of Lucy Bagley to Dennis Macpherson, the heir to a fortune made in Scottish biscuits. The wedding, which could be seen to herald a new all-British ruling class, is planned by Bagley to coincide with the coronation of Elizabeth II. Even Roderick objects that the wedding is a stunt and is disturbed to find at one point that Bagley has left the wedding to watch the Coronation on television with Edmunds, Bassett, the Avons and most of the other wedding guests (48). Eventually, even Roderick and Vanessa leave and Lucy is left on stage alone. Finally, Bagley returns to "the boring old wedding" and launches into a rambling, confused speech during which he mistakenly reads the words "I-have-taken-this-town-by-the-throat" from his jumbled notes (50, 55). He narrates his life as a rags-to-riches story punctuated by World War I, in which he claims to have seen men eating human flesh, and by his wife's death by falling on the cement steps

of a bomb shelter in 1943. Bagley recalls that a reporter once asked him if he was a nihilist. Bagley comments that he "felt like giving [the reporter] a quid for hitting the jackpot" (55).[94] Despite his joking tone, these comments suggest that Bagley is actually a cynic and that all along he has been motivated by envy and self-interest. The scene degenerates into slapstick as Bagley attempts to carve a huge wedding cake with a four-foot cardboard knife. Before he can begin, a dancer in strip tassels bursts out of the cake. After "a minute's superb dancing" by the woman, Bagley, who has been restrained, breaks free and goes for the dancer with the knife. He slams the knife down on the table, breaking it in two, and falls dead among the debris. The episode prompts Bassett to a revelation: "He pushed that woman down the air-raid shelter steps." The play suggests that this is true, as does Hare's comment that "*Brassneck* never recovers as a play after its greatest liar is killed off at the end of the first act" (*Early* 3). Bagley's exploitation of the myth of the Blitz to gain sympathy and to cover up his crime is, for the authors, a mockery of a myth that had a determining influence on their political growth. But every character in the play shares Bagley's cynicism and self-interest. The failings of Bagley and the other characters serve as an index to a spiritual malaise and loss of collective will that, Brenton and Hare assert, plagued postwar Britain. To see the failure of the New Jerusalem in these personal,

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[94] There is an interesting but not fully developed suggestion that Bagley's "nihilism" is rooted in his experiences in World War I. He claims that he "went to France in all ignorance thinking of picking up a bit of French linen. I came back with my whole philosophical outlook" (54). He also describes the odd feeling of "Walking down the garden path . . . a man who's seen another gnawing a human bone just like a knuckle of ham" (55). These comments suggest that Britain's spiritual collapse occurred much earlier, which may have doomed the idealism of the immediate postwar years from the start.

psychological terms, however, impedes the analytical thrust of the play. Though political and economic structures are criticized, their defects seem less important than the failings of individuals, which indicates a somewhat naive notion of the malleability of such institutions. If everyone had just been honest and selfless, Brenton and Hare seem to think, postwar Britain would have been different.

Act two begins with Roderick Bagley, the Avons, Edmunds, Browne and others foxhunting, yet another image of the complacency and traditionalism of the new establishment into which the Labour politicians Edmunds and Browne and the social upstart Bagleys have been absorbed. The year is 1969. Thrice divorced, Lucy is now married to Clive Avon. Browne is a "big wheel in Transport House" and a public relations man for Roderick, whom Edmunds now identifies as "a right-wing Tory" (65). Sidney and Martin Bagley are courting Raymond Finch, a Tory ex-Minister and "longtime junior in Colonial Office" as a representative for their father's company in Africa and Asia (65).

Late in the play, Sidney refers to his father's business as the "Bagley empire" (82). The remark is more significant than it seems at first. Roderick has aggressively expanded his business to Asia and Africa. In order to do so, he has exploited his connections in government. Finch, the former Colonial Office minister, has usurped Edmunds's cherished position as Roderick's "man in Asia" (71). In addition, Roderick is considering sending his son Martin to Africa as head of "Foreign Contracts" (73). These details reflect the efforts of businesspeople and politicians, both Labour and Conservative, to replace the disintegrating political empire with an

economic one. The empire had always been supported by a close association between business leaders and politicians; in this sense little seems to have changed. For Brenton and Hare, this sort of cooperation is reprehensible. Given their lapsed socialism, Edmunds and Browne are particularly culpable in their association with Roderick. Edmunds insists at one point that he will "work with anyone [including Roderick] to do good for the people of this country" (72). Roderick is unscrupulous and incompetent, but also comically ingenuous, especially regarding the legality of his business practices. Motivated by a simpleminded materialism and secure in his rights as heir to his father's fortune, Roderick does little "good for the people" of Britain, a point made clear in his self-pitying recollection of one of his construction projects: "The tower block. In Burnley. When the water ran down the living-room walls . . . of the people . . . living there . . . and they got angry with me . . . and they threw their refuse at me . . . how could I be expected to know . . . it would rain . . . so hard . . . that winter?" (95). This tower block symbolizes the failures of the postwar welfare state and, especially, the shortsightedness and avarice of politicians and businesspeople.

In the end, Roderick's "empire" collapses from "overextension," a factor frequently cited as a cause of the collapse of the British empire. Martin reveals that Roderick's "credit has been overextended by too rapid a programme of diversification. [. . .] And he's gone bankrupt" (85). Later, facing criminal charges, Roderick inadvertently admits to taking a bribe (which he genuinely believes was an innocent "gift") and is jailed (89). Roderick's ingenuousness emphasizes Brenton and

Hare's point that the ways of the establishment, which are so familiar to Roderick that he cannot recognize their illegality, are (and have always been) criminal. Roderick insists that "Somebody, somewhere . . . is gunning for us. An enemy of the family. [. . .] Somebody in the Establishment who detests everything I've tried to do, who doesn't like new methods" (91). Roderick is, however, part of the establishment, and he hopes that his connections within it will help him escape punishment. "Perhaps," he hopes, "the judge will be a Freemason" (95). Browne, by this point totally cynical, promises that "The Labour Party will scare [Roderick's creditors] off. . . . Because I'm their campaign manager" (92). Browne continues: "The Labour Party will whisper down the line. Builders, councils, Government departments will gloss over fat bad debts . . . vast sums you owe will disappear in the fog. Books will be fiddled and invoices burnt the length of the land" (92). Though his debts will be forgotten, Roderick must become a scapegoat—"Skewered on the one isolated case of fraud," in Browne's words (92).

In the final scene, set in 1973, Basset, Edmunds (now a Lord), Browne, Lucy, Sidney, Martin and Vanessa meet at the seedy "Lower Depths" strip club. Roderick has been released from prison. He has retreated, in Lucy's words, "to live in a hut, in the countryside and grow runner beans, and talk to the birds" (99). Martin has changed his name to avoid association with his disgraced father. Sidney makes a proposition to the family "and its satellites":

> There is a commodity, sold in occasional market places, in these sad times, the world the way it is, a product for our times, the perfect

> product, totally artificial, man-made, creating its own market, one hundred percent consumer identification, generating its own demand, if there's a glut the demand goes up, if there's a famine the demand goes up, an endless spiral of need and profit. [. . .] It's a winner. (99)

The product is heroin. Browne responds, "I was a communist in my youth. Now I'm looking for revenge. A revenge on everything I believed in. Count me in" (100). The play ends with Sidney proposing a toast "as the head of a great English Family" to the "last days of capitalism" (102). Rochester, a survivor from the Tory old guard, expresses the mood of the scene best: "Look at me. Bill Rochester. Naked with greed. I could take all my clothes off. Now. And greed would be blazoned across my bum" (101). What the postwar period, in Brenton and Hare's view, has witnessed is not the creation of a humane socialist state but the stripping down of capitalism to its barest essentials, naked of all ideological trappings and utterly destructive.

Near the end of act two, Edmunds laments the course of his political career and the failures of his party: "We 'ad a chance in 1945. Finest government this country ever had. But not good enough. Not quite good enough by half. By the end, in rags. [. . .] 'Ow can we ever forgive ourselves? I can't forgive myself" (85). Edmunds's words resemble Charlie Hammett's comment, cited above, on "the weight of knowledge of what ought to happen" in Hare's *The Great Exhibition*.[95] In 1973 the

[95] The disillusioned and compromised Labour politician becomes an archetype in Brenton and Hare's work, cropping up not only in *Brassneck* and *The Great Exhibition*, but also in Brenton's *The Churchill Play*, *Thirteenth Night* and *Greenland*. The line can even be traced to George Jones in Hare's *The Absence of War*, though in this case the image has altered in the context of Thatcherism.

characterization of Edmunds and Browne and the depiction of political institutions in *Brassneck* registered a deep disenchantment with the political consensus that had, with only minor adjustments, prevailed since 1945. For Brenton and Hare, this consensus entails the compromise of socialist ideals. Their disillusionment is, at this date, intensified by the apparent failure of the alternative politics of the late sixties.

The politicians and businessmen in *Brassneck* represent broad forces at work in postwar British society. At the same time, however, the play alludes to a specific scandal concerning dealings between the jailed architect John Poulson, Newcastle Labour councilor T. Dan Smith and Home Secretary Reginald Maudling, which led in 1972 to Maudling's resignation and the eventual imprisonment of Poulson and Smith. (Maudling, of whom Raymond Finch is a caricature, was an attractive target for Brenton and Hare, both of whom strenuously objected to British conduct in Northern Ireland, in part because he introduced the policy of internment without trial in Northern Ireland in August 1970.) After building the largest architectural practice in Europe, Poulson was declared bankrupt in 1971. The bankruptcy proceedings revealed that he had paid £334,000 to MPs, local councilors and civil servants in order to secure contracts and other favors (Childs 225). Despite his conservative politics, Poulson, like Roderick Bagley, "showed no political prejudice when seeking business favours from local politicians" (Childs 225). David Childs points out that, in the wake of the Poulson affair, similar corruption trials proliferated "up and down the United Kingdom" (226). As Carol Homden recognizes, Tom Browne's career "parallels exactly" that of Smith, who received over £150,000 in consulting fees from

Poulson's companies (28). The trials that followed the investigation "exposed how the closed and secretive ways some councils did business could degenerate into crime" and sparked a movement to reform these institutions (Brivati and Heffernan 462).[96] The plot of *Brassneck* is self-contained; knowledge of the Poulson affair is not essential to the meaning of the play. But the play's topicality—the Poulson and Smith trials were not yet concluded when the play was produced—was surely obvious to the original audience, and its topicality likely lent *Brassneck* additional authenticity and demonstrated the authors' interest in events occurring outside London.

According to Bull, in addition to their own experiences living in postwar Britain, it was "the rediscovery of an earlier socialist history, about which Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams had done the most to reopen debate, that shaped the political consciousness of the new playwrights," including Brenton and Hare (*New British* 9). Though it speaks in a different idiom, Calder's book, like the work of Thompson and Williams, seeks through painstaking research to bring to light the experience of the mass of the people, rather than focusing exclusively on the activities of their leaders. To this end, *The People's War* draws heavily on accounts compiled by the research group Mass Observation, a leftist initiative begun in 1937 as "a several-pronged reaction to the disturbed condition of western Europe under the

[96] The Poulson affair seems to have had lasting significance for Brenton. Recalling a 1982 visit to Newcastle, he writes that Poulson and Smith "did a lot of damage [. . .]. But looking at their earthly, civic remains I thought—you can sympathise. After the dreary, Tory 1950s they came to power, money was flooding in the veins, and they thought, 'Right! It's our turn.' . . . It's almost a pity they can't be forgiven. They can't because of the misery they brought to so many in the high-rise flats they built" ("On Tour" 102-3).

growing threat of fascism" (Harrisson 11).[97] Tom Harrisson, the group's director after 1939, writes that Mass Observation "sought to supply accurate observations of everyday life and real (not just published) public moods, an anthropology and a mass-documentation for a vast section of normal life which did not, at the time, seem to be adequately considered by the media, the arts, the social scientists, even by the political leaders" (11).

The influence of these historical methodologies on *Brassneck* is apparent in the strong documentary elements of the play. Documentary is typically associated with methods of social-scientific inquiry and, when the term is applied to film or other visual media, a naturalistic or even "photographic" mode of representation. But the juxtaposition of the documentary aspects of *Brassneck* (the projections, the references to Poulson, the precise identification of dates) and the non-naturalistic, farcical and slapstick elements works well. The contrast between these modes serves to dissociate documentary and historical drama from the realistic or naturalistic methods commonly associated with those sorts of plays. In this way *Brassneck* expands possibilities for radical historical drama. Like Brecht, Brenton and Hare are able in this play to use anti-illusionistic methods in order to show the ways in which the contemporary is historical.

[97] The connection to Mass Observation supports Peacock's argument that, however novel it may have seemed to Hare and others, Calder's book "was but one example of a gradual shift toward social and Marxist history which had been taking place amongst British academic historians during the previous forty years" (*Radical* 14).

The Churchill Play

The Churchill Play (1974), Brenton's first play after *Brassneck*, is set in 1984, by which time Britain has become a repressive totalitarian state. Labour and Conservative politicians are locked in a political stalemate that protects the interests of the ruling classes. The play makes clear Brenton's fear that popular notions of national decline will result in a radical swing to the right. Brenton also suggests that decline may be more imagined than real and that the rhetoric of decline can be exploited by conservative politicians to the detriment of the population as a whole, but especially dissidents and minorities. In the closing speech of Brenton's radically revised 1972 version of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Angelo, here an authoritarian ruler modeled on Enoch Powell, articulates a vision of the future very like that depicted in *The Churchill Play*: "The old order, unchecked, will bring forth a new and far harsher form of itself. Call me cynical if you will, but I welcome that. [. . .] I will proceed to fashion the England of my dreams. And you will learn that where the power has rested, there it shall rest. For a thousand years" (163).[98] In addition to the allusion to the Nazi Reich, this speech describes political power stripped of its ideological adornments, just as the final scene of *Brassneck* showed capitalism similarly naked. *The Churchill Play* takes this effect even further, with political

[98] Overt references to Powell had to be removed under threat of libel action.

power represented as undisguised physical force directed against the bodies of imprisoned dissidents.

The Churchill Play was first performed at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1974, only a few months after *Brassneck* finished its run at the same theatre. The action takes place in an internment camp called Camp Churchill in England in 1984. The plot concerns the presentation by the inmates of a play about Winston Churchill for visiting politicians. Brenton explains that the idea for the play first came to him when he was working with the Brighton Combination. In a 1975 interview he recalls, "I had the idea of [Churchill] coming out of the catafalque in Westminster Hall while he was lying in state, coming out and addressing the young soldiers around him. That idea was the beginning, and then there were more recent preoccupations, particularly the truth about Long Kesh" ("Petrol" 30). Since Brenton left the Brighton Combination in 1969, the play must have taken roughly five years to develop. During this period the Conservative Heath government came to power, which perhaps suggested a return to a Churchillian ethos of government. In addition, the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland resurfaced, with the renewed violence reaching a climax on "Bloody Sunday" in 1972. The crisis led the Heath Government to institute internment and trial by non-jury "Diplock" courts. In this political environment, reaction to the play, as might be expected, was mixed and, for the most part, reflected the politics of individual reviewers and publications. Michael Billington of the *Guardian*, for example, praised the play and commented that it "establishes Brenton as a major talent" (qtd. in Mitchell 30). The *Financial Times*, on the other hand, dismissed the play as "little but

a routine disapproval of authority. It is talkative but lacks any depth of thought or characterization" (qtd. in Mitchell 30). Harold Hobson, who had praised *Brassneck*, wrote in *The Sunday Times* that "*The Churchill Play* is a work of great aesthetic power" and that its argument is "impregnable [and] self-defended" (qtd. in Mitchell 31).

Brenton wrote an early version of the play for radio, which was, in his words, "In part an attempt to write about Ireland, and it was written in the shadow of the industrial unrest of that year, the miners' strike, the three-day week, and the very strong possibility of anti-Trade Union legislation" (qtd. in Bull, *New British* 51). All of these circumstances would be reflected in the stage play. Though it contains a few brief references to Northern Ireland, *The Churchill Play* approaches the subject of the conflict there only in oblique ways. This circumspection perhaps reflects a recognition of the difficulty of staging a play about the crisis in Great Britain, which Brenton knew first-hand from his experience with the 1972 Portable Theatre production of *England's Ireland*. In that play the authors (Tony Bicat, Brian Clarke, Snoo Wilson, David Edgar, Francis Fuchs, Brenton and Hare) attempt to represent aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland at a time when, according to Brenton, politicians of both parties were united in "a desire to forget about Ulster completely" (qtd. in Bull, *New British* 47). Brenton notes that fifty or more theatres refused to take the production (qtd. in Bull 49).[99]

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[99] Bull notes that, among other British playwrights, "only Arden and D'Arcy remained unsilent" on the subject of Northern Ireland (*New British* 48). Some thematic similarity between *England's Ireland* and

Camp Churchill is one of 28 such camps in Britain that have been established, according to the play, "By the authority of the Special Powers Act 1977. By the authority of the Emergency Provisions Act 1981. By the authority of the Industrial Relations Act 1981" (19). Though not described in detail, these fictitious acts resemble particular pieces of legislation enacted in the early seventies. The Industrial Relations Act of 1971, a matter of pride for the Heath Government, established an Industrial Relations Court, which imposed ballots and "cooling-off" periods on unions in order to crack down on unofficial strikes. Brenton's fictional acts also foreshadow measures taken by the Thatcher Government against unions, including the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982 and the 1984 Trades Unions Act, all of which had the effect of outlawing strikes in certain circumstances and making the maintenance of closed shops more difficult (Evans 37-8). Brenton's "Special Powers Act" and "Emergency Provisions Act" could also be seen to anticipate the Prevention of Terrorism Act introduced in November 1974, seven months after *The Churchill Play* premiered. This act provided security forces unprecedented powers in dealing with suspected Irish terrorists in Britain and Northern Ireland. These acts also recall

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Arden and D'Arcy's plays can be seen in the appearance in the Portable play of the ghost of James Connolly, who exhorts Irish republicans to "Set about the organisation of the socialist republic or your efforts will be in vain, and England will rule you forever [. . .]. The enemy is not the naked cross of the Protestant religion. Our foe in not the Shankill worker but the landlords and sweating capitalists of Ireland and England. Forge links. This is a class struggle" (qtd. in Bull, *New British* 47). This play was written several years before Arden and D'Arcy's *The Non-stop Connolly Show*. The Portable playwrights were, however, certainly familiar with Arden and D'Arcy's *The Ballygombeen Bequest*, which was produced in May 1972, five months before *England's Ireland*, and which also refers to Connolly. Both these Arden and D'Arcy plays strive to convey a very similar message to that contained in the passage from *England's Ireland* above. *England's Ireland* is unpublished.

the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act passed in 1939 when Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister and which, according to Calder in *The People's War*, allowed the Government to "act as it liked without reference to Parliament" (32). Calder explains:

> Under the Emergency Powers Act, the government could do virtually what it liked with the freedom and property of any citizen simply by issuing the appropriate regulation. Censorship was imposed on overseas mail, and telephone trunk lines, though the public did not know this, were tapped. By October [1939], a National Register of all Citizens had been completed. (66)

Winston Churchill made thorough use of these powers during the war. Brenton's Orwellian dystopia—the play is set in 1984—shows the Government asserting a similar power over individuals not in the face of an external threat such as existed in 1939, but in response to deepening internal divisions and dissent.

The prisoners have been interned for various reasons. Mike McCulloch, a Scotsman, is a union organizer. Joby Peake, who plays Churchill and exhibits the most enthusiasm for the play, is a journalist. "No militant, not by a million mile," Joby insists (43). While reporting on a miner's strike, he became involved in a scuffle and hit a policeman. He has been detained without trial for four years. Peter Reese, newly arrived at the camp, explains that, for no stated reason, he was arrested while working in a factory in Wales, chained and brought to the camp (30-31). An Irishman whom Reese met on the way to the camp told him, as Reese reports it, that the prisoners must "Leave our real selves by the gate of the camp. Like old coats. And

it's not us in here, daily going lower, more terrified, more craven. We are only the hearts and livers and kidneys, the bodies of those beautiful, brave and free men. [. . .] God knows, there's no difficulty in degrading the human animal. It's vulnerable enough" (32). Offenses which threaten the hegemony of the state or the interests of the ruling class are punished by physical violence and incarceration. That the state resorts to these measures shows the failure of the ideological apparatus that normally secures the consent of enough people to ensure the smooth running of civil society. In the world of the play, differences between classes and regions within the United Kingdom have grown too severe to permit any sort of "repressive tolerance" on the part of the government.

The play begins with the inmates rehearsing a scene from their play-within-the-play. A huge catafalque draped with a Union Jack dominates the stage. Around the catafalque stand four servicemen: an army Private, a naval Marine, an Airman, and an ordinary Seaman. They are, respectively, a working-class Londoner, a Welshman, a Scotsman and a Yorkshireman. The scene in rehearsal takes place at the time of Churchill's death in January 1965. As David Cannadine remarks, "the state funeral of Sir Winston Churchill in 1965, poised exactly half way between Elizabeth's Coronation and Silver Jubilee, was not only the last rites of the great man himself, but was also self-consciously recognized at the time as being a requiem for Britain as a great power" ("Context" 157). The Private, echoing the views of numerous conservative politicians in the seventies and eighties, explains that the play takes place "Inna nineteen-bloody-sixties! Be-fore Eng-land fell a-part!" (9). In

addition to betraying the status of the play-within-the-play, this remark is significant because it is spoken by the most stereotypically English of the soldiers. Honored to be guarding the coffin, he gives voice to the traditional view of Churchill against which Brenton's play reacts. Churchill, the Private asserts, was "the greatest, the biggest, blood-y most monument-al Englishman that ever lived! [. . .] Daddy of 'em all" (9). When the Scottish Airman complains about the task of guarding the coffin, the Private responds "shut yer face, Jock," establishing with a word the importance he attaches to his English identity, as opposed to a more inclusive British one (11). We must remember, however, that these speeches are doubly 'acted,' an effect which distances not only the real Nottingham Playhouse actor of the original production, but also the character on the stage from the words spoken. This effect gives the Private's Englishness (and the other characters' regional and national identities) an artificiality that suggests the performative aspect that is a component of all such identities. Soon after this exchange, a knocking is heard from inside the coffin. When the Private exclaims, "'E can't come out!," the Welsh Marine responds:

> He'll come out, he'll come out, I do believe that of him. Capable of anything, that one. (*Fiercely.*) To bugger working people. [. . .] We have never forgiven him in Wales. He sent soldiers against us, the bloody man. He sent soldiers against Welsh mining men in 1910. Three were shot. The working people of Wales know their enemies. He was our enemy. We hated his gut. The fat English upper-class gut of the man. When they had the collection, for the statues in front of

> Parliament . . . All over Wales town and county councils would not collect. No Welsh pennies for the brutal man to stand there. (12)

Calder comments that Churchill "was repeatedly accused of having set troops to fire on striking Welsh miners at Tonypandy in 1910. The story stuck because it was true to his character, though not to historical fact" (78). The Marine's comments provoke the Private to defend Churchill: "But 'e won the War." The Marine replies, "People won the War. He just got pissed with Stalin," a drastically simplified version of Calder's argument in *The People's War* and Brenton's very similar argument in the play (12). These contrasting voices from London, Wales, Scotland and provincial England draw attention to the recent and incomplete development of a unitary British identity. Further, Brenton demonstrates the failure of the ideological effort to secure such an identity and points toward the "break-up of Britain" forecast in the 1970s by Tom Nairn and others.

Churchill's voice is heard to exclaim, "England! Y' stupid old woman. Clapped out. Undeserving. Unthankful. After all I did for you. You bloody tramp" (12). A moment later he bursts from his coffin. These lines recall Nelson's harangue as he bursts on stage at the beginning of Arden and D'Arcy's *The Hero Rises Up*: "If you don't know who I am you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, God damn your eyes. You are, I take it, Englishmen?" (16). Churchill's resurrection also recalls the ascension of Nelson at the end of *The Hero Rises Up*. Both scenes deflate the hero and foreground the artificiality of the myth associated with him. This effect continues when Churchill recalls,

> It was my birthday. The 30th of November. A dirty autumn. Was old. Out of power. Spit on the lip. Was lead to the window. Saw the English people in the street. Saw how they waved and cheered. (*Angry*.) Ingratitude! [. . .] I went from high office without grace. There was an Empire. Is it burnt? Drowned? Dust. Ash. Cast away. [. . .] Still, I can say I bludgeoned my way, through many jarring blows and shocks, bludgeoned [. . .] Onto . . . Mah History's stage! (13).

A later revision to the play specifies that the date referred to is Churchill's ninetieth birthday, November 30, 1964 (*Plays: One* 113). This date places the moment just weeks after the October 15, 1964, defeat of Douglas-Home's Conservative Government by Harold Wilson, an event which at the time might have cast doubt on Churchill's political legacy. Combined with the loss of the empire in whose service Churchill rose to power, this circumstance suggests that the world was changing beyond the old man's comprehension. Brenton's play, however, shows the conservative, authoritarian ethos Churchill embodied triumphant in the long term.

A moment later, Colonel Ball, the camp commander, interrupts the play and Corporal Taylor enters with a machine gun. Only then does it become clear to audience that the setting is an aircraft hangar in an internment camp. Joby, the internee playing Churchill, removes his mask, forcing the audience to reassess what they have just seen. The artifice of the prisoners' performance, highlighted not only by Joby's removal of the mask but also by the presence of a wind machine and a

crude, amateurish set, by extension, makes the audience aware of the status of Brenton's play itself as a dramatic construction. Thus, while the play makes a case for a particular view of history, it also argues that any view of history is a representation constructed by human beings. For Brenton, this recognition does not obviate the need for historical enquiry, but does prepare the ground for the radical revisioning of popular history he performs in *The Churchill Play*.

It is implausible that a play like that rehearsed by the prisoners could be countenanced in a camp such the one Brenton describes. The play does, in fact, face substantial opposition from camp administrators. The prisoners' main ally among the camp staff is Captain Thompson, a young army doctor who has some liberal ideas about the importance the prisoners' recreation and the possibility of their "rehabilitation," which in this case amounts to political re-education. When Ball objects to the prisoners' presenting the play to the Select Committee of the House of Commons that will be visiting the camp, Thompson argues that "The men have worked hard preparing the entertainment for the Select Committee. It has raised morale. The costumes, the props, the words of the text. . . . They have taken six months to prepare" (16). Ball calls the play a "Giant pisstake" and insists there is "not the sliver of a chance" of its coming off (17). Then soldiers arrive and begin to smash the set. Eventually, however, Ball relents, but he requires Thompson to "Water [the play] down, cut it about. . . . Put a few . . . patriotic remarks . . . About England . . . In it." (19). Ball wants "no disrespect to the memory of the great man" (19).

The position of the prisoners vis-à-vis the camp administration is analogous to relationships within the subsidized theatre in Britain in the seventies as Brenton perceived them, and Ball's requirements indicate Brenton's view that censorship persisted in the British theatre even after formal censorship was abolished in 1967. Brenton's comment that when *Weapons of Happiness* premiered at the National Theatre the company was "an armoured charabanc full of people parked within the National walls" shows that he considered the stages of the mainstream subsidized theatres to be enemy territory, much like the prisoners' stage in *The Churchill Play* (qtd. in Morley 9). Clearly, Brenton felt that an adversarial relationship existed between himself and at least some of the administrators of the big subsidized theatres. Brenton may seem overly anxious, but his feeling is the logical outcome of a situation in which the state is seen not just to tolerate but to actively support works of art radically opposed to itself. In addition, the forced substitution of dramatic performance for political activity in *The Churchill Play* suggests that the theatre can provide a kind of political sublimation at the same time that it demonstrates a strategic tolerance on the part of the establishment.

Thompson's attitude toward the prisoners is expressed in his comment that "We live in difficult times . . . Difficult for . . . All of us" (24). His sympathy, though well intentioned, is naive and his effort to equate his situation with that of the prisoners seems insensitive. Thompson represents a type of middle-class liberalism that, Brenton suggests, is ineffectual in times of social conflict and that, as Thompson's role as camp doctor suggests, is complicit in the maintenance of the

political status quo. Thompson's wife Caroline wants him to leave his job at the camp. She argues: "It's not bad, what I want, is it? It's no disgrace? A house, with a garden in the south of England. Decent. Mild. Safe. Away from this . . . Rural slum. [. . .] No disgrace. Not wanting to be the English wife. Of the English doctor. Of an English concentration camp" (54). Caroline is less troubled by moral qualms than her husband and her desires are, the play suggests, a more accurate expression of her and her husband's class interests than Thompson's sympathy for the prisoners. Caroline's appeal leads Thompson to reflect on an experience he had in Spain as a student when he stumbled upon a camp similar to Camp Churchill. At the time, he and his companions vowed, "Never in England" (55). A lingering faith in British liberty has kept Thompson from seeing the situation in Britain for what it is, but the facts are becoming undeniable. Much later in the play, when the prisoners have momentarily taken Caroline, the visiting MPs and the prison officials captive, the prisoner Jimmy rifles through Caroline's handbag and finds a picture of a house like the one she describes above. He sneers, but Caroline reiterates her desire for a house and garden. Jimmy responds, "Want a house do you, Lady? What, with a garden? Yeah, and barbed wire round t'stop dirty animals like me getting in?" (86). He concludes with a threat; the prisoners, he tells her, will "come out a the dark. Right through plate glass window of your house. Kick in your three-D colour telly. And paraffin your fancy furniture. And burn you, burn you bright" (86). Caroline responds by asking, "What have I ever done to you?" Jimmy replies, "You put me in 'ere, Lady" (87). This exchange reinforces Brenton's point that middle-class complacency has facilitated the

right-wing movement that produced the camps. Brenton says that his aim in writing *The Churchill Play* was to show that "The pleasant roads in southern suburbs are as much of the wire in Long Kesh as the wire itself" ("Petrol" 15). That Brenton chooses to embody middleclass complacency and materialism in one of the few women in the play is troublesome, but it does not substantially damage his argument on this point. Brenton strives in this play not to soothe the conscience of middle-class members of his audience, who might well see something of themselves in the Thompsons.

Sergeant Baxter, one of the soldiers at the camp, explains to Thompson that the soldiers think he is a "fucking namby pamby Sunday School do-gooder fucking lily-white bleeding heart" who has "egged the scum on to take the piss out of a great Englishman" (27). Baxter has been a soldier in Ulster, where he recollects seeing "a lot of pigs stuck" (26). This experience has prepared him for his role as prison guard at Camp Churchill. Baxter recalls:

> Ten years down Ulster then English streets. Then the late seventies and the laws against industrial unrest. Soldier boy at the picket line, working men 'is own kind comin' at 'im yellin' Scab Scab. (*Scoffs.*) I went down a mine, a corporal then, in the strike o' nineteen eighty. The miners o' that pit tried t'kill us, y'know that? Only time I've ever been in Wales. (29)

Military service, as in Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, is a means of controlling the working classes, by both siphoning off surplus workers and instilling a culture of

violence and patriotism in individual soldiers.[100] For this reason, Baxter's recognition that the striking miners are his "own kind," instead of causing him to question his role as a soldier, leads him to abandon any sense of class solidarity. In contrast to Baxter's views, Furry Keegan, one of the prisoners, speaks of his service in "their army," the army of the "ruling class" (33).

Soon after the exchange between Thompson and Ball cited above, an actor-internee in black make-up enters, not realizing that the rehearsal has been stopped. He is dressed in bloodstained rags, his arm "fearfully wounded, hanging by a sliver of flesh" (19). He is playing a wounded Dervish at the battle of Omdurman in 1898, at which Churchill was present.[101] Joby and the Dervish quote Churchill's recollection of the scene: "Can you imagine the postures in which a man, once created in the image of his maker, had been twisted? Do not try, for you would ask yourself with me

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[100] As I noted in discussing Arden's play, this theme also appears in Bond's *Saved*. Baxter's language resembles that used by the former soldiers in that play.

[101] Omdurman was the capital of the Mahdi, a Sudanese religious leader hostile to the colonial government in Egypt. Churchill fought under Kitchener in the battle that saw the complete destruction of the Mahdist forces led, after the Mahdi's death, by Khalifa. The invasion of the Sudan was, in large part, motivated by a desire to avenge the death of General Charles Gordon at Khartoum in 1885 at the hands of the Mahdi's army. Byron Farwell points out that "The failure of the effort to save Gordon rankled in the proud British mind, and the feeling that his death should not go unavenged disturbed the British conscience" (330). Farwell describes the battle:

> thousands of Dervishes charged across an open desert in plain sight, waving their spears and screaming. Kitchener's howitzers, machine guns and rifles cut them down. Not a single Dervish reached the Anglo-Egyptian lines. Few even came as close as 500 yards. It was, war correspondent G. W. Steevens said, "not a battle but an execution". An estimated 10,000 Dervishes fell, and few of the wounded survived, for the British used vicious dum-dum bullets. (336)

Brenton could hardly have chosen a better event to highlight the disparities of power that enable imperialism and the effects of that power on the bodies of its opponents.

‘Can I ever forget’” (20). The Dervish is led off in handcuffs, yelling, “Butchery! Flies!

[. . .] under the imperial canopy a never setting sun” (20). The prisoner playing the Dervish, George Lamacraft, appears again later, still ranting about the “filthy corruption” of the British Empire. In act two, we learn that Lamacraft has been “dumped,” or murdered, by the prison guards. At the end of act three, Thompson finds him near the camp, dying. As he dies, Lamacraft speaks: “Poor savage Dervish, lover of God. [. . .] Dyin’ in a sand. One a Winston’s Wars weren’t it, when he was a young man” (56). In addition to a simple exposition of the horrors of imperialism, the presence of Lamacraft as the Dervish emphasizes the similarity between the treatment of the prisoners at the camp and that of the colonized peoples under British imperialism. That even as he is dying Lamacraft stays in character as the Dervish suggests that he is aware of this similarity and that his sympathy for the victims of imperialism is genuine. The character of the Dervish in the prisoner’s play is supposed to have been written by the internees themselves, suggesting that they have undertaken a historical inquiry similar to Brenton’s own. Also, the presence of a white man “blacked up” to look like an African suggests the superficiality of the signs of racial difference which fuelled imperial racism (19). This spectacle might also demonstrate to the audience that “blackness” is in an important sense created by the colonizer’s gaze and that the roles of colonizer and colonized are reciprocal.

In the fourth and final act, the Select Committee arrives and the prisoners’ play proceeds. The Committee consists of two Members of Parliament, Jonathan St.

John and Gerald Morn, and their secretary Julia Richmond. St. John is a member of the ruling "Con-Lab" government and Morn is a member of the "Socialist Labour" opposition. St. John explains that his government "is a coalition of the Conservative Party and a part of the Labour Party . . . Not the part to which Mr. Morn still stubbornly adheres to." St. John explains that he is "more Con. than Lab. Very much more" (58). According to Richard Boon, this coalition is intended to resemble Churchill's wartime government (*Brenton* 101). But Brenton is also criticizing the postwar consensus, much as he and Hare did in *Brassneck*. Most pointedly, however, he criticizes divisions within the left and, particularly, that segment of the Labour party that has abandoned the socialist program that the Attlee and Wilson Governments announced but never fully delivered.

Brenton portrays Morn, though he gets roaring drunk and his efforts on behalf of the prisoners are futile, as the only non-prisoner with any integrity. But Morn can do little more than inquire about the prisoners' welfare and express his disdain for the camp, which he refers to as "the English Dachau" (63). Informed by Thompson that the men have written and produced the play themselves, Morn asks, "And they don't just stand there and scream? [. . .] Shower us with accusation. Spit. Disapprobation. Eh?" (66-67). Morn presses Ball, asking, "What about you, are you for or against shoving your social enemies into Internment Camps without trial?" (63). Ball replies: "No soldier likes internal security. Like putting your own language up against the wall. Bearing a bayonet down your own streets. Barbed wire in your own fields and woods. There is a heartbreak about it" (63-64). The image of "language" going to the

wall points to the ideologically undisguised nature of the current regime and suggests that, while ideology is based in language, authority is based on power. Notions of justice and liberty, much touted by British politicians in the past, have become obsolete forms of words.

Morn rails against the idea of "The English Army taking over England" and comments that "We are all caught up in some vast conspiracy of obedience. Who is responsible? None of us, all of us" (64-65). Brenton has referred to the phrase "conspiracy of obedience" as a key to the play. "A conspiracy of obedience," he explains, is "what a whole country can be involved in, very easily and very soon, and quite suddenly. There can be a conspiracy of obedience amongst everyone, and to say, '*He* is a villain', '*He* is the psychopathic fascist', '*He* is the man with the whip', is impossible" ("Petrol" 15; emphasis original). In light of these comments, it is clear that Ball and even Baxter should not be seen simply as fascists, nor does the play suggest that Churchill was a fascist. Ball and Baxter, culpable though they are, are merely willing servants. Significantly, Brenton makes no mention of an individual head of state in the world of the play. Fault lies, he implies, with society at large, but especially with the educated and professional classes represented by the Thompsons. The play cautions individuals on the left and in the Labour Party not to fall prey to the despair to which Morn succumbs, and urges them to remain active and vigilant even in the face of setbacks. The urgency of this message is conveyed in these lines spoken by Joby: "Our freedom goes. When did freedom go? [. . .] Thar, then, was it then? Or some ev'nin', way back in 'nineteen seventies. Wun ev'nin'. Y'were in 'pub. Or local

Odeon. Or in bed w' your Mrs. Or watchin' telly. An' freedom went. Ay, y'look back and ask . . . When did freedom go?" (42). This passage emphasizes the importance of the present moment, the importance for the future of actions taken or not taken. Brenton's point is summarized in his comment that *The Churchill Play* was designed "to get English people to believe that democracy was not some kind of sacred flower that is always going to grow in England, not a natural thing, but a man-made thing [that] has to be looked after, by everybody, or it will actually disappear" (qtd. in Boon, *Brenton* 102).

In the prisoners' play, Churchill vows to achieve "Victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realized; no survival for the British Empire; no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for" (74). These, as Calder's book shows, were not the ideals that motivated the majority of people who participated in the war effort. For Brenton's audience, these lines raise questions about what exactly the empire stood for. Brenton also questions what the legacies of the war—and Churchill specifically—have been:

> The idea that Churchill is universally admired by people who went through the war is not true, but what they always say, and what my parents say, is "He gave us freedom." And the question of freedom becomes paramount—you say, "What freedom? What do we do with that freedom? What have we done with it?" And the answer at the

> moment is, we are in danger of throwing it away—and also that it's not freedom. ("Petrol" 15)

Rather than the transformation of the defeat of fascism into a starting point for the expansion of individual freedom and economic justice, the postwar years have, according to Brenton, witnessed the rise of a national politics based on consensus and compromise. This stasis, Brenton suggests, along with the popular acceptance of notions of national decline, fostered the reactionary cult of personality that developed around Churchill. Brenton's play implies that the unqualified admiration for Churchill by individuals and politicians excuses his authoritarianism and makes possible its emulation by later governments.

Soon after his resurrection, Churchill addresses Mike McCulloch, dressed as the Marine, as "Jolly Jack Tar," assuming a simple and anachronistic patriotism that rankles the jailed Scottish union organizer (70). Churchill then recalls a visit to Glasgow: "When I had said my few words they sang 'Will Ye No Come Back Agin'. Glasgow dazzled me." Though McCulloch is playing a character, he speaks in a voice that seems very much his own when he answers Churchill, referring to the devastation of the city during the war, "Glasgow? Old man, you don't know the half [. . .]. Of forty-seven thousand souls, thirty-five thousand homeless" (72). This crucial exchange follows:

> MIKE. Old man, we don't live in the same world.
>
> CHURCHILL. It's not all ermine robes to wipe your bottom where I come from.

MIKE. Nor is it all cloth caps and waving flags where I come from.

CHURCHILL. We're both of the Island Race. Out of the Celtic mist. The Saxon fen. And bitter, dark green Normandy.

MIKE. I don't understand a word of that.

CHURCHILL. Blood. Heritage . . . (*He clutches his heart*). Pain. (72)

Churchill's appeal to blood and heritage essentializes Englishness as a quasi-biological phenomenon. But his own words about the Celtic, Saxon and Norman influences in Britain calls into question the singularity of the "Island Race." Rather than seeing this hybridity as a sign of the impossibility of an essential and unchanging national identity, Churchill suggests, in the vein of much nationalist discourse, that this mixture of "races" somehow produced a pure and distinctly English ethnicity.[102] McCulloch's resistance to and incomprehension of Churchill's ideas suggests that he conceives identity primarily as a political phenomenon. For Churchill, by contrast, a common nationality joins classes together and patriotism overrides political difference. This idea is expressed through the popular image of the loyal Tar, which complements that of admirals like Horatio Nelson. Though they are bound in

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[102] This notion is exemplified by Matthew Arnold in "On the Study of Celtic Literature." He writes of the British:

> So long as this mixed constitution of our nature possesses us, we pay it tribute and serve it; so as we posses it, it pays us tribute and serves us.[. . .] Then we may have the good of our German part, the good of our Latin part, the good of our Celtic part; and instead of one part clashing with the other, we may bring it in to continue and perfect the other, when the other has given us all the good it can yield, and by being pressed further, could only give us its faulty excess. (133)

It is tempting to see this as the elaborate sophistry required to reconcile an absolute belief in the essentialism of racial types with the historical hybridity of the British "race."

common cause, the class distinctions that divide the admiral and his sailors remain constant; the prisoners' play shows a similar dynamic at work in Churchill's conception of his relationship to the people he ruled. Brenton, however, emphasizes the anachronism of Churchill's notions about nationality and race when Churchill tells McCulloch that he, Churchill, is "a dying bit of Old England, Jack Tar" (73). McCulloch replies, "Churchill, you left us nothing. Few statues of you, in your boiler suit. Your name in a kid's skipping rhyme. Adventure story, from some lost colonial war. Bit of gas from our fathers about some darkest hour years ago. Gas only, not a single human thought. Not a single true, human remain" (73). Brenton's play, however, argues that Churchill has left a substantial political legacy. If McCulloch's questioning of the Churchill myth were more widespread among the British public, the play hints, this legacy might be different. McCulloch's views, however, represent a political perspective that has been marginalized in the prevailing postwar consensus.

The historical nature of the conception of Englishness Churchill embodies and the genealogical manner in which these ideas are reproduced are exposed in his recollections in the prisoners' play of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill. Churchill recalls his father's death from syphilis, adding that throughout his life he feared his "Father's disease, visited upon me, as the Bible says, generation upon generation" (76). Though he did not inherit the disease, Churchill did receive from his father an absolute conviction of his right as an Englishman. For Winston, Lord Randolph embodied the "natural right of an Englishman to rule" (76). The fact that Brenton includes this language alongside a discussion of disease implies that there is

something pathological about the way these ideas are spread, and even about the Churchill family's legacy itself. Lord Randolph Churchill, of course, spoke the famous words "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right." For Brenton, the situation in Northern Ireland is a direct outcome of the belief in imperial prerogative that Lord Randolph and his son espoused. In 1942, shortly after the battle of El Alamein, Winston Churchill said famously that he did not "become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire" (qtd. in Cannadine, *Britain* 20). This comment suggests that the war was, in Churchill's mind, being fought to preserve the empire and the prewar status quo. Brenton certainly encountered this idea in *The People's War*, where Calder writes that Churchill's aim in fighting the war "was simply to defend Britain's power" (98).

In Brenton's view, the continued maintenance of empire required a particular relationship between the rulers and the ruled in Britain, just as it did a different but in some ways analogous relationship between colonizer and colonized abroad. This domestic relationship is interrogated in the scene following Churchill's speech about his father. At the beginning of the scene, a white sheet bearing the words "We can take it, Guv. Give it 'em back" is lowered. Then a crude slideshow showing "post-war English history in reverse" commences, beginning with Churchill's funeral and ending with the famous image of the ruined St. Paul's Cathedral during the Blitz. In between appear, along with photos of prime ministers and of John Profumo, scenes from Suez and Cyprus; images of rationing and nationalization; pictures from the 1945 election, Yalta, D-Day, and El Alamein; and a photograph of Hitler (77). This

sequence mixes the controversial and the scandalous with acknowledged British landmarks in the period. The effect is to return the action of the play to an originary, explanatory moment. In addition, the slideshow implies a single inclusive narrative of history from which the triumphant (or the scandalous, for that matter) cannot be extracted to suit the aims of the narrator. The words on the sheet also refer to that originary moment of the Blitz. The phrase comes from Churchill's description in his memoirs of a trip to Peckham at the time of the Blitz, during which those words were, according to his account, spoken by a bombed-out working-class survivor. Churchill's account, like mainstream histories, stresses the unifying patriotism and the apparent diminution of class differences during the war years. Churchill's visit to Peckham is reenacted in the prisoner's play, and one of the survivors who meets the prime minister is Mike McCulloch's Uncle Ernie. Ernie objects to Churchill's account: "That were 'myth. This is like it was" (79). He then proceeds with his own version. Churchill appeared, Ernie recalls, "Like he'd come down from a cinema screen, out of a film show. Winnie. With a cigar. And I felt angry, suddenly, angry" (80). With the image of the hero dispelled by the presence of the living man, Ernie is tempted to say, "We're alright, we'll come through, what else is there for us. Just go away from this hole," referring to a bomb crater (80). The resignation in these words recalls Nelson's sailors' comments at Trafalgar in *The Hero Rises Up* that they will do their duty simply in order to survive. Ernie claims that he said to Churchill, "We can take it. [. . .] But we just might give it back to you one day" (80). He explains: "And in his book on war [Churchill] wrote it down as give it 'em back" (80). His

comment suggests that Ernie sees Churchill's class as the enemy as much as Hitler and conveys an obstinate and, Brenton suggests, essential refusal to subordinate class differences to patriotism. Brenton includes this episode to reveal what he sees as the distortions of mainstream history. He does so not primarily to provide a true account, but to demonstrate the mediated nature of all accounts of the past. Because history is subject to distortion and bias, Brenton urges a critical attitude toward the telling of history. Churchill's account, as it is presented in the play, exemplifies the appropriation of the working class into a historical narrative at odds with its own interests—"history from above." A moment later, Ernie says, "God rot great men," to which Churchill replies, "Who won the war?" Ernie answers insolently: "Don't you know that? I did. And she did. People won the war" (81).This comment encapsulates Brenton's (and Calder's) argument precisely.

At the end of the prisoners' performance, an enormous Union Jack descends as a curtain. Soon, Ball sends Baxter to check on the prisoners. A few moments later, the curtain rises again to reveal Baxter tied up and McCulloch holding a gun to the soldier's head. The prisoners contemplate an escape. Not sure what to do next, McCulloch, who has become the prisoners' leader, speaks:

> Break out we thought. Freedom we thought. Get to a big city, lose ourselves among the people. Go to the hills. [. . .] Here we find ourselves. And we go out that door, and they cut us down. And Joby, Ted, Furry, Jimmy, Jack, Peter, Mike are shredded meat. [. . .] Hanging on the wire for the birds . . . Nowhere to break out to, is there.

> They'll concrete the whole world over any moment now. And what do we do? (*A slight pause*. *Smiles*.) We survive. In the cracks. Either side of the wire. Be alive. (89)

The doors to the hangar open and searchlights flood the stage, the prisoners standing in the blinding light. The original version of the play ends a moment later with soldiers outside calling the prisoners' names over a loudspeaker. In the revised version performed at the RSC in 1978, Joby speaks a final line: "The Third World War" (*Plays: One* 177). McCulloch's resigned but determined comments about surviving in the cracks suggest the role to which the left has been relegated, in Brenton's opinion, in the seventies. Interpreted more broadly, these lines evoke, romantically perhaps, the resilience of common people subject to exploitation and oppression. The revised ending is more apocalyptic and, if anything, more pessimistic. The "Third World War," the play suggests, will occur between classes rather than nations. The conception of the nation-state that Churchill represents is, the play implies, is in danger and must be maintained by force rather than naturalized by ideological consensus. The state will not, Brenton implies, survive this new war intact.

Within certain limits, the dystopian mode of *The Churchill Play* serves Brenton well, providing an excellent vehicle for both his anger and his analysis. The play's conceit allows him to exaggerate aspects of contemporary society that he finds objectionable and to convey a few ideas with great force. But the intensity of his attacks, combined with the volatility of the myths that are their objects, demands a

very sympathetic audience. For discontented leftists and other radicals, the play may well have provided important historical insights and even served as a rallying cry; for other audiences, it most likely fell on deaf ears.

Plenty

Finlay Donesky writes in his book on Hare that, “Although chronicling the postwar decline of Britain is one of the central preoccupations of British writers, none have done so as consistently and deliberately as Hare” (1-2). Hare’s *Plenty* is in many ways the quintessential “bad-state-of-the-nation” play. In this sense, it follows directly in a tradition established by *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*. Though Hare’s politics are avowedly leftist, the quality of the nostalgia his play evokes recalls Osborne’s work more than it does Arden and D’Arcy’s plays, or even Brenton’s. This resemblance is heightened by Hare and Osborne’s similar naturalist theatre practices. While Arden and D’Arcy celebrate the end of empire, and Brenton laments that imperial ideology remains largely intact, Hare’s attitude is more ambivalent. Though Suez is prominently discussed in the play Hare—like Osborne in *The Entertainer*—has little to say about imperialism or decolonization except in their effects within the narrow sphere of domestic British life. When the play does raise moral questions about empire, Hare’s answers suggest that he subscribes to a rather mild anticolonial liberalism.

Hare has written that "Since 1956 it has been the expectation of every British theatre-goer that there will be, if not a stream, at least a steady trickle of plays which address themselves to the contemporary world" (*Writing* 41). Hare sees himself as an inheritor of this tradition. This role, Hare continues, was "forged for the theatre by John Osborne, Joan Littlewood and others [. . .] offering a place where the recognizable thoughts and feelings of the time may seem to echo and illuminate social history" (*Writing* 41). This notion of a mirror-like relationship between an individual's "feelings" and history is essential for understanding Hare's work as a whole and *Plenty* in particular. While the centrality of this relationship tends to minimize (or disguise) Hare's agency as an interpreter of history, it helps explain his preference for a naturalistic dramaturgy which, he feels, is best able to convey emotional depth. Hare's main theatrical mode can be defined as a brand of naturalism that seeks constantly to link in concrete ways the events of the play to sociopolitical circumstances that exist outside its representational range. As Donesky notes, Hare's drama resembles that of Osborne and Terrence Rattigan, two playwrights to whom he is often compared. "None of the work of these three playwrights," Donesky explains, "is notably innovative technically." Each writes, he argues, "variations on the well-made play and comedy of manners" (2).

Plenty premiered at the National Theater in 1978. Though it contains some spatial and temporal discontinuities, the play is, like *Look Back in Anger* and *The*

Entertainer, essentially naturalistic.[103] In all three of these plays, the authors' concerns are registered through a central character who feels acutely and personally the humiliations of postwar British history. There are also significant thematic grounds on which to compare *Plenty* and *The Entertaine*r, most particularly the representation in both plays of the Suez crisis as a watershed of postwar British history. Hare's account of Suez can be examined alongside Osborne's more immediate response in order to draw conclusions about the development of notions of decline and the meanings that have accrued to the Egyptian conflict in subsequent decades.

Hare's television play *Licking Hitler* was broadcast by the BBC in January 1978, less than three months before *Plenty* premiered. The plays are thematically very

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[103] Richard Allen Cave describes the stagecraft involved in the original production, which Hare directed:

> Faced with the need to effect a rapid transition of scenes, Hare could not respect the conventions of fourth-wall realism except at great cost financially and in time; instead he took advantage of the technical facilities of the Lyttleton to pre-set his scenes on trucks and roll them into position on tracks set in the main stage floor. As a result the speed of the scene changes, their looming into place out of the darkness and the surreal effect of their scattering as the lights faded, together with the visual effect that the actors were working true to the conventions of realism but on what were clearly stages within a stage, introduced a deliberate note of theatricality into the proceeding, an eerie effect of distancing. (198)

These facilities enabled Hare to create what might be called an 'epic naturalism' in which fully realized naturalistic settings could coexist with a wide-ranging (in terms of time and space) epic narrative structure. Cave feels that, because of this technique, "Each scene has an objective social reality, but the pattern governing the selection and ordering of the scenes is subjective, one mind's process of recall. We watch Susan's increasingly critical awareness of her performance, as it were, on the stage of history" (198). While Susan's actions are histrionic, the suggestion that the narrative is structured by her consciousness is not entirely persuasive. The structure of scenes, it seems more likely, is an artful construction on Hare's part rather than an attempt at psychological realism. This authorial intervention adds to the "theatricality" Cave identifies. The careful sequencing also suggests Hare's conception of the epic as expressed in a 1985 interview: "A number of young writers seem to think that if you write a great many monologues and short scenes, that's epic writing. But epic writing on stage is actually about juxtaposition, about what you put next to what" (qtd. in Donesky 83).

similar, and Anna Seaton in *Licking Hitler* strongly resembles Susan Traherne, the protagonist of *Plenty*. Anna works during the war in an army "black" propaganda unit transmitting from a stately English country house to Germany and occupied Europe. Thirty years later, in a letter to her wartime lover Archie MacLean, with whom she has not spoken since the war, Anna reflects that

> In retrospect what you sensed then has become blindingly clear to the rest of us: that whereas we knew exactly what we were fighting against, none of us had the whisper of an idea as to what we were fighting for. Over the years I have been watching the steady impoverishment of people's ideals, their loss of faith, the lying, the thirty-year-old deep corrosive national habit of lying. (128)

Hare, however, has clear ideas about what the war was fought for:

> *Plenty* is inspired by the belief that people literally died in vain. That the upsurge of radical feeling was a genuine outcome of their experiences and not an accident, that the material and emotional plenty of that last period of affluence was wasted, and that the British have drawn a mantle of lies and coldness over the war. We are afraid to show our emotions. (qtd in Page 43)

The final phrase here recalls Osborne's assertion in "They Call it Cricket" that he wants to provide "lessons in feeling" and that "there seems little danger of people feeling too much—at least not in England as I am writing" (47). Significantly, the idealism of the war years is, for Hare, defined in terms of affect, as a "radical feeling"

or "an emotional plenty" that has been squandered. Hare has little time for a discussion of socialism, nationalization, the advent of the welfare state or anything so concrete. Consequently, his play points toward the distinctly liberal conclusion that, if the institutions of British society became more compassionate and people were always honest and generous, there would be no need for a fundamental restructuring of economic and political apparatus.

In 1978 Hare offered this overview of postwar history:

> A great empire falls apart, offering as it collapses, a last great wash of wealth through this country, unearned, unpaid for, a shudder of plenty, which has dissolved many of the rules that kept the game in order; while intellectuals grope wildly for an answer, any answer to the moral challenge of collectivism, the citizens have spent and spent, after the war in a time of wealth, but recently in a time of encroaching impoverishment. (*Early* 8)

This account is a standard critique of the consumer capitalism of the fifties and sixties. The fact that *Plenty* ends in 1962, before Wilson's first term as Prime Minister, leaves the audience ample opportunity to reflect on the relevance of Hare's analysis to more recent events. Hare implies that the intervening years have seen only more betrayal, lying and self-interest. The Conservative victory Hare foresaw in 1978 imbues *Plenty* with a despairing, pessimistic tone. This pessimism arises not only from events but also from the public's response to those events. Hare comments in 1975 that "the discussion of the decline of our society has become fashionable, and

society discusses itself obsessively [. . .] Now our decline is voraciously discussed; but the means of discussion are failing us" ("Commanding" 118). Thus it is not exactly silence against which Hare struggles, but a lack of vocabulary and an inaccessibility of meaning.

During the war Susan, still a teenager, worked for the Special Operations Executive in occupied Europe. She feels that Special Operations was the "one part of the war from which the British emerge with the greatest possible valour and distinction" and it is in contrast to this authentic experience that she finds her later life lacking (*History* 188). Hare explains that he "had originally been attracted by a statistic, which I now cannot place, that 75 per cent of the women flown behind the lines for the Special Operation Executive were subsequently divorced after the war" (*Writing* 81). According to M. R. D. Foot in *SOE in France* (1966), the standard work on the subject when Hare was writing *Plenty*, 53 women, the large majority of them British nationals, were sent by SOE to occupied France. Of these, 12 were executed or died in Nazi custody.[104] Calder recalls that Mass Observation's observers "found that 'the wanderlust' was now 'very widespread in the women's services. The uppermost feeling seems to be a negative one; 'I'll never be able to settle down again.'" Calder adds that, "While women in industry accepted the continuing inequality of the sexes, servicewomen tended to hope for equal competition with

[104] The story of one of these women, Violette Szabo, who died at Ravensbruck in 1945, figures prominently in Brenton's 1972 play *Hitler Dances*. Szabo, the daughter of a French woman and an English man is the subject of the 1958 film *Carve Her Name with Pride*.

men" (400). After participating in the organization of the Festival of Britain and a brief career in advertising, Susan settles into the role of a diplomat's wife, suggesting that the wartime expansion of the roles available to women was temporary.[105] The other primary female character in the play, Susan's jaded bohemian friend Alice, is similarly unable to find a fulfilling role within mainstream society. Greil Marcus's description of the position of women in Britain and the United States in the immediate postwar period helps us to understand Susan and *Plenty*:

> The project of the postwar West [. . .] was to prove that real life was back, and to restrict the definition of real life to the pleasurable consumption of material goods within a system of male supremacy and corporate hegemony. [. . .] [T]he most intense and complete days many [women] had lived, at home and away, were turned into an anomaly, and those who could neither get over them nor, according to the new rules, talk about them, were charted as deviant cases. Thus all sorts of anarchic protests against the reorganization of social life appeared out of nowhere. (258)

[105] Advertising plays an important role in postwar debates about culture. Donesky claims that advertising helped in "creating a powerful myth of progress based on material wealth" (73). An affluent consumer culture leant advertising a new importance and perhaps respectability, and the goods advertised symbolized wealth. At the same time, however, as a commercial art, advertising represented for many observers the lowering of artistic standards, an inherently dishonest use of language and the harnessing of valuable talent to materialistic ends. These later meanings seem more relevant to *Plenty*, especially considering that when it was written, the culture of affluence that emerged in the fifties and early sixties seemed to be in crisis. Hare implies that Susan's work for the Festival prepared her for a career in advertising, and suggests that the Festival was, like advertising, concerned with image over substance.

Susan's actions demonstrate the futility of much of the resistance Marcus describes. At the same time, Susan's experience during the war is exceptional and raises questions about what extent it (or she) can be considered representative, a function the play demands. Benedict Nightingale feels that "Susan's observation of Britain is [not] sufficiently sweeping, or her experience representative enough, to give the play quite the scope Mr. Hare wants" ("Ship" 538). On the other hand, as Donesky points out, in his depiction of Susan "Hare does something rather unusual in modern and contemporary British literature: he avoids defining her according to social pedigree or political tendency" (68). We learn nothing about her education, family or politics. Hare suggests that Susan's experience, while it is perhaps more intense than is typical, is not qualitatively different from that of millions of other Britons who experienced risk, sacrifice and desperation in serving the war effort.

Plenty follows Susan's life from 1943 to 1962. The first scene is set in 1962, while the last, scene twelve, is set in August 1944. Scenes two through eleven move chronologically from 1943 to 1962, with scene ten occurring earlier on the same day as scene one. Thus, despite lengthy gaps between scenes, a strict and carefully placed chronology is maintained through most of the play. Scene five is set in May 1951 to coincide with the opening of the Festival of Britain and scene seven occurs in October 1956, just days after the British and French attack at Suez. The main effect of these choices—especially Hare's decision to represent the latest moment chronologically in the first scene—is, as Carol Homden shows, to challenge the audience's narrative

expectations in order to "replace the suspense of what happens in favour of the analysis of how and why it happens" (66).

The first scene is set in Knightsbridge at Easter 1962 in a "room which has been stripped bare. Around the floor are packing cases full of fine objects" (133). Present are Susan, Alice and Brock, Susan's husband, who has passed out from drink and Nembutal and is lying naked on a mattress on the floor. Alice speaks the play's first lines: "I don't know why anyone lives in this country. No wonder everyone has colds all the time. Even what they call passion, it still comes at you down a blocked nose" (133). Alice continues, "The wet. The cold. The flu. The food. The loveless English" (133). Thus begins Hare's criticism of British emotional and spiritual stagnation. Susan, it turns out, has given her house to Alice for use as a home for unwed mothers. She asks Alice to tell Brock when he recovers that she "left with nothing that was his. I just walked out on him" (134). Susan leaves a moment later, fulfilling her oft-repeated desire "to move on." "I do desperately want to feel I'm moving on," she explains as early as scene four, set in 1947 (151).

Scene two shows Susan as a courier for the SOE in France in1943. She meets a British agent code-named Lazar, who has just parachuted into enemy territory. Susan approaches with a drawn revolver and speaks in French. She refuses to look at his face: "It's an element of risk which we really don't need to take" (136). Lazar is dressed as a French peasant and Susan in a greatcoat and a scarf covering her face. During a quarrel with a French Resistance officer over possession of a supply drop, Lazar grabs Susan's gun and points it at the Frenchman. When he returns it, she

grasps his hand and confesses her fear. A friend in the SOE, she explains, has been taken to Buchenwald. Though she has only moments before told Lazar that "it really is best if you always obey the rules," Susan breaks protocol by speaking the captured agent's name and admits to Lazar, "I don't want to die. I don't want to die like that" (136, 140). This exchange foreshadows moments later in the play when Susan is unable to follow rules and maintain appearances, sometimes at great cost to herself and Brock. The disguises she and Lazar wear have a thematic significance related to Susan's difficulty connecting with others, including Lazar, who shares much of her wartime experience. Even much later in the play, when Susan and Lazar meet again and have sex in a seedy Blackpool hotel room, he refuses to tell her his name.

Hare introduces Brock and Leonard Darwin, his boss at the Foreign Office in Brussels, in scene three.[106] It is 1947 and Susan has been having an affair with a man named Radley, who has died at their hotel of a heart attack. Susan comes to Darwin's office in order to make arrangements for transporting the body back to Britain. When she and Brock engage in passionless discussion of embalming techniques, he begins

[106] Darwin's name is significant. Hare draws attention to it when Susan asks Brock "Darwin, is that his name?" and Brock responds that "God is getting his revenge by dashing off a modern Darwin who is in every aspect less advanced than the last" (19). Later, Alice's young student Dorcas, having attended Darwin's funeral, admits that she "never heard his name," allowing Brock to speak it again. The play suggests that Leonard Darwin's ideas about race and the higher development of the "older" civilizations of Europe are a debasement of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Hare's Leonard Darwin may also be intended to evoke Charles Darwin's son, Major Leonard Darwin (1850-1943), president of the Eugenics Education Society and author of *The Need for Eugenic Reform* (1926). This Leonard Darwin claimed to be dedicated to "making [his father's] life work of service to mankind" (v). In his distasteful book, Darwin treats "the decay of ancient civilizations," claiming that the decrease in birth rate in "civilized" countries was threatening European civilization (315). The Society advocated "sterilization, voluntary or compulsory" as a means for "the elimination of the less fit" (531, 366). Hare's Darwin, however, is not an entirely unsympathetic character. He is not nearly so sinister as this parallel might suggest.

to suspect that Radley was married to another woman. Radley, it turns out, was Tony, the agent sent to Buchenwald, and this liaison foreshadows Susan and Lazar's. Susan explains that she was surprised that Tony called her and asked her to go abroad. "People in our organization really didn't know each other that well," she explains (146). But, Susan continues, she and Tony shared something as a result of their experience: "It's a kind of impatience, we're rather intolerant, we don't suffer fools. And so we get rather restless back in England, the people who stayed behind seem childish and a little silly. I think that's why Tony needed to get away. If you haven't suffered . . . well" (146). This is the first time Susan articulates her rejection of postwar Britain and the first indication of the isolation she feels. Brock asks, "Don't' you think you wear your suffering a little heavily? This smart club of people you belong to who had a very bad war" (147). This question not only calls Susan's representativeness into question, but also makes possible a reading of her eventual breakdown as psychological. Despite Hare's careful correlation of Susan's troubles to historical events, this interpretation is never entirely foreclosed.

The views Brock and Darwin express in this scene suggest a confusion regarding Britain's role in the postwar world. Brock complains of his posting to Brussels: "I'd been hoping for something more positive. Fresher air. The flag still flies over a quarter of the human race and I would like to have seen it really" (145). Brock's complaint reflects a scaling down of Britain's global concerns and the marginalization of diplomats like himself, a point Hare returns to later in Susan's conversation with the Foreign Office man Andrew Charleson. Brock's lament comes

in June 1947. August 1947 would, of course, see the coming of Indian independence, after which it would no longer be possible to make Brock's claim about the flag flying over a quarter of the world's population. In this context, Brock's comment shows that he is both nostalgic and unable to comprehend the issues facing Britain in the postwar years. Darwin, who was previously posted to Djakarta, envisions a "New Europe": "Massive work of reconstruction. Jobs. Ideals. Marvelous. Marvelous time to be alive in Europe. No end of it. Roads to be built. People to be educated. Land to be tilled. Lots to get on with" (24). "Seen from Djakarta," he continues, "this continent looks so old, so beautiful. We don't realize what we have in our hands" (24). Darwin's enthusiasm suggests a hope that Britain will find a leading role in Europe that will provide some consolation for the nation's loss of status as an imperial power.

Scene four is set in September 1947, by which time Susan has started a relationship with Brock and befriended Alice. The scene begins with her complaint, quoted above, about wanting to move on. "I'd like to change everything but I don't know how," she explains (153). Susan fixes a powdered-egg omelet, a symbol of continuing rationing and austerity. Brock has brought with him from Brussels a large gift wrapped in pink paper, which stands out in the nearly empty room. He explains: "I find [money] immoderately easy to acquire. I seem to have a sort of mathematical gift. The stock exchange. Money sticks to my fingers. I triple my income. What can I do?" (155). "I think everyone's going to be rich very soon," Brock continues, "Once we've got over the effects of the war. It's going to be coming out of everyone's ears"

(155). This is the beginning of "the last great wash of wealth" to which the title of the play ironically refers (Hare, *Early* 8). The irony comes about because, for Hare, this unearned material wealth is matched by a spiritual and moral poverty. Initially, Brock takes Susan's dissatisfaction and restlessness for a strength to be emulated: "The very day I met [Susan], she showed me you must always do what you want. If you want something you must get it. I think it's a wonderful way to live don't you?" (155). This interpretation of Susan's feelings shows Brock's desire to break out of his role as a civil servant and exemplifies the self-interest that accompanies Britain's new-found affluence. But Susan is not the individualist Brock thinks she is and, though she has a self-serving notion of the exceptionalism of her wartime experience, her dissatisfaction is rooted in her perception of a loss of purpose on a national level.

Brock's conventionality is revealed more fully when he protests that "The work I do is not entirely contemptible. Of course our people are dull. They're stuffy, they're death. But what other world do I have?" (158). This remark immediately sends Susan into a reverie about the war. "I think of France more than I tell you," she begins. She recalls that she met "The most unlikely people. People I met only for an hour or two. Astonishing kindness. Bravery." She then recalls her wartime meeting with Lazar: "He was lost. I was trying to be blasé, trying to be tough, all the usual stuff—irony, hardness, cleverness, wit—and then suddenly I began to cry. Onto the shoulder of a man I'd never met before. But not a day goes by without my wondering where he is" (158). The emotional authenticity of this moment is for Susan opposed to Brock's conformity. The "irony, hardness, cleverness, wit" that Susan points to are

the stereotypical qualities of the repressed English. Her unlikely marriage to Brock can be seen as a capitulation to the establishment values that are again ascendant in the postwar era.

Hare has written that "The clearest way I describe *Plenty* is as a play about the cost of spending your whole life in dissent" (*History* 14). Scene four establishes Susan as a figure for a virtuous and idealistic (and idealized) Englishness under threat—even for the conscience of the nation. Her breakdowns become an index to the deterioration of a particular form of Englishness in the affluent postwar society. But though Hare's choice of a female protagonist breaks with the masculinist tradition Osborne embodies, the strategy evokes an essentialized femininity characterized by emotional sensitivity and moral rectitude that is itself quite conventional.

The following scene takes place on the Thames Embankment just before the opening of the Festival of Britain in 1951. Having worked to promote the festival, Susan is considering going into advertising. The result of her labor, to the extent that it is described in the scene, is an advertisement for Bovril placed on a barrage balloon. Though the Festival was supported and patronized by a large segment of society, it was a Labour Party initiative. This detail, minimal though it is, is the only indication of any political affiliation on Susan's part. She has, though, stolen food from the Festival Hall, which could indicate a cynicism about the project. Susan is standing alone and Mick, a young black-marketeer from the East End whom she has arranged to meet, approaches. She proposes that Mick father a child for her. "I mean

marriage is not involved," Susan explains, "Or even looking after it [. . .] I mean conception will be the end of the job" (162). This proposition reflects Susan's view of her position as a woman in postwar Britain. "Why," she asks, "should I have to compromise, why should I have to make some sad and decorous marriage just to have a child. I don't see why any woman should have to do that" (162). When Mick suggests that Susan's motives are selfish and that the proposition "Doesn't sound like a very good deal" for the child, Susan responds that "The child will manage" and argues that "Being a bastard won't always be so bad" (163). When Mick replies, "I wouldn't bet on it," Susan asserts that "England can't be like this for ever" (163). This faith, which may also be registered in her desire for the child, is a remnant of Susan's belief that things would change after the war. Mick's skepticism is related to his working-class background and to his cynical exploitation of the black market. Donesky notes that the black market prospered in the fifties and that "Most of the [black-market] 'traders,' known as spivs, were working class Londoners," testifying to the accuracy of Hare's portrait (76). Donesky argues that "Spivery became symptomatic of a widespread and profound disbelief in public morality, collective values, and the possibility of genuine social change" (76).

In scene six, set in December 1952, Susan is working for an advertising agency. She complains to Alice that "To produce what my masters call good copy, it is simply a question of pitching my intelligence low enough. Shutting my eyes and imagining what it's like to be very, very stupid. This is all the future holds for any of us" (166). This passage makes clear the meanings Hare associates with advertising.

The abdication of intelligence advertising demands is the outcome of the materialistic values associated with affluence and consumer capitalism, and, as such, stands opposed to the idealism embodied for Hare in the 1945 election. Susan has been forced to engage in what Hare suggests is the most debased commercial art. Susan's relegation to the advertising firm can be seen not only as a prostitution of her talents, but also as society's punishment of an unconventional woman. A moment later, Mick shows up and it comes out that, after 18 months trying, their efforts to conceive a child have been unsuccessful. Mick feels that he has been used and calls Susan and Alice "cruel and dangerous" (170). Susan leaves and Mick tells Alice that Susan is "actually mad," a claim supported a moment later when Susan returns with a revolver and fires four shots in Mick's direction. Later we find out that she wounded Mick and that Brock paid him to cover up the incident. Susan's apparent barrenness—and her adultery—furthers her alienation from a society that has extolled the family as a model for the nation and, in the past, the empire.

Scene seven occurs at the time of the Suez invasion in October 1956. Susan and Brock are now married. Susan has been treated for mental illness and Brock, in his words, has tried to "help her back up" (174). They are hosting a dinner party for the Burmese ambassador M. Aung and his wife. Darwin attends as well. Aung begins the scene, speaking to Brock: "Two great nations, sir. The Americans and the English. Like the Romans and the Greeks. Americans are the Romans—power, armies, strength. The English are the Greeks—ideas, civilization, intellect. Between them they shall rule the world" (171). This comment is calculated to console the

British diplomats for the loss of the empire. Such a flattering comparison might well have been cultivated by the Foreign Service or the Government itself.[107] That it comes from the representative of a former colony shows a number of things. Firstly, despite the dissolution of the formal links that held the empire together, Britain's prestige has remained strong. More significantly, Aung embodies the success of the colonizer in creating a colonized subject in his own image. As Homi Bhabha shows in "Of Mimicry and Man," the imperial project demanded the fashioning of an "Other" that is the same as, yet recognizably different from, the colonizer. This "Other" must be recognizable and knowable, but still subordinate and inferior. Bhabha claims that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*" (86). The colonial subject then "is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (87). Aung strives to be more English than the English, but he must always remain an outsider. His mimicry seems particularly craven when Aung expresses his envy for Darwin's use of the English language: "Ah the English language, she is a demanding mistress, yes? [. . .] And no one controls her so well as you sir. You beat her and the bitch obeys. [. . .] The language of the world" (172). Aung's flattery is shown to be futile when Darwin refers to him behind his back as "an appalling wog" and tells Brock that Aung "had his tongue stuck so far up my fundament all you could see of him were the soles of his feet" (173). When Darwin is

[107] Harold Macmillan made a remark similar to Aung's to John F. Kennedy (Jack 7).

about to leave, Aung tells him, “We are behind you sir. There is wisdom in your expedition.” He even tells Darwin, “these gyps need whipping and you are the man to do it” (179). These comments, especially coming moments after Aung has been called a wog behind his back, demonstrate the extent of Aung’s desire to ingratiate himself. It also points to the complex and unsavory effects of imperialism on the colonized.

Upon his arrival, Susan launches immediately into an attack on Darwin, assuring him that “The words ‘Suez Canal’ will not be spoken” and that “Nobody will say blunder or folly or fiasco. Nobody will say ‘international laughing stock.’ You are among friends, Leonard. [. . .] Nobody will say ‘death-rattle of the ruling class’” (172-3). A moment later, Susan and Aung leave Brock and Darwin alone. Darwin asks, “Mental illness, is it? Your wife?” Brock responds that Susan is not ill, but that “she just . . . feels very strongly” (173). That Darwin imagines Susan’s outburst, which intrudes into the banalities and formalities of diplomatic speech, to be a sign of mental illness highlights the extent to which the formal language used by the diplomats suppresses any genuine response to the events of that week. Brock’s response links emotion and mental illness, furthering Hare’s critique of the emotionally stifled British. Whether or not Susan is mentally ill, her “condition” is shown to be the result of feelings provoked by events outside herself. For Hare’s diagnosis of the malaise threatening postwar Britain to be persuasive, his audience must see Susan’s illness (if it is defined as such) not as a symptom of internal pathology but as an index to a national “disorder” on the largest scale.

Though only a moment earlier he has asked him to leave the subject, Darwin detains Brock and begins to explain his feelings about Suez. "We have been betrayed," Darwin says. He continues:

> We claim to be intervening as a neutral party in a dispute between Israel and Egypt. Last Monday the Israelis launched their attack. On Tuesday we issued our ultimatum saying both sides must withdraw to either side of the canal. But Raymond [Brock] the Israelis, the aggressors, they were nowhere near the canal. They'd have had to advance a hundred miles to make the retreat [. . .] Last week the Foreign Secretary went abroad. I was not briefed. We believe he met with the French and the Israelis, urged the Israelis to attack. I believe our ultimatum was written in France last week, hence the mistake in the wording. [. . .] I think the entire war is a fraud cooked up by the British as an excuse for seizing the canal. (175)

The details are historically accurate, and in this passage Hare provides more details about the crisis than Osborne does in the whole of *The Entertainer*. Of course mere proximity to events made this sort of detail less crucial for Osborne, but Hare engages in a level of analysis not present in the earlier play. That Hare intends a history lesson—especially for a younger generation—is suggested by Susan's comments to Dorcas in the following scene, discussed below. Brock insists that the lying should make no difference for Darwin because he was opposed to the operation from the start. Darwin, however, cannot forget that the government lied to him and has not

acted "in good faith" (176). Brock concludes: "so what you're saying is, the British may do anything, doesn't matter how murderous, doesn't matter how silly, just as long as we do it in good faith" (176). Darwin answers, "Yes. I would have defended it, I wouldn't have minded how damn stupid it was. I would have defended it had it been honestly done. But this time we are cowboys and when the English are cowboys, then in truth I fear for the future of the globe" (176). Though Darwin's objection to Suez is genuine, he would have kept quiet had the government adhered to protocol and if it had acted in the sincere conviction that it was in the right. But Darwin sees Suez as an exercise in cynical *realpolitik*. Britain has become a maverick nation, concerned narrowly with its own economic and political interests. More precisely perhaps Britain has been a maverick nation throughout the imperial era, but is only recognized as such now that its imperial prestige is being stripped away. Darwin goes on to explain the government's actions in historical terms: "Eden is weak. For years he has been weak. For years people have taunted him, why aren't you strong? Like Churchill? He goes around, and he begins to think I must find somebody to be strong on. He finds Nasser. Now he'll show them. He does it to impress. He does it badly. No one is impressed" (176). Eden was well known for having acquiesced to Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936, a disgrace which he looked back upon "again and again during the Suez crisis" (Kyle 11). Nasser, however, was not Hitler and Eden's show of strength was ineffective. Eden felt he had to live up to an ideal of a different age, symbolized by his political mentor Churchill. Clearly, the imperialist values Churchill championed are no longer appropriate and Eden is unprepared to

preside over the process of decolonization. Darwin, we are informed, will resign in protest.

Susan expresses sympathy for the "poor parachutists" in Egypt, and criticizes the Suez adventure by asserting that the SOE made it their business "to land in countries where we were wanted." She continues: "I can't see the Egyptian girls somehow . . . no. I mean, there are girls today who mourn Englishmen who died in Dachau" (178). She begins to sob. This episode calls for a comparison of the motives for which Britain fought in World War II and in Suez, which, Susan is confident, will show the nation's loss of purpose and the cynicism of the Eden Government. She is, however, able to find hope in the situation. "Isn't this an exciting week?" she comments, "Don't you think? Isn't this thrilling? [. . .] you think? Everything is up for grabs. At last. We will see some changes. Thank the Lord" (179). The remainder of the play shows that little will change and Susan will again be disappointed.

A scene set in July 1961 demonstrates how little has changed in the wake of Suez. Susan, Brock, Alice and Dorcas, Alice's 17-year-old student, have just returned from Leonard Darwin's funeral. Susan tells Dorcas that she wanted very much to attend Darwin's funeral even though she has been living in Iran, where Brock has been assigned. "He spoke his mind over Suez," Susan explains, "In public. He didn't hide his disgust. A lot of people never forgave him for that" (182). Darwin was ostracized by an establishment trying to put Suez behind it. Alice comments that "nobody was there today" and Brock approves Dorcas's presence at the funeral because she "swelled the numbers" (182, 180). When Dorcas asks Susan about Suez,

she responds, "It's a historical incident four years ago, caused a minor kind of stir at the time. It's also the name of a waterway in Egypt. Egypt is the big brown country up the top right-hand corner of Africa. Africa is a continent" (182). Dorcas takes the brunt of Susan's anger, but her youth and her ignorance draw attention to issues of education and socialization, areas in which society seems to have failed her. Alice describes the students at the school where she teaches as "the daughters of the rich and congenitally stupid" (181). Hare is criticizing the hermetic culture of the ruling classes, which, his depiction of Dorcas suggests, facilitates the maintenance of the power of those classes. Osborne makes a similar accusation through Jimmy Porter's description of Alison's brother Nigel: "The only thing he can do [is to] seek sanctuary in his own stupidity" (20). Though the Dorcas can hardly be accused of such willful ignorance, the object of Hare's invective is the same as Osborne's.

A moment later, Brock states that "we see England very clearly from [Iran]. And it does look just a trifle decadent" (186). Brock adds that, in Iran, "Persian labour is disgustingly cheap" (185). He recalls: "The sky. The desert. And of course the poverty. Living among people who have to struggle so hard." This experience, he explains, "can make you see life very differently" (185-6). That Brock's minor moral qualms never come near an indictment of colonialism or capitalist exploitation is yet another example of postwar complacency and, on Hare's part, an indictment of a type of mild liberalism that can accommodate itself easily to an imperialist culture.

Scene nine begins with the voices of Susan and a BBC radio interviewer discussing her service in the war. It is in this interview that Susan claims that the

SOE's operations were "one part of the war from which the British emerge with the greatest possible valour and distinction" (188). The scene then switches to the office of Andrew Charleson, Brock's superior at the foreign office. Susan is inquiring behind Brock's back about his prospects in the service. Brock has abandoned his posting in Iran because of Susan's refusal to return there after Darwin's funeral, and she has since been hospitalized. He is now doing, in Susan's words, "a fairly lowly job, backing up the EEC negotiating team" (190). Brock's earlier reverie about the empire indicates that he likely sees his new job as a failure and a capitulation, or, alternatively, as a tremendous sacrifice he has made for Susan. Informed by Charleson that Brock "has never been a flyer" and that he is "making haste slowly," Susan becomes aggressive, asking Charleson, "do you never find it in yourself to despise a profession in which nobody may speak their mind?" (193). Charleson responds to Susan's challenge:

> That is the nature of the service, Mrs. Brock. It is called diplomacy. And in its practice the English lead the world. [. . .] The irony is this: we had an empire to administer, there were six hundred of us in this place. Now it's to be dismantled and there are six thousand. As our power declines, the fight among us for access to that power becomes a little more urgent, a little uglier perhaps. As our influence wanes, as our empire collapses, there is little to believe in. Behaviour is all. (193)

Hearing Susan referred to as "Mrs. Brock" is unfamiliar and emphasizes the compromises she has made and the loss of identity she has suffered. Frustrated, Susan

threatens to shoot herself if Brock is not promoted. Charleson and his secretary then threaten to have her hospitalized. Susan's actions are clearly the antithesis of the good behavior of which Charleson has spoken, and this moment shows her becoming less and less functional within the society she disdains.

In the next scene Brock and Susan are preparing to leave their house just a few hours before the events of scene one. Brock has resigned from the Foreign Office and now works for the City of London. Brock will be making less money, but tells Alice, "I can't help feeling it will be better, I'm sure. Too much money. I think that's what went wrong. Something about it corrupts the will to live. Too many years spent sploshing around" (195). Susan has been dressing in the next room. She soon enters and announces that she is giving the house to Alice. She comments that "we've all lived like camels off our humps." "Well, then," she continues, "isn't the best thing to do . . . to turn around and simply give the house away?" (198). Brock's objections prompt a tirade from Susan against the possessions they have acquired over the years: "A universe of things [. . .] Mosquito nets, golf clubs, photographs. China. Marble. Mementoes in stone. What is this shit? What are these godforsaken bloody awful things?" (199). Most of these things are relics of Britain's involvement overseas, and they symbolize not only the materialism Susan hates but also the legacies of a past she wants to escape.

Brock asks Susan, "Which is braver? To live as I do? Or never, ever to face life like you?" (199). He continues a moment later: "Your life is selfish, self-interested gain. [. . .] You claim to be protecting some personal ideal, always at a cost

of almost infinite pain to everyone around you. You are selfish, brutish, unkind" (199). What Susan has gained at the expense of others is the self-righteousness and self-justification of the dissident. Though Brock clearly doesn't understand Susan, Hare suggests in a note appended to the American edition of the play that he means Brock to be taken seriously: "It is always a mistake to play Brock as a fool" ("Note" 116). "Brock's destruction," Hare explains, is meant to counterbalance Susan's. This balance, he adds, has gone "comparatively unremarked because it is the kind of death so many members of the audience have chosen, a death by compromise and absorption into institutional life" (*History* 15). Hare also explains that Susan "chooses one path and pays the price for that: the price is madness and isolation; [Brock] chooses the other path, the path of consent with the society, and the price is inertia and repression. And it was meant to be a classical play offering these two balances—those two tendencies" (12). The play, in part through Brock's criticisms, shows Susan's rejection of society to be futile because it is entirely personal. She cannot envision any solution to the problems she sees, nor can she imagine any basis for collective action after the war. As Brock implies, Susan is as self-absorbed as the diplomats and business people she rails against, falling back time and again on her experience in the war to justify herself. The futility of Susan's revolt can perhaps be seen as an effect of a culture in which viable political options are foreclosed. But Alice, though she is not a fully drawn character, presents an alternative. She plans to open the shelter for young mothers and makes a brief but conspicuous reference to the CND Aldermaston march. Stephen H. Gale notes that Easter 1962, when the scene is

set, saw a "riotous rally" against nuclear power outside the American embassy (218). These details suggest a growing alternative politics loosely associated with the "New Left." Though the long-term success of the alternative politics of the sixties has been mixed, Hare includes enough detail to suggest that Susan could have used her energies more productively. Clearly, her giving the house to Alice is a gesture of renunciation, not a sign of any commitment to Alice's cause.

As we know from the first scene, Susan walks out on Brock later that night. The following scene finds her in a seedy Blackpool hotel room with Lazar. Susan's infidelity highlights her rootlessness and, especially in this setting, her desperation. She and Lazar have met at his instigation after he heard the BBC talk and tracked her down. Susan has been "out on the road" since leaving Brock. Lazar has met with Brock, who has succeeded in reclaiming title to the house. Initially, Susan and Lazar's voices are heard in the dark. He pleads, "Susan. Susan. Feel who I am," to which she responds, "I know. I know who you are. How could you be anyone else but Lazar" (201). This exchange is ironic because their entire interaction in this scene is a charade that ends with him refusing to tell her his real name. The retreat into the past this liaison represents brings Susan pleasure: "Jesus. Jesus. To be happy again," she comments (202). Lazar asks Susan if she sees Brock, and she replies "Good gracious no. I've stripped everything away, everything I've known. There's only one kind of dignity, that's in living alone" (204). Lazar begins to speak of his own life, telling her, "I don't feel I've done well. I gave in. Always. All along the line. Suburb. Wife. Hell. I work in a corporate bureaucracy as well" (204). But Susan resists his

confidences and prepares to leave. Lazar, however, ends up leaving first. In the final line of scene two, Susan laments that she doesn't know Lazar's name. As he leaves in scene eleven, Susan asks him to tell her his name, to which he responds, "Codename Lazar" (205). Her desire to know his name calls into question Susan's professed independence. Both she and Lazar have made hesitant gestures toward a greater intimacy, but each has rebuffed the other. As he opens the door, the audience sees not a corridor, but a green field in France. The scenery of the room disintegrates. This is the most conspicuously artificial effect in the play. The contrast between the dreary hotel room and the brilliant sun of the French countryside emphasizes both Susan's attraction to the past and the drabness of postwar society.

The short final scene shows Susan, dressed as a French girl, in a liberated area of France in 1944. The scene, coming as it does after the dramatic effects that end the previous scene, seems to be, in part at least, a projection of Susan's memory and imagination. She meets a Frenchman, who asks her whether she will attend a celebration in the village. Susan is eager, but the Frenchman replies, "Myself I work. A Farmer. Like any other day. The Frenchman works or starves. He is the piss. The shit. The lowest of the low" (206). This peasant represents the people of Europe—including Britain—who were to benefit from the radical reorganization of their societies. His skepticism is born of his role in an economic system which he does not foresee changing, and which the play shows has not changed radically in the decades after the war. Susan insists that the Frenchman must be happy about the end of the war and he concedes that it "Is something good. Is true." The Frenchman is disarmed

by Susan's ebullience and comments that "The English . . . have no feelings, yes? Are stiff." Susan replies, "They hide them, hide them from the world" (207). But, Susan continues, "things will quickly change. We have grown up. We will improve our world" (207). Susan speaks the play's final words: "There will be days and days and days like this" (207). The poetic quality of this line seems a bit forced, raising the question whether Susan really uttered these words in 1944 and suggesting that her idealization of her war-time experience is at this point a backward projection. Despite her first-hand experience in France, the war has for Susan attained a mythic status which provides a convenient standard by which the political climate of the present can be judged deficient. Susan's acceptance of this myth leads to paralysis. Hare's depiction of this paralysis adds a note of caution to the play. The documentary aspects of the play, however, suggest that there are real grounds for Susan's dissatisfaction. A question then emerges concerning the appropriateness of Susan's response. Though Hare is clearly outraged by many of the same things that upset Susan, he enables the audience to judge her individual, backward-looking response to be inadequate.

The structural and chronological similarities between *Plenty* and *Brassneck* are obvious. The central difference lies in Hare's interest in characterization, especially in the relationship between history and private psychology. This aspect of his work is diminished in his collaborations with Brenton. In Susan Traherne, Hare strives to create an entirely naturalistic character. She is so convincing that it is possible for the audience to see Susan's disintegration, in Bull's phrase, as "an essentially personal affair" ("Adapting" 150). Hare acknowledges this possibility:

> In England the opposition to *Plenty* forms around the feeling that from the start Susan Traherne contains the seed of her own destruction, and that the texture of the society in which she happens to live is nearly irrelevant, for she is bent on objecting to it, whatever its qualities. This is certainly not what I intended. [. . .] I intended to show the struggle of a heroine against a deceitful and emotionally stultified class, yet some sections of the English audience miss this, for they see what Susan is up against as life itself. (*Writing* 81)

Thus those audience members upon whom Hare presumably most desires to make an impression are shielded by their involvement in the society he deplores. The difficulty arises from the extent to which social conditions have been naturalized, and Hare's efforts to show that things could be different are not entirely successful. The problem with the naturalistic emphasis on the individual is that the audience—particularly one accustomed to plays in a naturalistic mode—misses the critique of English institutions and traditions that is unmistakable in *Brassneck*. For all its strengths, *Plenty* never distances the audience from the institutions of postwar England as the earlier play does. Homden argues that, "In placing emphasis on the pain of the individual and not the historical context, Hare is in danger of subsuming history within the personal, subsuming change within despair and of having a comforting and ultimately reassuring political effect" (71). But, despite *Plenty*'s reliance on naturalistic characterization, the historical context is made clear enough that it is in no danger of being subsumed by Susan's psyche. Suez will not be overshadowed by

Susan's despair. Ultimately, the play questions not so much the status or meaning of historical events as it does the adequacy of Susan's response to them.

Despite outward differences, as Gale, for one, has pointed out, significant similarities exist between Susan Traherne and Jimmy Porter. Gale goes as far as to proclaim Hare an "anachronistic angry young man" on the basis of the parallel (214). Like Jimmy, Gale explains, Susan is "scarred by disappointed expectations" (219). What is more interesting, however, is the extent to which both characters have internalized the nation's apparent decline and the correspondence between their psychological well-being and the nation's moral and political standing. This connection holds despite the fact that both conceive themselves as dissidents and outsiders. The malaise each character experiences is a response not only to their personal circumstances, but also to challenges posed in the postimperial era to their self-conception as Britons. The disaffection both feel can be read as a symptom of the disarray into which imperial ideological constructs had fallen in the postwar years. The imperialist mission required, especially during the rapid expansion and consolidation of the empire in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods that are so emotionally resonant for Jimmy, that an individual conceive himself or herself, first and foremost, in terms of nationality. For this reason, the apparent decline of the imperial British state becomes an issue of personal and emotional concern for large numbers of people, even if they, like Jimmy and Susan, were not directly involved in the building or maintenance of the empire. In addition, as the retreat from empire progressed and Britain became increasingly inward-looking and dependent on

American military power, the racial and national "Others" crucial to the maintenance of British national identity—with the important exception of postwar immigrants—became less readily available for ideological appropriation. Susan is not in the least nostalgic for empire, and her political instincts seem progressive, yet her nostalgia for the war is grounded in a conception of national greatness which has frequently been exploited by conservative politicians, especially in periods of perceived decline or weakness. Though Hare endorses most of Susan's criticisms of postwar British society, her paralysis suggests that nostalgia—even for the idealism of the war years—is an inappropriate response, especially for the Left. But Hare offers no alternative, and his play cultivates that same nostalgia. In 1978 Hare foresees the failure of yet another postwar Labour government and the coming of a period of political reaction. But though he looks back obsessively and is apparently unable to articulate a vision for the future, his play nevertheless testifies, albeit implicitly, to the necessity of engaging present realities with an eye toward the future.

Though their politics are quite different, both Hare and Osborne see Suez as a symptom of decline, a judgment which produces in *The Entertainer* and *Plenty* a nostalgia common to what some critics have called the "bad-state-of-the-nation play." The crucial difference between Hare and Osborne concerns their notions about when Britain's decline began and the moral and political indices by which that decline can be measured. For Hare, Britain's decline is registered in moral terms; the idealism of the war years, which he sees most fully expressed in the result of the 1945 election, provides him a "land of heart's desire" from which, he argues, the British people have

become increasingly estranged. Though he too felt a sense of betrayal in what he saw as the stagnation of postwar politics, Osborne's deeply conflicted nostalgia locates the summit of British power and prestige in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. In Hare's view, the retreat from empire is not to be lamented; it is an unavoidable, even a welcome, eventuality. Britain's dishonor lies in the way that retreat was conducted in Suez, Cyprus and elsewhere, and in the misguided efforts of politicians to preserve what remained of the empire. Osborne parodies these efforts when Archie Rice sings, "Those bits of red still on the map / We won't give up without a scrap," but for Osborne Suez is farcical because it is a travesty of the imperial mission, exercised without the confidence and purpose of an earlier generation of imperialists (33). For Hare, imperialism is intrinsically objectionable and the actions of the Eden government merely embody its pure form, naked of any enabling ideology.

In the end though, neither *The Entertainer* nor *Plenty* is about Suez or even imperialism. Neither is very concerned with the claims of the Third-World nationalism that emerged in the decades after World War II. For both Osborne and Hare, the Suez Crisis is an occasion when the decline of Britain accelerated precipitously, and it is significant only as an episode in British history. This fact is particularly interesting in Hare's case, considering his avowed leftist politics and his continuing interest in the situation in Northern Ireland. His next stage play, *A Map of the World*, would attempt to deal in a substantive way with the problems and promise of decolonization. For both authors, the most significant aspect of the Suez crisis was the way in which it showed the ideological efforts of the establishment to mask the

nation's political decline by upholding an older form of British identity based on imperial prerogative to be hopelessly inadequate, anachronistic and mendacious.

The Romans in Britain

In both plot and theme, Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980) is similar to Arden and D'Arcy's *The Island of the Mighty* in so many ways that it is difficult to imagine that Brenton was not thoroughly familiar with that play.[108] Both plays deal with Britain in the period immediately following Roman rule, though Brenton's is set in other periods as well. Both draw parallels between the Roman colonization of Britain and modern British imperialism, and both imagine the genesis of the myth of King Arthur. Like Arden and D'Arcy's play, *The Romans in Britain* dramatizes a sequence of invasions in to order create a sense of the overlapping of cultures in the British Isles. Brenton writes: "Ever since I began working on *The Romans in Britain*, every stretch of ground I look at in the countryside heaves and seethes like an ocean in a slow, centuries-long swell, barrows, medieval fields, dew ponds, strip cultivation, hill forts, banks, ditches riding under the grass. The landscape is riven by human work" ("Caesar" 39). This description suggests that the central dynamic of British history is the imposition over time of invading or migrating cultures upon preexisting

[108] Though I have not found any direct reference to *The Island of the Mighty* by Brenton, he does comment that as a young writer he found Arden's plays "marvellous" ("Petrol" 6).

ones. For Brenton, as for Arden and D'Arcy, history is a palimpsest in which later cultures overwrite but do not completely erase earlier ones. As Boon suggests, the Roman and Anglo-Saxon invasions shown in Brenton's play represent "a succession of historical invasions and waves of colonisation which, by implication, could extend to include Vikings and Normans" (*Brenton* 181). In both plays, this aspect of Britain's history is emphasized in order to highlight the hybridity of modern British culture and to undermine notions of British national or racial exceptionalism. According to Boon, in the opening scenes of *The Romans in Britain*, "Brenton is constructing [. . .] a picture of Britain in a state of cultural flux and, even before the Romans arrive, under pressure" (*Brenton* 190). Furthermore, Brenton implies that such flux is constant and that cultural and national identities are more unstable than is commonly recognized.

The Romans in Britain begins in 54 BC, the year of Julius Caesar's second expedition to Britain. This date places the action of the play near the beginning of the recorded history in Britain, suggesting that from the very beginning British history is a chronicle of violence and oppression.[109] This violence, Brenton takes pains to show, preceded the arrival of the Romans. Reference is made to conflict among native

[109] In his valuable essay "Howard Brenton's Romans," Philip Roberts shows that, contrary to accusations by the play's critics, Brenton's picture of Celtic society and the Roman invasion is essentially accurate. Roberts claims that "Brenton's account of part of the early history of Britain is verified by the standard works on the period and [. . .] his selection of detail for dramatic history neither distorts history nor manufactures it" (7). Roberts also notes that "Much of what is known about early Celtic organisation, secular institutions, religious customs and art" derives from Irish sources, the island being relatively untouched by the Romans (9). This circumstance strengthens the links between the Mother's Celtic group in act one of the play with the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland.

British tribes, and it becomes clear in the early part of the play that the native British are slaveholders.[110] The play begins when Conlag and Daui, two thieves recently arrived in Britain from Ireland, are discovered in fields owned by a village of Celtic Britons. The thieves' have resolved: "If men make you live like an animal [. . .] be an animal" (6). This resolution makes clear the level of violence and instability to which they are accustomed. The thieves first encounter a female slave, and Conlag asks if he should "kill it" (10). The village is controlled by a matriarch known simply as the Mother. Among her "sons" (no biological relationship is clear) are the "brothers" Marban, Brac and Viridio. Marban is studying to become a priest. A meeting between the thieves and the brothers turns hostile. The thieves introduce themselves to Marban and his brothers as "just a couple of Irishmen," but the brothers imagine that they might be Romans (13). This notion prompts Daui to yell, "I am a Roman come to fuck your mother" just before the brothers fall on him and slit his throat (16). Marban ties the corpse up by its feet and places a bowl under the wound to collect the blood. In addition to depicting a society accustomed to violence, these details prevent any identification of Celtic Britons as uncorrupted noble savages.

Brenton's ideas about the Romans and the Celts recall Arden and D'Arcy's description of the "rectilinear" Romans and the "curvilinear" Celts. "I kept staring," he recalls, "at the few examples of their decoration we have, which is off center, curled, triangular." This led Brenton to wonder if the Celts held "An 'asymmetrical

[110] Britain is known to have exported slaves to the Roman Empire, and there is evidence that British tribes themselves used slaves. See Peter Salway, *Roman Britain*, p. 15.

view of the world'" (*Plays: Two* ix). He claims that he could "find a language" for his Celtic characters only after "puzzling at these cryptic traces in the archeological records and at the triads, and [after] visiting some sites of Celtic camps—again, triangular, maze-like, once hidden in the woods, unlike the square Roman camps dominating ridges and hilltops" (*Plays: Two* ix). "[I]n many respects, Caesar in the play thinks like us, that is dialectically, in terms of cause and effect. His mental world is symmetrical, four-squared, logical," Brenton adds (*Plays: Two* ix). Brenton's Celts can scarcely conceive what the Romans might be like. An envoy from a neighboring Celtic group who meets with the Mother proclaims, "There is a Roman Army and it is coming. It is an army of red leather and brass. It is a ship. It is a whole thing. It is a monster. It has machines. It is Roman" (18). What distinguishes the Romans and makes them so fearsome is their large-scale organization. "Understand," the envoy continues, "The Romans are different. They are [. . .] a nation. Nation. What? A great family? No. A people? No. They are one, huge thing" (20). Brenton suggests that this organization can be achieved only through an oppressive discipline and rationality and, further, that this organization enables imperial conquest. As many historians have recognized, the development of modern nations in Europe coincided with an aggressive expansionism.[111] As he does in *The Churchill Play* and as Arden and D'Arcy do in a number of plays, Brenton suggests that imperialism requires a coercive sovereignty both in the imperial nation and in its colonies.

[111] For a recent analysis see part two, "Passages of Sovereignty," of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*.

Beyond the glory that comes with military success, Caesar's motives for invading Britain are unclear. Some British tribes were involved in the resistance to Roman rule in Gaul, and Caesar my have conceived the invasion as a way of consolidating his gains in Western Europe. And, as Peter Salway argues, "There is very little doubt [. . .] that profit in cash and kind was very much to the fore among Roman motives for [the] campaigns in 55 and 54 BC and there is no reason to think Caesar did not share them" (*Roman* 39). In the play, Caesar asks the historian Asinus, who accompanies his army, "What did we come to this Island for?" Asinus replies, "Fresh water pearls" (50). This exchange recalls Conrad's assertion in *Heart of Darkness* that the Romans in Britain "were conquerors, and for that you only want brute force [. . .] They grabbed what they could for the sake of what was to be got" (31). But for Brenton none of this matters much. For him, Roman aggression and lust for conquest are a natural extension of their way of thinking about the world and an outcome of the internal organization of their society.

Scene three contains the controversial attempted rape that caused an uproar during the play's run at the National Theatre. Marban, Brac and Viridio are bathing in a river when three Roman soldiers arrive. When the Romans enter, one remarks, "Three wogs." When another asks what tribe they belong to, the first replies, "A wog is a wog" (30). The anachronistic use of a twentieth-century racial slur—the *OED* does not record its use before 1929—links Roman and British imperialism and suggests that the denigration of subject peoples is necessary to imperialism. The term also points indirectly to racial problems in postwar Britain and introduces a modern

and likely anachronistic conception of racial difference into the Roman scenes. But because *The Romans in Britain* is, in the end, a play about contemporary Britain, putting modern racist language in the mouths of ancient Romans serves Brenton's purposes well. His clear anti-racist intentions allow him to objectify the language—and the racism the slurs represent—for the audience's consideration. The Romans' use of racial slurs, which will be mirrored in the British soldiers' use of similar slurs in Ireland in part two, suggests that the modern Irish are conceived as racial others. This assertion is well founded, but racist attitudes toward the Irish are not identical to those directed against the Arabs and other colonial subjects more commonly disparaged as "wogs."

The soldiers murder Brac and Viridio. One attempts to rape Marban before knocking him unconscious. While the soldier is assaulting him, one of his companions says to Marban, "My friend has been to the Orient. Persia? Funny little ways he's picked up, in his career" (34). This comment makes available to the audience a perspective in which the relatively minor incident of the rape can be seen as part of the functioning of an enormous imperial system. The soldier's participation in that system has instilled in him a lust for violence and a contempt for the colonized evoked not only in the used of the term "wog" but also in his comment that Marban has an "Arseful of piles. [. . .] I mean, what do they do on this island, sit with their bums in a puddle of mud all year long?" (36). The scene also drives home the point that at its most basic level imperialism—or any other form of social control—is made possible by real or threatened violence against the bodies of individuals. Brenton's

point is similar to Foucault's when he remarks in *Discipline and Punish* that "the body is [. . .] directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks" (25). The rape then is not precisely a metaphor for imperialism. More accurately it bears a synecdochical relationship to the imperial system—the act being one small part of a larger action. By choosing to portray a homosexual rape, Brenton distances himself from the commonplace and often sentimentalized trope by which the subject nation—Ireland, for example—is represented as a ravished woman. At the same time, however, Brenton suggests, here and elsewhere, both that the Celts are more feminine than the Romans and that the rape of Marban robs him of his masculinity. Thus the Celts are essentially feminine *and* they have been feminized by colonialism. The compatibility of these ideas in Brenton's analysis points to a determinism in which essentialized cultural differences enable imperialism. Those differences are then amplified under an imperial system.

After the attack, the soldier who spoke of his comrade's experience in Persia tells the unconscious Marban that his uncle was a slave. He clears Marban's breathing passage and comments, "Choke on that. I saved your life, nig-nog. A legionary saved your life, nig-nog. Nephew of a slave. Now, a citizen, upon my discharge" (37). These comments reveal the motives of a common soldier, which are not unlike those of Sergeant Baxter in *The Churchill Play*. Salway comments that "By the end of the second century BC there were so many landless peasants and unoccupied city dwellers [in Rome] glad of employment that it was not difficult to attract men to

serve in one campaign after another for pay" (21). Brenton may well have perceived analogous circumstances in 1970s Britain. In addition to money, military service for this soldier is a way to advance himself socially. "The Roman soldier, however strict his discipline," Salway writes, "Was highly privileged in the ancient world by being paid a regular money wage, having secure employment, and being able to look forward to a comfortable retirement as a solid citizen" (21). Similar motives inspired many British soldiers in the era of empire. This Roman soldier, again like Baxter, sees an opportunity to rise above his station, while hardly considering the injustice of the social stratification that remains unchanged by his individual good fortune.

The next scene shows the thief Conlag and the female slave from scene two traveling through the woods. The parallels between these characters and the thief Garlon and the Bondwoman in *The Island of the Mighty* are striking. Conlag asks the slave, whose eardrums have been pierced and her tongue cut out, to accompany him further. "There is a land," he says,

> The stories say it's there so it's got to be. Over the sea. The forests are thick. The deer are free. [. . .] Put your hand in a river there, the fish come to kiss your fingers. And no Gods, no creepy crawlies, no souls of dead heroes bashing around in the undergrowth, giving you the shits. And no people! No people! It is there! The stories say so! (39)

This vision is reminiscent of the Bondwoman's desire that, with a "great big / Sack full of gold," she and Garlon will "have a whole great island full of trees and mountain water / And no one to control us wherever we shall wander" (75). Conlag

expresses an anarchic desire to escape a violent and oppressive social order, and he recognizes that the "Gods" and "dead heroes" are part of the ideological support of that culture. In its utopian aspects Conlag's description of the land over the sea resembles the myth of King Arthur as it is described later in the play. As the scene ends, Conlag and the slave encounter villagers fleeing the Romans and it becomes clear that they will not escape across the sea.

The relationship between the poet (or, in Brenton's play, the historian) and political power is another theme common to *The Romans in Britain* and *The Island of the Mighty*. In his official role, Asinus resembles Taliesin and, to a lesser degree, Merlin in *The Island of the Mighty*. The servile nature of Asinus's position is clear when Caesar notifies him at one point that he is "going to make a remark for the official biography" (46). This detail makes clear Brenton's criticism of official history and supports his thesis that power writes history. Brenton is hostile to "standard" histories which, he feels, obscure the realities of imperialism:

> I remember a picture of 'Caesar's legions crossing the Thames' pinned on the classroom wall when I was nine. So the play takes a rooted, popular myth from the national consciousness. Everyone knows the Romans came to Britain. This is vaguely felt to be 'a good thing', because they built straight roads and 'brought law'. [. . .] For the Romans, Caesar's second raid on Britain is a minor operation which is not that successful. It is a small war on the edge of the known world that gets bogged down, a wretched summer of little achievement and

> to Julius Caesar of little interest. The scene in which he appears is titled "Caesar's Tooth'. He has a toothache and, irritably, removes the offending tooth and throws it away. That sums up what he thinks of Britain. He notes a few local customs for his memoirs, orders the fields to be salted 'as a reminder', and leaves the stage and these shores for greater things. But for the Celts the appearance of the Roman army is the end of their culture, its touch is death. (*Plays: Two* vii).

By debunking a largely unquestioned image of the past, this passage enacts exactly the sort of historical revision Brenton attempts in his play. Asinus says of Caesar, "In a sense, he does nothing. He only reacts. And finds himself the master of continents. It is not surprising that he pays historians to find omens of great things at the time of his birth" (50). For Brenton, Caesar's power is, to borrow a phrase from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "an accident arising from the weakness of others" (31). For Brenton, this weakness is in part a result of the colonizer's monopoly on language, particularly the written word. To an important degree, Caesar's power is a carefully managed function of language and is dependent on a politically advantageous reconstruction of events.[112] In Asinus's hands, the events of the campaign immediately become "history."

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[112] As Salway shows, Caesar, or any Roman commander in the field, had to carefully manage public opinion in Rome, a situation not unlike that faced by modern imperial governments. See *Roman Britain*, pp. 20-39.

In the passage quoted above, Brenton also seeks to discredit the argument which justifies colonialism in terms of the "improvements" the conquerors bring with them. In one scene, three Roman soldiers appear carrying spades and wooden toilet seats. The attitudes of these soldiers belie the notion that there is any sense of a civilizing mission or other noble purpose behind their efforts. "Something to tell your kiddies, when you get back home," one comments. Another responds, "Oh yeah. I dug a shit hole on the edge of the world" (42). When Caesar announces that the Romans will abandon the camp they have been constructing, a soldier asks, "What about the lavatories?" A guard responds, "Leave 'em for the Britons. Teach 'em a healthy habit" (52).[113] Brenton here implies that the real goal of the imperialist is not to "improve" the colonized territory, but to install a cultural apparatus by which colonized subjects can be changed and, ideally, assimilated into the imperial order for the political and economic gain of the colonizer.

Marban has been taken prisoner and presented to Caesar as a curiosity—a "nig-nog" who speaks Latin (37). Robert F. Gross argues that this scene "briefly moves the play into a fantastic surrealistic, realm" and "snaps" the verisimilitude of the rest of the play, as if a blow to his head suddenly enabled Marban to speak a foreign tongue (78). If this were the case, the event would indeed be surreal and

[113] In a section of the "Aeolus" chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* entitled "The Grandeur that was Rome," professor McHugh observes that "The Roman, like the Englishman who follows in his footsteps, brought to every new shore on which he set his foot [. . .] only his cloacal obsession. He gazed about him in his toga and he said: *It is meet to be here. Let us construct a watercloset*" (108). For both Joyce and Brenton, the disposal of excrement symbolizes the material processes of empire in contrast to the civilizing mission promulgated by the colonizer. Joyce provides a precedent for Brenton's comparison of British and Roman imperialism, a theme developed at a number of points in *Ulysses*.

radically disruptive to the style of the play. But there is no magic in the play. It seems much more likely that, as an apprentice priest already three years in training, Marban actually knows some Latin. Caesar himself comments that "It's no surprise to find a little Druid in Britain, talking Latin" (49). And Asinus sees Marban's ability as a sign that the Celts have "All the tools of civilization. And they keep their people in ignorance" (49). Asinus's comment typifies the colonizers' view that their language and, by extension, their culture is a gift bestowed on their subjects. Language would, in this context, have a status similar to that of roads and toilets—apparent improvements that merely facilitate the subjection of a people. What Marban has said to the soldiers is "Sacerdos sum. Exsecrationem scio. Te miles romane, caedet. Foede!," which means, approximately, "I am a priest. I know curses. You Roman soldiers will fall. In a filthy manner!" (37; my translation). This sentiment recalls Caliban's assertion in *The Tempest* that Miranda "taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (1.2.365-6).[114] Marban, unlike Caliban, has his own language. But his knowledge of Latin allows him to convey his curse to the Romans, however little impression it makes. More broadly, the episode argues that imperialism inspires and then actually enables resistance against itself.

Caesar orders the soldiers to release Marban but leave his hands bound. Caesar takes a Venus pendant from his neck and puts it around Marban's neck.

[114] Caliban has, of course, become a central figure in the academic discourse on colonialism. See in particular Stephen J. Greenblatt "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century" in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*.

Marban writhes, but cannot escape this symbolic negation of his faith. Caesar tells him, "On the mainland I burn your temples. Your priests that will not serve the Roman Gods—I kill. I desecrate their bodies. Desecration according to your beliefs. [. . .] Because there are new Gods now. Do you understand?" (49). This speech shows that knowledge of a subject culture makes repression more effective. The scientific and pseudoscientific languages that bolstered British imperialism—social Darwinist and orientalist discourses among them—served similar purposes. The British officer Thomas Chichester makes a similar point later in the play when he explains to a fellow soldier that "It's Celts we're fighting in Ireland. We won't get anywhere 'til we know what that means" (67). Caesar's comment makes it clear that the permanent subjugation of a people such as he hoped to achieve in Gaul requires not only force but the imposition of a whole system of values and beliefs. Roman experiences in Britain and Gaul—and British experiences centuries later—demonstrate that lasting conquest is extremely difficult. Marban's resistance to Caesar's gesture symbolizes the kind of opposition efforts to achieve such domination usually provoke. At the end of the scene, Caesar orders his soldiers to "Take [the Celts's] animals. Salt the fields. Kill the prisoners," actions which he justifies by insisting that "Even a little massacre must look like policy. They'll take it as a warning. Or that we knew these people were traitors. Probably leave a little local war behind us—no bad thing" (51-52).

The Romans conclude that the Celts they meet in the play are "a loose grouping, a handful of families" and Asinus tells Caesar that "The body of a woman was bitterly fought over." Caesar is surprised, but Asinus explains that these Celts

“do not originate from the mainland. They are of the ancient stock of Britain. Traces of matriarchy are to be found among them. The Iceni” (45). For Brenton, as for Arden and D’Arcy in *The Island of the Mighty*, matriarchy sets the Celts apart from the Romans (or, in Arden and D’Arcy’s case, Romanized Britons) and suggests that imperialism is an essentially masculine endeavor. A century after the events depicted in the play, native Britons, under the Iceni queen Boudicca (Boadicea), nearly drove the Romans from Britain. Though tenuous, the possible allusion to a British queen who instigated a rebellion after she was flogged and her daughters raped furthers Brenton’s attribution of distinct gender roles to colonizer and colonized. As a masculinized warrior, Boadicea would become, like Arthur, a prominent figure in British nationalist mythology.

In scene six, Marban is discovered by some of the villagers. After he is unbound, he asks for a knife and speaks: “Oh the life of the farms will go on. But you’ll never dig out the fear they’ve struck in you. [. . .] They’ve struck a spring in the ground beneath your feet, it will never stop, it will flood everything. The filthy water of Roman ways” (54). Marban here describes the psychological violence subject peoples suffer under imperialism. The experience is humiliating and dehumanizing, but Marban also suggests that these feelings can become the basis for resistance. The Celts, he states, must “Abandon the life [they] know. Change [themselves] into animals. The cat. No, an animal not yet heard of. Deadly, watching, ready in the forest. Something not human” (54). The mention of a cat recalls the Wildcat Picts of *The Island of the Mighty*, who Merlin describes as being “like the

mountain cats themselves who hide [and] wait to spring and then run back / Into their holes and none can find" (63). Marban's sentiment is also echoed later in Brenton's play by the Celtic British woman Corda who dreams of becoming "a mother of killers [. . .] Children brought up right. Like stoats, like weasels, like otters" who will fight the invading Saxons (93). In these descriptions, Brenton, like Arden and D'Arcy, means to evoke the philosophies and fighting methods of modern anticolonial movements. For Brenton, the connections become explicit in the portrayal of IRA volunteers in the final act of the play. As Boon comments, "the IRA terrorists [in *The Romans in Britain*] are accounted for as inevitable functions of [. . .] imperialism. Their actions are neither condemned nor condoned: they are simply the logical consequence of the injustice of invasion and colonisation" ("Politics"148). Despite his ideas for combating the Romans, Marban chooses not to fight; instead he kills himself by falling on his knife.

Scene seven, which ends part one, contains the first of several major chronological disjunctions in the play. The female slave, who has traveled with Conlag before killing him with a stone, is speaking when the sound of a helicopter interrupts and Caesar's army enters dressed in 1980s vintage British Army uniforms. The slave throws a stone at one of the soldiers and is immediately gunned down, demonstrating rather heavy-handedly the disparity in power between colonizer and colonized. The Roman/British soldier who shoots refers to her as a "Fucking bogshitting mick," suggesting that the plight of the modern Irish is in some ways akin to that of the ancient Britons under Rome, a notion that is developed throughout part

two (57). In an aside Caesar conveys his hope "That everyday life will begin again. That violence will be reduced to an acceptable level. That Civilisation may not sink, its great battle lost," reiterating in this final phrase the belief that has driven British as well as Roman imperialism (57). Reginald Maudling, the Home Secretary indirectly attacked in *Brassneck* for his involvement in the Poulson affair, notoriously spoke in 1971 of achieving "an acceptable level of violence" in Ulster. The notion of an acceptable level of violence suggests for Brenton an imperial arrogance and a willful ignorance of the effects of colonialism.[115]

Part two begins in 1980 near the border in Northern Ireland. British Army Captain Thomas Chichester, who has been operating undercover, appears in a cornfield, talking to himself. The field, he muses, is "The dead likeness of the Old Acre. A field back home, on the family farm" (61). Soon a group of British soldiers arrives and interrogates Chichester at gunpoint. Switching rapidly from an impression of Bertie Wooster to a perfect West Belfast accent, then to a Dublin one, Chichester

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[115] Caesar's lines also allude to W. B. Yeats's poem "Long-legged Fly," which begins,

> That civilization may not sink
> Its great battle lost,
> Quiet the dog, tether the pony
> To a distant post.
> Our master Caesar is in the tent
> Where the maps are spread,
> His eyes fixed on nothing,
> A hand under his head.
>
> Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
> His mind moves upon silence. (339)

Caesar's abstraction here recalls Brenton's description Caesar's toothache and his attitude toward Britain. Both texts suggest that Caesar is preoccupied with greater things than the day-to-day workings of empire. Any comment by Brenton on Yeats is difficult to ascertain.

taunts the soldiers. A soldier, hearing the Wooster voice, asks if Chichester is British, to which he replies in the Belfast accent "I take that badly, coming from a British Soldier. Who's walking all over my country, as if he did God almighty's job and made it" (63). This charade not only reveals the changeability of the outward signs of national and ethnic identities, but also indicates Chichester's uncertainty about his role in the conflict in Ireland, which will soon become clear.

A moment later, Lieutenant Bob Maitland, with whom Chichester is acquainted, arrives. Only then is Chichester's identity revealed. When Maitland asks him "How do you, of all people, pass yourself off as Irish?" Chichester responds, "I sing a few rebel songs in the local pub," again suggesting that the external forms of identity can be adopted or discarded like a disguise (66). What sets Chichester apart from the other British soldiers and makes him somewhat sympathetic to the IRA's cause is his sense of history. Chichester tells Maitland, "Look at this field. It's like one on my mother's farm, not far from Colchester. The Roman city of Camulodunum. One spring, ploughing, we found a God. That big. Celtic, pagan. And Camulodunum could be the site of Arthur's last battle. AD 515. King Arthur! Celtic Warlord. Who fought twelve great battles against the Saxons. That is, us" (67). A moment later, Chichester rants, "The Celts! Ha! Very fashionable, the Celts, with the arty-crafty. Ley-lines. Druids. But show them the real thing—an Irishman with a gun, or under a blanket in an H-Block and they run a mile. If King Arthur walked out of those trees, now—know what he'd look like us to us? One more fucking mick" (67). This talk puts Maitland off: "You're a maverick, Tom Chichester," he tells him, "And a

romantic and a bloody menace" (67). Maitland is the strait-laced, stereotypical English soldier. He reveals his simple-minded motivation for joining the Army when he says, "God! I joined the Army for tanks. Where are my tanks?" (67).[116] Chichester realizes that the Celtic past is part of his own cultural inheritance as an Englishman. From his perspective the foundational national myth of King Arthur has a deeply ambiguous meaning for the present. Chichester's reference to a "fashionable" "Celtic" style points to the fact that the "Celtic" in popular culture has come to represent a romantic counterpoint to an official culture stereotyped as bureaucratic, managerial and unfeeling. Chichester apparently feels that the modern commercial appropriation of Celtic decorative style denies real historical relationships and that a valorization of Celtic emotional and spiritual authenticity is hypocritical on the part of a culture that has long disparaged the Irish as childlike and irrational.

The next scene returns to the distant past, this time AD 515 and the Saxon invasion of Britain. Chichester remains sleeping at the side of the stage. Several Celtic British villagers and a Christian priest enter the field. The presence of the priest marks the long-term Romanization of Britain. Salway dates the end of Roman Britain around AD 500, and the Roman element in the culture depicted in Brenton's sixth-century scenes is residual (*Roman* 501). A villager warns Cai, the old man who owns the field, that the Saxons "may be here, in your field—in the heart of Britain" (70).

[116] The dynamic between Chichester and Maitland parallels that between Yolland and Lancey in Brian Friel's *Translations*. Friel's play premiered less than a month before Brenton's, so direct influence is unlikely to explain the similarity. The hard-nosed, professional soldier and the ambivalent, perhaps even well-meaning imperialist—in Yolland's case a "soldier by accident"—are, however, archetypes (31).

Like the Roman invaders in part one, the Saxons are terrifying and mysterious: “You want to see your daughters raped?” a villager asks Cai, “And have the Saxons eat your brains, over a fire?” (70). The priest refers to the coming invasion as “an English raid” (70). The description of the invaders as English, rather than Angles, Saxons or Anglo-Saxons, is anachronistic and makes clear to Brenton’s mostly English audience that the culture to which their heritage is most directly linked was, like the Romans, imposed by invasion and bears no natural connection to the British Isles. This is the only use of the word “English” in the ancient scenes. But, according to Boon, in early drafts of the play the Saxon soldier who later stumbles into Cai’s field was referred to as English (*Brenton* 184). Arden and D’Arcy also refer to the Anglo-Saxon invaders in *The Island of Mighty* as English. As the scene ends, Cai unearths and reburies a large Celtic idol. The idol represents the submerged Celtic element in British history which successive invasions have failed to erase completely. The idol is also the “God” to which Chichester referred in the previous scene, indicating that Chichester’s family’s field and Cai’s are one and the same. This detail would seem to justify Chichester’s continued presence on stage, except that Chichester is in an Irish field, which merely resembles the other. But this doubling is necessary to maintain the conceptual link between Chichester and the Saxon as well as the Roman invaders.

Cai continues burying the idol during the next short scene, in which a drunken Chichester speaks both parts of a dialogue between himself and an imaginary superior officer. We find out that he has been sent to kill an IRA man named O’Rourke. In his own voice, Chichester asks, “When will peace come, Sir?” As the officer, he replies

“England out of Ireland? Swords into plough-shares, machine-guns into rakes, ammunition into fertilizer?” Again in his own voice, he asserts that “The dead in any war would vote for peace, Sir” (73). This ventriloquism dramatizes the conflict within Chichester. At this point, Chichester sees British withdrawal from Northern Ireland as a means to stop people being killed, not as a redress to a historical wrong. Chichester reminds himself that he is a British soldier and that, if he is to fulfill that role, his growing disgust for violence and desire for peace must be pushed aside.

At the beginning of the next scene, a wounded Saxon soldier appears in Cai’s field. Also present are Corda and Morgana, Cai’s daughters. With the exception of Marban’s single line of Latin, this soldier is the only character in the play who speaks in an ancient language, unintelligible to the audience and, in this case, to the other characters on stage. All other characters, even when they are understood to be speaking in Latin or a Celtic language, deliver their lines in a stylized and colloquial modern English. For Brenton’s audience, as Peacock asserts, the Saxon soldier’s language reinforces the point that “the English were themselves just another alien race bent on colonisation” (*Radical* 132). Cai claims to be a veteran of the Battle of Badon Hill, where the native British defeated an earlier Saxon invasion, and he is slow to believe that the new invasion is happening. He explains: “Twenty-one years of peace. And the killing when I was a boy, forgotten. [. . .] And powerful men, only rumours. Bandits calling themselves ‘Emperors’, ‘New Romans’” (75). Cai’s chronology locates the action in these scenes at exactly the same historical moment in which Arden and D’Arcy’s *The Island of the Mighty* is set. He describes the same

postimperial power vacuum which Arden and D'Arcy's play dramatizes, and his reference to bandits passing themselves off as "New Romans" recalls the characterization of Arthur in the earlier play. Cai then unearths the idol, which Morgana, a Christian, refers to as "A filthy pagan thing" (77). Cai replies that "She's not like your skinny rabbit Jesus, nailed up, soaking up prayers" (77). This exchange again suggests the continuing encroachment of a masculine Romano-Christian culture into a feminized Celtic society. A moment later, Corda and Morgana believe they hear a woman crying and conclude that the soldiers are coming. When Cai will not leave the field, Corda picks up a stone and kills him with it.

Awakening in the field, Chichester is discovered by a contemporary Irish woman. Chichester works for her, while her sons live in London. When the woman, who is Chichester's contact with O'Rourke, questions him about his background, Chichester explains that he is of "Anglo-Irish parentage." "My family's house," he tells her, "was burnt down in 1918 because my grandfather, something of a romantic drunk, went over to the republican cause" (80).[117] These details are plausible in part because of a long tradition of Anglo-Irish nationalists that includes Wolfe Tone,

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[117] Chichester's name has numerous resonances in Anglo-Irish history. Arthur Chichester, who became Lord deputy of Ireland in 1604, strove to weaken the loyalty of the native Irish to their chiefs and encouraged the settlement of Ulster by Scottish and English immigrants (Foster 199). In addition, James Chichester-Clark served as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1971. In office he witnessed the arrival of British troops in Northern Ireland and the emergence of the militant Provisional IRA. In addition, the British town Chichester was a Roman garrison town and its name is of Roman origin. There is a well known monument to the Chichester family in St Nicholas Church in Belfast. Louis MacNeice describes the statues in "Carrickfergus":

> I was the rector's son, born to the anglican order,
> Banned forever from the candles of the Irish poor;
> The Chichesters knelt in marble at the end of a transept
> With ruffs about their necks, their portion sure. (69)

Robert Emmet, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Charles Stuart Parnell and W. B. Yeats. As the woman leaves, Chichester shouts, “The Republican cause is just! Trust me! It’s in my blood! The great wrong of England in Ireland!” When she has gone, he talks to himself: “Believe it, don’t you Tom. In a way, Tom.” Chichester is having increasing difficulty reconciling his views of history and his role as a soldier. He concludes, “I am the great wrong in Ireland,” suggesting that peace will not come until British forces withdraw from Ireland and that this must happen not simply in order to put an end to violence, but because its is a necessary step in redressing a historical injustice (80).

Chichester sleeps again, and the action returns to AD 515. Two British cooks, a steward and the “Roman” matron Adona enter. The cooks carry Adona on a stretcher. Adona is under the illusion that the Roman legions will return and restore her to her position at the head of large household. When the First Cook speaks of the Saxons eating human brains the Steward asks him, “Where did you hear that the Saxons are cannibals?” The cook responds, “Aren’t they?” The Steward replies that “They’re dirt farmers. Just like us” (84). Here Brenton implies that the Saxons are driven by economic necessity to fill the power vacuum the Romans left behind. This implication disrupts Brenton’s equation of Roman, Saxon and British imperialism, though the important equivalence between the Romans and the modern British is undisturbed. Suggesting that the Saxons were motivated by economic exigencies does not lessen Brenton’s point about the historical contingencies that underlie what would become the dominant culture of the British Isles, though it could make his attack

seem somewhat less strident. Adona, like Arthur in *The Island of the Mighty*, tries to exploit a tenuous connection to the Roman past. The decay of the civilization she claims to represent is symbolized in the fact that she has plague, which has disfigured her face and given her a foul smell. "What do you expect when a civilization dies?" she asks, "Good Health?" (86). When the Cooks refuse to carry her any farther she yells, "You're staring at a Roman matron. Restore the empire! Rebuild the towns. Appoint magistrates. Drive the raiders back" (87). The First Cook responds coolly: "Lady, the Romans left Britain a hundred years ago" (87). The Second Cook alleges that "There weren't any Romans. And if there were, they're all dead" (87). Adona replies, "We are ghosts. Roman standards lie rotting on the ground. We stoop to pick them up. Our hands pass through them. Like smoke" (87). This scene shows that already in the sixth century the meaning of the Roman legacy in Britain was being contested, and Brenton's play suggests that it still is hundreds of years later. When the Steward realizes that he cannot carry her alone, the Steward robs and kills Adona, who, it is revealed, has been his lover.

The play again switches back to 1980. O'Rourke enters and speaks to Chichester, referring to him by his assumed name Liam Henwick:

> You're a strange and puzzling man to us, Mr Henwick. Here you are on an Irish farm, out of the goodness of your heart helping a bedridden old woman, her sons being scattered by British economic imperialism. You are heard singing in the pubs. Spreading it about that you are no friend of the British Government. Then sending us messages that you

> are a gun-runner, with communist weapons for sale. Now as I see it, you're either a madman, or an intelligence officer with the Special Air Services Regiment. One way or another. So you better convince me quick you're stone crazy. (88)

Chichester simply admits that he is a British officer. "I come from an old English Army family," he explains, "My father was killed by a landmine in Cyprus, when I was a baby" (89). This reference to another prominent postwar colonial crisis suggests that little has changed, politically at least, since the 1950s. But Chichester's uncertainty about his mission, especially considering his background, could signal a different sort of change. "My mission was to assassinate you, O'Rourke," Chichester admits (89). O'Rourke asks the question many in the audience probably wished to ask: "Now why, in God's name, do you tell me that" (89). A clear answer is not forthcoming. Chichester does not seem to be expecting mercy. He is delusional, if not exactly suicidal. He tells O'Rourke, "I keep on seeing the dead. A field in Ireland, a field in England. And faces like wood. Charred wood, set in the ground. Staring at me. The faces of our forefathers." "They stare at me in terror," he continues, "Because in my hand there's a Roman spear. A Saxon axe. A British Army machine gun. The weapons of Rome, invaders, empire" (89). Chichester's use of the word "our" suggests an identification with O'Rourke and points to the difficulty of establishing separate national identities on the basis of an appeal to British history. But regardless of Chichester's new-found historical insight, this identification cannot occur because of the present circumstances, which constitute that history's concrete

legacy. The interchangeability of the "weapons of Rome" in Chichester's mind shows that he sees himself as part of an unbroken history of violence and oppression. Moments later, Chichester imagines an end to that history: "The weapons. I want to throw them down. And reach down. To the faces. Hold the burnt heads in my hand and pull them up. The bodies out of the earth. Hold them against me. [. . .] And work them back to life. Like King Arthur" (90). But Chichester's apparent loss of reason—and his impending death—suggest that his renunciation will have little effect. In its futility, Chichester's protest recalls Serjeant Musgrave's in Arden's play.

Chichester's reference to Arthur indicates that he imagines a recuperation of the myth for a progressive political purpose. Rather than the paragon of a British warrior tradition, Arthur would be a protector or avenger of the dispossessed Celts and other victims of empire. This conception is similar to D'Arcy's when she imagined that Arthur "stood for [. . .] the struggles of the Welsh against English domination" (*Island* 18). When one of the IRA Volunteers argues that Chichester should be killed, O'Rourke hesitates: "I think he might just be an honourable man, having a hard time of it. The assassin, humanised by his trade. [. . .] Is that it, Captain? The horrors of war?" (90). Chichester has cast off his role as a British soldier, but it is too late for him to renounce his imperial heritage. O'Rourke's comment contains a critique of liberal humanist opposition to militarism and imperialism that the Irish Woman picks up on:

> What right does he have to stand in a field in Ireland and talk of the horrors of war? What nation ever learnt from the sufferings it inflicted

> on others? What did the Roman Empire ever give to the people it enslaved? Concrete. What did the British Empire give to its colonies? Tribal wars. I don't want to hear of this British soldier's humanity. And how he comes to be howling in the middle of my country. And how he thinks Ireland is a tragedy, Ireland's troubles are not a tragedy. They are crimes his country has done to mine. That he does to me, by standing there. (90)

Immediately O'Rourke gives a hasty order and Chichester is shot. The Woman's speech has much authority within the play. Written with a largely middle-class British audience in mind, her comments offer a critique of a kind of anticolonial liberalism that is likely outraged at the violence in Northern Ireland, but perhaps only partly conceives the "tragedy" as a legacy of colonialism.

In the final scene, the two Cooks meet Corda and Morgana. They are mutually suspicious, but soon realize that they are on their own and decide to travel together. The First Cook decides that he will change his trade and become a poet. He talks of writing a poem about "a King who never was." "His Government was the people of Britain," the Cook elaborates, "His peace was as common as rain or sun. His law was as natural as grass, growing in a meadow. And there never was a Government, or a peace, or a law like that" (94). "When he was dead," the Cook continues a moment later, "the King who never was and the Government that never was—were mourned. And remembered. Bitterly. And thought of as a golden age, lost and yet to come" (94). When Morgana asks the Cook the King's name he replies, "Any old name dear"

(94). The Second Cook suggests a name “Arthur” (95). While Arden and D’Arcy attacked the Arthur myth as a masculinist and militarist fable, and showed the “real” Arthur as a feeble man nostalgic for past glory, Brenton seeks to recast Arthur as a hero for the oppressed. The Cook’s vision evokes the “lost rights” tradition of English radicalism as described, most notably, by the historian Christopher Hill. One of the most common forms of this tradition is, according to Hill, the “Sleeping Hero; the leader who has not really died, but will return one day to rescue his people.” “Often,” Hill adds, “the Hero was associated with final unsuccessful resistance to foreign conquest. The memory of Arthur, sleeping in Avalon, and the conviction of his second coming were firmly held by Britons and Welsh seven centuries after Arthur had died fighting the Anglo-Saxon invaders” (“Norman” 15). Brenton’s view of Arthur mirrors D’Arcy’s original conception, largely written out of *The Island of The Mighty*, of Arthur as a Welsh hero. But unlike Arden and D’Arcy, Brenton posits no “real” Arthur. The myth is not an interpretation or even an outright distortion of historical fact, but an invention created for a particular purpose. Arthur, the great enemy of the Saxons, is imagined in a moment of crisis and profound uncertainty. The First Cook’s Arthur, however, is not a warrior, but a benevolent governor, and his kingdom a political utopia similar to that Conlag imagines earlier in the play. For Brenton it is clear that utopia—here a form of primitive socialism—cannot be achieved without a detailed understanding of how and why it was lost or, if it never existed, why it has not yet come to be. This idea is particularly important in understanding the play as a comment on postwar British history. As we have seen, the

1945 election was for Brenton an expression of a utopian impulse, and much of his work as a dramatist is dedicated to enumerating the reasons why the promise of that moment withered. But, though Brenton's view of postwar history is quite pessimistic, the final scene of *The Romans in Britain* argues the importance of keeping a utopian aspect in radical thought alive.

Though the invasions in *The Romans in Britain* suggest that history is repetitive and cyclical, Brenton does not imagine a fatalistic Viconian or Nietzschean historical schema. What the play demonstrates is not eternal recurrence, but the mundane and monotonous fluctuations of power. Brenton would likely resist grand historical formulations because they minimize human agency in history. Though he does not provide a program for people to change the world, Brenton's socialist politics is founded on that possibility. Yet there is no Marxian historical inevitability to guarantee the coming of Brenton's utopia. That he refers to Arthur's kingdom as "lost and yet to come" does not argue the inexorable arrival of utopia as much as it does its imaginative significance for human beings. A careful reading of the Cook's lines shows that they describe not so much a utopia itself, but the way it was and will be "remembered."

In her essay "Celts and Celticists in Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*" Meenakshi Ponnuswami argues that "the Celts' struggle against Roman, Saxon and finally 'British' invaders is located in a discursive as much as a material battlefield" (70). This assertion sheds light on the function of the Arthur myth in Brenton's play. The myth as we see it come into being is a countermeasure to the

official histories of Asinus and Caesar. The eventual hijacking of the Arthurian myth, which the play presupposes, is a coup for English cultural imperialism accomplished through the writing of literature and history. For Michael Zelenak, one of the main objectives of Brenton's drama as a whole is to show that "The concept that history is a closed system, something 'out there,' something 'objective,' an indisputable body of facts, leads to a passive attitude towards the political-economic system" (55). Both the presence of Asinus and the Cook's invention of the Arthur myth show that any historical narrative is conditioned by the circumstances of its creation and the biases of it authors. *The Romans in Britain* constructs a version of history, but it also shows history, as written or oral narrative, in the making. The effect of this demonstration is self-reflexive, highlighting the fact that Brenton's history is itself an interpretation. This result, however, can only further his major purposes. These are, firstly, to show that official history is not a lens through which the objective truth of past events can be ascertained and, secondly, to produce in his audience a questioning attitude toward the dominant discourses of British history. Brenton's own history, in a sense that recalls the work of historians like Hill and E.P. Thompson, is, unabashedly, an activist history designed to challenge existing accounts.

Because he posits an essential difference between the Celts and the invaders (rather than merely differentials in military and economic power or technology), Brenton may be guilty of speaking what Ponnuswami, following David Cairns and Shaun Richards, calls a language of "Celticism," which is analogous, as Cairns and

Richards describe it, to Said's "Orientalism" (71).[118] As Ponnuswami puts it, "Brenton situates Celtic resistance to colonial oppression within representational boundaries produced and controlled by the colonizing imagination, and in this sense the Celts in *The Romans* may be seen as little more than versions of an imperial fantasy" (73). Ponnuswami goes on to identify ways in which Brenton falls into some of the traps of Celticist discourse, and even claims that "it could be argued that the potentially radical character of Brenton's expose of imperial myth-making is undermined by his disconcerting reinscription of the languages of 'Celticism'" (71). This "reinscription" is evident, for example, in Brenton's notion that the Celts had an "asymmetrical view of the world" (*Plays Two*: ix). As Ponnuswami points out, these and other comments resemble those of Celticists such as Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan. She fails, however, to show that this tendency on Brenton's part diminishes the power of his critique of imperialism or that it weakens his analysis of the processes by which myth and history are narrated. Ponnuswami's criticisms do not apply at all to Brenton's representation of the modern Irish, and she does not attempt to show, based on the scant evidence available, that there is anything inaccurate about his picture of the ancient Celts, which would seem essential to her argument that they

[118] Ponnuswami refers to Cairns and Richards's chapter "An Essentially Feminine Race" in *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*. The chapter is quite relevant to a discussion of *The Romans in Britain*, especially in its analysis of the feminization of the Celtic in Renan and Arnold. This early Celticist discourse, closely linked with a philology that proposed a hierarchy of languages, established the essential Celt as creative, emotional, and melancholic. This concept was always relational; for Arnold, in Cairns and Richard's words, "the true strength of the English derived from their blending in one race the positive aspects of Teuton and Celt" (47). Cairns and Richards conclude that "The Celts were inscribed as the creative principle in the mutually interdependent Indo-European family [of languages], their centrality guaranteed by the needs of the 'masculine' Teutons" (46).

are the figments of an imperialist imagination. Ponnuswami also neglects the ways in which Brenton seems to have been aware of the possibility of exoticizing or romanticizing the Celts. Chichester's remarks about Celtic design and Brenton's emphatically unromantic picture of the modern Irish undermine Ponnuswami's position. In addition, Boon records that Brenton objected to aspects of the original stage design for the play because it suggested what Boon describes as "spurious prehistoric magic and mysticism, of Churchillian Celtic mists and Anglo-Saxon fens" (*Brenton* 185).

Ponnuswami's most significant charge is that Brenton's focus on Chichester's dilemma enables "a rewriting of colonialism as something which happens to the colonizer" (73). As she recognizes, this focus suggests a parallel between the play and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and, more specifically, between Chichester and Kurtz. Ponnuswami argues that "Brenton's representation of Caesar and Chichester [. . .] mirrors generations of colonial self-presentation of the colonizer abroad" (80). Her augment, however, discounts the significance of the spectacle of the rape of Marban and his subsequent humiliation before Caesar. It can, of course, be argued that these scenes show that the Roman colonizer has been dehumanized by his imperial mission. But the import of such a conclusion must surely be very small compared to the dramatic effect of the violence against Marban and, later, the female Slave. Ponnuswami relates her arguments to a question of audience. Brenton, she claims, "addresses an audience whose only access to the play, he seems to assume, is through the Englishman. As a result, the Celts and the Irish remain alien and othered, and are

eventually absorbed into Chichester's point of view" (82). There are a couple of serious weakness in this argument. Firstly, Chichester appears only in part two, which constitutes well under half the play's length. Thus Ponnuswami's argument that the audience can see the play only through the eyes of the Englishman ignores the fact that for more than half the play there is no Englishman present. Chichester's apparent madness also makes the audience unlikely to identify with him. And it seems unlikely that the audience would identify in such a way as Ponnuswami describes with Julius Caesar. Moreover, the assumption that an audience member can "access" a play only through a character of his or her own nationality seems to be Ponnuswami's idea more than it is Brenton's, and the view that a play is understood by identifying with a single character is itself troubling. In fact, one of the main successes of Brenton's parallel between British and Roman imperialism is that it provides the audience a distanced perspective on their own history and culture. As Boon recognizes, "most of the characters in *Romans* are bit-players in history: farmers, refugees, criminals, stragglers" (*Brenton* 195). As Gross puts it—contrary to Ponnuswami—"Brenton repudiates the overwhelming tendency of British historical drama since the eighteenth century to constitute itself through an empathy with the sufferings of those who wield power, and demands that we consider history from the point of view of the oppressed" (75). Ponnuswami's criticisms of the play are appropriate only to certain aspects of part two. While her observation that that part of the play is predominantly concerned with the mind of the colonizer is accurate, the significance of that fact is less clear than she makes it seem. Even so, especially considering Brenton's

audience, it is hard to see why an analysis of Chichester's mental state will necessarily have the conservative effect Ponnuswami imagines. Given their reciprocal nature under imperialism, Brenton must scrutinize the subjectivities of both the colonized and the colonizer.

Whether or not they were intended by the play's critics, the controversy surrounding *The Romans In Britain* seems to have had two main effects: it ensured that the play was very well attended throughout its run, and it preempted most serious discussion of the play's themes.[119] As Bernard Weiner explained in 1981, "What *The Romans in Britain* did was to provide the means for various groups and individuals to argue points, most of which had little to do with the play and a great deal to do with the precarious economic/political/moral state in which the British nation now finds itself" (68). Richard Beacham, also writing in 1981, felt that the controversy arose in part because "Imperialism has been relatively neglected by British playwrights, considering its enormous impact on the nation's history and psychology. It would seem to be one of those topics which, by unwritten convention, in a society still much-subject to such conventions, playwrights have largely avoided" (36). The transgression of such conventions may well have contributed to the vehemence of the public outcry against *The Romans in Britain*. Beacham also makes the important observation that "The National Theatre has come to occupy a very significant place not only in Britain's theatrical life, but, given the difficult times and the prevalent

[119] I will not deal with the controversy in any great detail. See Bernard Weiner, "The *Romans in Britain* Controversy" and Richard Beacham, "Brenton Invades Britain: The *Romans in Britain* Controversy" for good factual accounts.

awareness of national decline, also as a sort of icon representing the better aspects of British heritage and achievement," a circumstance which, along with the use of public funds to support the production, certainly did raise the volume of objections (37). In addition, as Boon observes, "The play's central attack, on nationalism and on the notion of a unifying cultural heritage, came just at the time that Thatcherism was seeking to reassert them in its effort to 'make Britain 'Great' again'" (*Brenton* 209).

Like *The Island of the Mighty*, *The Romans in Britain* is a large, ambitious and unwieldy play. Though more people saw Brenton's play than saw Arden and D'Arcy's (and they saw it in a version that more nearly reflected the author's intentions than did the RSC production of *The Island of the Mighty*), the meanings of both plays were obscured by controversy. In addition, Brenton's play, as Boon and others have suggested, was out of step with the social climate in which it appeared, and the outrage provoked by its alleged obscenity clearly had a political overtone. The fates of both plays also testify to the sensitivity of issues concerning Britain's imperial past. In the end both plays, because their authors sought to influence the audience's views on a large scale, must be judged—even on their own terms—to have failed.

Conclusion

Neither Brenton nor Hare embraced Brecht as enthusiastically as Arden and D'Arcy did, and both have expressed reservations about the continuing value of Brecht's drama as a model for British playwrights. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider the plays of both authors in relation to the Brechtian tradition. Brenton referred to himself in 1974 as a "A Left anti-Brechtian" and argued that "[Brecht's] plays are museum pieces now and are messing up a lot of new theatre workers. Brecht's plays don't work, and are about the thirties and not the seventies, and are now cocooned and unperformable" ("Petrol" 14). Brenton also said in the same interview that "the search for something other than what Brecht was doing goes on endlessly among the writers of my generation" and he describes *The Churchill Play* as a move toward an "epic style which has nothing to do with Brecht" ("Petrol" 8, 13-14). Since the early seventies, however, Brenton's dramaturgy has developed strong similarities to Brecht's—especially in terms of epic structure—and he has tempered his anti-Brechtian stance. He has, in fact, directed a version of Brecht's *Galileo* in his own translation. And his 1983 play *The Genius* grew out of the experience of directing *Galileo* and bears striking thematic similarities to Brecht's play. By the 1990s, Janelle Reinelt, though she recognized Brenton's differences with Brecht, was able to write that "More than anyone writing in Britain today Howard Brenton epitomizes the Brechtian legacy" (*After* 17).

In an essay with the significant title “The Best We Have, Alas: Bertolt Brecht,” Brenton writes of his experience directing *Galileo* that “the production was, in the end, a cleansing experience. Like many contemporary playwrights, I’ve felt Brecht on my back, a weight, an inhibition. I used to say something fatuous like ‘I’m a Left anti-Brechtian’, to avoid having to think about his influence” (63). Thus Brenton’s earlier anti-Brechtian pose came out of an anxiety of influence and what might be called “Brecht fatigue.” He concludes:

> [Brecht] put down markers that many of us in today’s theatre have, sneakily, slipped into our pockets. He gave us a way of busting wide open the decayed Ibsenite drama of closed rooms and closed minds. He reinstated direct, broad popular storytelling as the basic art of playwriting. His stagecraft [. . .] showed how to sweep the stage of pictorial clutter and put the actor at its center. (67)

Elsewhere Brenton explains that “The convention in dramatic writing that still holds sway is that of the onion. Layers are stripped away from a character to finally reveal the real man or woman. It’s a static view. It’s false. It’s the staple assumption of what’s come to be thought of as ‘Ibsenite drama’—that a good play reveals truth in terms of human personality” (“Interview” 135). These comments distance Brenton from Osborne—and Hare—and point to the influence of authors like Bond and, especially, Arden and D’Arcy.

Speaking in a 1979 interview of *Magnificence* and *The Churchill Play*, Brenton outlined his notion of epic theatre:

> These plays are big, in cast, in staging, theme and publically [sic] declared ambition (they do want to change the world, influence opinion, enter the fight over political issues); they are 'Jacobean' in a mix of the tragic and the comic, taking great pleasure in the surprises and shocks of entertainment the huge stage can arm the playwright with as a showman; they are epic in that they are many-scened, full of stories, ironic and argumentative, and deliberately written as 'history plays for now.' ("Interview" 138)

In 1986 Brenton elaborated on the structure of these big epic plays:

> Each scene is written and should be played as a little play, in its own right, with its own style—some have asides, some do not, some are internal and psychological, others are group scenes with naturalist settings. These differences should be emphasized [. . .], therefore the stage should be wiped clear before each scene. [. . .] Disunity between the scenes will only help, not hinder. The end of the play is to be 'open', a gift to the audience—something for them to fall out over and keep warm with, while they're waiting for the bus home. (*Plays: One* v).

Most of the essential elements of Brecht's dramatic practice are identified in these comments: epic structure, anti-illusionism, estrangement, a desire to engage the audience on an intellectual as well as an emotional level. Brenton suggests that, in postwar Britain, this kind of play demands a new kind of spectatorship: "Through

Ibsenite glasses, the glasses worn by our bourgeois theatre critics, the characters [in epic plays] often look like cartoons or fanatics because the way they are written has nothing to do with the finely expressed peeling of the onion toward a fine, hidden center of 'true feeling'" ("Interview" 136). In the same interview Brenton makes the distinctly Brechtian observation that "The sets, the shape of the auditorium (proscenium, in the round, etc.), the theatre you play in, the cost of the show, the nature of the company (hired or ensemble), the context of the theatre (subsidized, commercial, big stage or small)—all this has ideological meaning" ("Interview" 141).

Hare's *Fanshen* (1975), which he presented with Joint Stock in close collaboration with Bill Gaskill, a long-time advocate of Brecht in Britain, is his most obviously Brechtian play and, in many ways, his least characteristic. Hare explains that for *Plenty*, which he directed in its first run and its New York premiere in 1982, he and the play's designer, Hayden Griffin, "were trying to find a sort of English way to do epic plays—a way to create plays that moved about with total freedom in time and space [. . .] we wanted something different than Brecht" (qtd. in Oliva 78). This notion of finding an "English way to do epic plays" takes us back to Osborne's anxiety about the "Brechtian bulldozer" and his comment that "Language, custom [and] national temperament [. . .] seemed to doom the effort" of staging Brecht's plays in Britain (*Damn* 28). Hare has said in a 1987 interview with Reinelt that

> I think [Brecht's] ideas about political theatre are really mistaken. The idea of the Alienation Effect seems to me absurd in that it is so clear that the purpose of the exercise is to involve the audience, so that to

> discuss uninvolving them seems to me a complete waste of time. It's incredibly hard to get people to go to the theatre; it's incredibly hard to move them when they are there. (qtd. in Reinelt, *After* 109)

As Reinelt argues in her discussion of Hare's ideas about Brecht, "[Brechtian] alienation is not a question of uninvolvement; on the contrary, it requires deeper, more fundamental involvement in the complexity of experience than traditional bourgeois plays" (123). Hare's apparent misapprehension of a crucial element of Brechtian dramaturgy comes about because he defines audience involvement almost entirely in terms of emotional identification with one or, sometimes, several characters. For Hare to proclaim himself an anti-Brechtian on the basis of such profound confusion limits the interpretive value of the statement. Hare's rejection of Brecht is related to his growing disenchantment with radical politics, as he revealed in a 1978 lecture. He asked:

> Why do we so often have to endure the demeaning repetition of slogans which are not seen as transitional aids to understanding, but as ultimate solutions to men's problems? Why the insulting insistence in so much political theatre that a few gimcrack mottoes of the Left will sort out the deep problems of reaction in modern England? Why the urge to caricature? [. . .] Brecht uncoils the great sleeping length of his mind to give us, in everything but the greatest of his writing, exactly that impression, the god-like feeling that the questions have been answered before the play has begun. (*Early* 5)

In largely rejecting Brecht, Hare rejects the main tradition of postwar British political theatre. His abandonment of that tradition is less an indictment of its politics than of the effectiveness of its methods. "In the absence of revolution and an efficacious leftist political party," Hare comments, "defenders of political theatre tend to speak of the importance of 'raising consciousness.'" Hare claims that "raising consciousness" is "a worthy aim and yet [. . .] consciousness has been raised in this country for a good many years and we seem further from radical political change than at any time in my life" (*Early* 3-4). In response to this situation, Hare turned in the eighties and nineties to writing a very traditional type of "problem play," most notably in the "Hare Trilogy" (*Racing Demon*, *Murmuring Judges* and *The Absence of War*) which appeared between 1990 and 1993. These plays have been tremendously successful in part because the audience is accustomed to the type of spectatorship they require.

Richard Allen Cave observes that "Of his generation Howard Brenton is the one who has remained truest to the tenets of the fringe with its suspicion of the unified work of art and its preference for a technique of dislocations and a will to shock and provoke" (179). For this reason, Brenton has become a relatively marginal figure, while Sir David Hare vies with Tom Stoppard for status as the most prominent British dramatist of the period. Hare explained in 1991 that he had "in recent years, been less drawn to attacking the iniquities of a particular social system than to illustrating the dilemmas of all those who still struggle with the idea of what a good life must be" (*Writing* xiii). This struggle, his plays of the late eighties and nineties suggest, must occur within existing institutions. "The one thing I have learnt and

understood from five years' study," Hare concludes from his research for the Hare Trilogy plays, "is that British society needs not to abolish its institutions, but to refresh them. For, if not through institutions, how do we express the common good?" (*Asking* 8). This meliorism is in stark contrast to the disgust with British society that Hare expressed in the sixties and early seventies. As an undergraduate at Cambridge (studying, technically at least, under Raymond Williams) Hare and his fellow students felt "that from its own terminal contradictions, Western society would surely burst asunder in an orgy of violence and civil unrest" (*Writing* 8). Donesky is right when he writes that Hare's later work "presents a full-throated passionate indictment of British society, yet in the final analysis he calls for reform rather than transformation. He is a liberal with a tender heart who wants British institutions to be more caring and just" (10). But Donesky also argues that "Hare is as radical as it's possible to be and still remain heard on a regular basis in mainstream theatres" (12). The differences between Brenton and Hare that became increasingly apparent in the eighties and nineties seem to be correlated to opposing positions in the endless debate in leftist politics about radicalism versus reformism. Because this question, in the abstract at least, is apparently insoluble, it is no more appropriate to criticize Hare—as many have—for his pragmatic reformism than it is to condemn Brenton for his dogged adherence to high-minded but perhaps unrealistic ideals.

Michael Billington wrote in February 2001 that "The epic, state-of-the-nation play looks to be a dead duck, and not just for financial reasons. How does a dramatist attempt to speak for Britain at a time of governmental devolution, growing

nationalism and a massive north south divide?" (2). All the plays I've discussed here can in some sense be called "epic state-of-the-nation plays." *The Romans in Britain*, in retrospect, seems to be the monumental culmination of that tradition, though it appeared over twenty years before Billington's comment. Billington's remark also raises the interesting question of whether plays like *Plenty* and *The Romans in Britain* depend for their efficacy and impact on a notion of singular British identity that has passed away or is rapidly passing. Brenton has always had a more antagonistic view of society than Hare and most of his plays, if they do not presuppose a sympathetic, even partisan audience, are aggressive and confrontational, and thus do not attempt to address a unified national audience. Hare recalls that, when he was working on the Hare Trilogy, he "felt able [. . .] to do an English canvas. I wanted there to be three plays which could be played together, which would present a whole canvas of British life" ("Interview"). This comment implies that Hare believes that there is still a truly national audience for the theatre. Brenton, however, never imagined, and certainly never courted such an audience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Caryl Churchill: Revolutionary Legacies, Hidden Histories, and the Advent of Thatcherism

Caryl Churchill is, with good reason, most often considered as a feminist playwright concerned primarily with issues of gender and sexuality. Deeply interested in social change, she could also be designated a socialist writer. Churchill states that "Socialism and feminism aren't synonymous, but I feel strongly about both, and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other" ("Caryl" 78). But Churchill is not entirely comfortable with the labels "feminist" or "socialist." She explains, "If someone says 'a socialist playwright' or 'a feminist playwright' that can suggest to some people something rather narrow which doesn't cover as many things as you might be thinking about" (qtd. in Naismith xxi). Churchill would probably be equally uncomfortable with the particularizing—or pigeonholing—tendency of an awkward descriptor like "socialist feminist." But, despite her circumspection about labels, Churchill does not hesitate to articulate her politics. She describes the changed society she desires as "decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, non-sexist—a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives" (qtd. in Aston 3).

Among those "many things" Churchill is thinking about that may be overlooked by critics who see her only (or merely) as a feminist playwright, are race, nationality and imperialism. I do not, however, mean to suggest that these concerns,

as Churchill presents them, can be isolated from the feminist issues she treats. In fact Churchill's major contribution to the discourse on race and nation in postwar British drama is that she shows that the attitudes, identities and power relationships sanctioned by imperialist and nationalist ideologies rarely exist independently of equally ideological notions about gender, sexuality and the family. For this reason, I focus in this chapter on those numerous moments in Churchill's plays which show discourses on gender and sexuality to be intimately related to the languages of imperialism. In addition I will consider, as I have with Arden and D'Arcy, Hare and Brenton, how Churchill uses history to examine notions of British identity. Churchill often engages with an explicitly feminist history, making a powerful argument that none of these various discourses—on women and gender, race, sexuality, imperialism, and nationality—can be fully comprehended independently of the others. Complementing this analysis is Churchill's unceasing interest in the psychological effects of these ideologies on individuals and groups, especially as they contribute to the subjugation of women, workers and colonial subjects.

Born in 1938, Churchill is older than Howard Brenton and David Hare. I treat her in my final chapter largely because Brenton and Hare are linked in more obvious ways with the radical culture of the sixties and because they gained notoriety earlier. In addition, I want to suggest that Churchill has in some senses moved beyond the achievements of Hare and Brenton in treating matters of race, national identity and imperial history. Hare and Brenton experienced the radicalism of the late sixties in a very immediate way. Churchill's experienced that time quite differently. She writes:

> I really didn't feel a part of what was happening in the sixties. During that time I felt isolated. I had small children and was having miscarriages. It was an extremely solitary life. What politicised me was being discontent with my own way of life—of being a barrister's wife and just being at home with small children. (qtd. in Itzin 279)

Though never in an autobiographical way, domestic issues of the kind she identifies here are central to Churchill's drama. These issues are consistently linked to the more "public" politics with which Brenton and Hare are, especially in their early works, almost exclusively concerned. Churchill's most concrete link to the radical culture of the sixties is her involvement with the fringe theatre that grew out of that period. Though she became resident dramatist at the Royal Court in 1975 and has premiered many of her plays there, Churchill maintained her association with fringe groups well into the eighties. In addition to a long association with the Joint Stock Theatre Group, Churchill has worked with the feminist company Monstrous Regiment and university drama groups. Churchill sees these collaborative efforts as having ushered in a new stage in her career in the mid-seventies—one that includes all the plays I discuss at length in this chapter ("Fair" 8).

Churchill is the only writer to have had an extended relationship with the Joint Stock Theatre Group, and the group's methods have exerted a large influence on all her work since the association began. *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976) and *Cloud Nine* (1979) were both Joint Stock productions. Churchill began her career as a solitary writer of radio drama, and her first stage plays were also individual

productions. Joint Stock introduced her to a collaborative way of working. The "Joint Stock method," as it came to be known, was quite flexible, but most often involved a workshop period of some weeks followed first by a "writing gap," during which the author would produce a script in seclusion, and then by an extended rehearsal period.[120] The workshop would begin with a topic—often very different from that of the finished play—and the actors, writer and director would research the topic and discuss it at length. Joint Stock's artistic project was openly political, which affected both the choice of subjects and the way those subjects were presented. According to Rob Ritchie, Joint Stock's "work is animated by an absorbed interest in ordinary life, in people at the margins of the news, not the charismatic leaders, the intellectuals, the stars" (11). "Typically," Ritchie continues, "Joint Stock shows explore a particular community, caught in a moment of disturbance or adjustment" (11).

Almost all of Churchill's plays, as my discussions below will show, are extremely intertextual. As Amelia Howe Kritzer puts it, "Churchill's plays inevitably refer the audience or reader to theoretical frameworks outside the works themselves" (2). Churchill uses historical documents, the works of Marxist and feminist critics and historians, dramatic works from the past and psychological studies. She dramatizes works by Frantz Fanon and Michel Foucault and draws on the work of, among others, Hannah Arendt, R.D. Laing and Jean Genet. This intertextuality complicates her

[120] Hare's *Fanshen* was Joint Stock's first major success and largely codified the "Joint Stock method." More than anyone else, the director responsible for this method is the company's co-founder Max Stafford-Clark.

plays in ways that demand an intellectual rigor on the part of the audience. Her use of historical sources, including both primary texts and works by contemporary historians, draws attention not only to past events but also to the ways in which history is transformed into narrative.

Most of Churchill's plays examine some form of social control. She describes systems, which are often forms of surveillance, by which normative behaviors are enforced more often than she depicts the coercion by force of oppressed men and women. Churchill also shows how the standards of behavior enforced by such systems often contribute to the maintenance of racial, sexual and economic privilege. Her most sustained and theoretical analysis of such systems appears in *Softcops* (1984). Churchill recalls, "I had an idea for a play called *Softcops*, which was to be about the soft methods of control, schools, hospitals, social workers when I came across the Foucault book [*Discipline and Punish*], and was so thrilled with it that I set the play not here and now but in nineteenth century France" (*Plays: Two* 3). At the same time, she had "been thinking about how you can control people without the necessity of violent means once you have a whole lot of systems to fit people into" ("Fair" 10). Foucault is concerned in *Discipline and Punish* not only with the development of methods of punishment and changing conceptions of criminality, but also with the question, "how were people made to accept the power to punish, or quite simply, when punished, tolerate being so?" (303). These effects are often achieved through the "soft methods of control" Churchill identifies.

What Churchill seems to have taken from Foucault—or perhaps seen confirmed in his writing—is the idea that power exists as much or more in institutional and discursive practices as it does in more obviously "political" forms. These practices make up what Foucault famously describes as "a micro-physics of power" which, he stipulates, is to be "conceived not as a property but as a strategy" (*Power* 26). Foucault wrote in 1976, the year after *Surveiller et Punir* was published in France, that "We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects" (*Power* 97). Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish* focuses on the development of means of punishment and policing from the relatively unsophisticated use of violence against the bodies of criminals to a complex process by which citizens were transformed into "docile bodies" rarely subject to physical coercion. This "constitution of subjects" is what, by rather crude means, Pierre, a government functionary interested in penal reform, attempts in *Softcops*. Other Churchill plays show similar processes at work, particularly, among the plays I discuss here, *Cloud Nine*. In that play, the African servant Joshua brings the issue of subject formation into an imperial context. Through Joshua, Churchill suggests that power enables the knowing and naming of the "Other" and that, in the imperial encounter, this knowledge plays an important role in the molding of colonial subjects. Thus knowledge, a product of power, circulates to increase power. As Foucault explains, "We should admit that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation

without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (*Power* 27). Examples of these "fields of knowledge" to which Churchill's plays refer include racial theory, criminology, and the discourse on gender and sexuality. Throughout Churchill's work we see that by formulating roles—like the criminal, the colonial subject, the wife—power molds individuals. Along with Fanon and feminist critics such as Kate Millet and Sheila Rowbotham, Foucault enables Churchill to understand the psychological violence done to people by the "knowledge" their social superiors have of them.

Beginning in the early seventies, Churchill's drama shows a marked interest in the possibilities and practicalities of revolution, a theme which would receive its fullest and most nuanced treatment, albeit from the distanced perspective of historical allegory, in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Unlike that play, Churchill's 1972 television script *The Judge's Wife* (1972) and the stage play *Objections to Sex and Violence* (1975) explicitly examine the possibility of revolution and revolutionary violence in contemporary Britain. *The Judge's Wife* begins with an assertion by the right-wing Judge of the title that "Every criminal is a revolutionary. And every revolutionary is a criminal. For they both act in defiance of laws that protect us, protect our property, protect what we in this society have chosen to be" (149). The setting is a courtroom. The Judge passes a heavy sentence on Vernon Warren, a well-known defendant on trial for unsuccessfully attempting an unspecified political crime intended, in the Judge's words, to "overthrow the established institutions" of the

country (149). The Judge, who sees little reason to dissemble, proclaims that "our society is upheld by force and we should not be afraid to admit it. The forces of law and order are stronger than those of revolt and we will not hesitate to use our strength" (149). The ease with which the Judge conflates the interests of the class he represents and those of the nation as a whole suggests that, for Churchill, the disruption of traditional ideas of Britishness is a precondition for the elimination of privilege based on race and class. Though *The Judge's Wife* and *Objections to Sex and Violence* show Churchill to be uncomfortable with political violence, she clearly believes that the inequities of British society stem from class and economic structures that are largely impervious to reformist measures. Looking back from 1985 on *Objections to Sex and Violence*, Churchill remarks "how immediate and pressing ideas about the anarchism, revolution and violence were" ("Objections" 52). This comment recalls similar testimonies by Brenton, Hare and Arden and D'Arcy to the urgency of such ideas in the late sixties and early seventies.

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire

The meditations on violence and revolution in *The Judge's Wife* and *Objections to Sex and Violence* provide a necessary background for Churchill's interpretation of the revolutionary events of the seventeenth century in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. By 1976, Churchill felt that the potentially revolutionary

moment of the late sixties and early seventies, if it had not yet passed, was rapidly passing. This circumstance made what she saw as the ultimate failure of the English Revolution an attractive subject for her drama.

In 1976 Churchill was working on *Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* simultaneously. The plays premiered two weeks apart in September and October, and Churchill comments that they “overlapped in both time and ideas” (129). Both are set in the seventeenth century. In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill depicts a fictionalized episode in the history of the oppression of women; in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, she is primarily concerned with the political history of the British state and mixes fictional and historical events and characters, but an untold women’s history remains central to the play’s concerns. Both plays narrate “history from below” in a way similar to much of the work of Brenton, Hare, and Arden and D’Arcy, though with an increased emphasis on women’s issues. In an oft-quoted passage from the introduction to *The Making of the English Working Class* E.P. Thompson writes that he is “seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the ‘obsolete’ hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity” (12).[121] Churchill’s project in these plays is analogous to Thompson’s; in *Vinegar Tom* the protagonists are lower-class women, while in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* they

[121] In *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson, as this quote might suggest, often turned his attention to the plight of women in the industrial revolution and to early women’s rights movements. But the main value of his work for feminist critics and historians, it seems, has been as a model for expanding the scope of historical inquiry.

represent a larger spectrum of the exploited and dispossessed, both male and female. Most specifically, Churchill's efforts in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* mirror Thompson's in being concerned with bringing to light forgotten instances of resistance to capitalism and state power. But though Thompson is certainly an important (but possibly indirect) influence, Churchill's interest in the seventeenth century mirrors very closely the work of the historian Christopher Hill.

In an essay on Churchill and other women playwrights, Elin Diamond writes that "To understand history as narrative is a crucial move for feminists, not only because it demystifies the idea of disinterested authorship, but because the traditionally subordinate role of women in history can be seen as the legacy of narrative itself" ("Refusing" 276). Because Churchill understands history as having no objective existence outside the discursive practices of culture, she is able not only to question the authority of traditional "top down" histories, but also to provide alternative accounts. *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom* pursue a historical project similar to feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham's in *Hidden From History* (1973), and it is probably not coincidental that Rowbotham discusses both witchcraft (the subject of *Vinegar Tom*) and the Ranters (whose writings inspired *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*). In addition, Rowbotham ends her book with a call for a socialist feminism very much like that Churchill advocates. She explains that there has been a "revolutionary reawakening" since 1968 and argues that "Women's liberation is part of this reawakening and a socialist feminism is again possible in the world" (*Hidden* 168).

Churchill recalls that in writing *Vinegar Tom* she “rapidly left aside the interesting theory that witchcraft existed as a survival of suppressed pre-Christian religions and went instead for the theory that witchcraft existed in the minds of its persecutors, that ‘witches’ were a scapegoat in times of stress like Jews and blacks” (*Plays: One* 129). She continues: “I wanted to write a play about witches with no witches in it; a play not about evil, hysteria and possession by the devil but poverty, humiliation and prejudice” (*Plays: One* 130). She set the play in the seventeenth century not only because it was the time of the last major witchhunts in England, but also “because the social upheavals, class changes, rising professionalism and great hardship among the poor were the context of the kind of witchhunt I wanted to write about” (*Plays: One* 130). Churchill points out that “The women accused of witchcraft were often those on the edges of society, old, poor, single, sexually unconventional” (*Plays: One* 129-30).[122]

Vinegar Tom consists of 21 short scenes, most separated by songs. The songs, which Churchill says “are not part of the action,” are sung by actors in modern dress. Thus these songs disrupt the theatrical illusion in a Brechtian manner. The lyrics make clear Churchill’s argument about the similarities between the political climate of the seventeenth century as depicted in her play and that of Britain in the 1970s. “Something to Burn” is typical of these songs:

[122] As Amelia Howe Kritzer argues, Churchill seems to have been influenced in her project not only by Alan Macfarlane’s *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* and the 1973 feminist pamphlet “Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers,” which Churchill mentions in her preface, but also by Rowbotham’s *Hidden from History*. Rowbotham writes that “Many of the women who were accused of being witches were old and poor. Disputes arose between neighbors and when misfortune came people looked for someone to blame,” a precise description of incidents in *Vinegar Tom* (5).

Sometimes it's witches, or what will you choose?

Sometimes it's lunatics, shut them away.

It's blacks and it's women and often it's Jews.

We'd all be quite happy if they'd go away.

Find something to burn.

Let it go up in smoke.

Burn your troubles away. (*Plays: One* 154)

The interchangeability of the objects of persecution strengthens the play's argument that the violence committed against women accused of being witches is the result of the psychological needs of more powerful groups in society. These psychological needs, however, do not originate with the individual. Churchill shows the abjection the "witches" face to be the product not only of their sex but also of their marginal economic standing, and argues that economic uncertainty not unlike that seen in Britain in the 1970s is the root cause of the witchhunts. Churchill also makes a powerful point, similar to one she will suggest in *Cloud Nine*, that among the most effective means the powerful have of controlling their subordinates is the internalization by the oppressed of the judgments and definitions of the oppressor. Churchill makes this point most powerfully when she introduces the historical characters Kramer and Sprenger, authors of the seventeenth-century misogynist tract *Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches*. In the original production, Kramer and Sprenger were played by actors who, as the characters Ellen and Joan, had just been hanged as witches. Churchill thought this an "ideal doubling" (134).

The strongest assertion of a parallel between Britain in the seventeenth century and in the 1970s in *Vinegar Tom* comes when the cast sings "Lament for the Witches." The song ends:

> Look in the mirror tonight.
>
> Would they have hanged you then?
>
> Ask how they're stopping you now.
>
> Where have the witches gone?
>
> Who are the witches now?
>
> Ask how they're stopping you now. (176)

These questions are directed most particularly to a female audience. The injunction "Ask how they're stopping you now" acknowledges that discrimination in modern Britain is much more subtle than a witchhunt, but that women remain excluded from full participation in civil society. But the earlier exposition of the interchangeability of the objects of persecution—also suggested by the metaphorical use for which the word "witchhunt" is available—suggests that the play should resonate not only for women, but for ethnic and racial minorities and political dissidents as well.

In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill omits any explicit parallel like those created by the songs in *Vinegar Tom*. Irving Wardle comments in his *Times* review of the play that Churchill "leave[s] audiences to do the editorializing" (20). Churchill's decision to leave out explicit parallels allows her depiction of the past an autonomy it lacked in *Vinegar Tom*. This move is appropriate because *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is a history play in a sense that *Vinegar Tom* is not. Though

Vinegar Tom makes the important point that the oppression of women and other minorities has a long history, it does not suggest the kind of allegorical, even perhaps causal, relationship between the past and the present that *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* does.

Churchill begins her preface to *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* in *Plays: One* by citing a Digger pamphlet entitled *More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. The passage she quotes reads: “You Great Curmudgeons, you hang a man for stealing, when you have stolen from your brethren all land and creatures” (183). The Diggers (sometimes known as the True Levellers) led by Gerrard Winstanley, whose *The True Levellers’ Standard Advanced* Churchill cites as a source for the play, asserted the people’s right to formerly common land and lands confiscated by the Commonwealth. Some modern British leftists have taken the Diggers as native English forebears, an interpretation Churchill’s play endorses. Hill, for example, in his introduction to Winstanley’s writings, relishes that idea that “neither Russia nor Germany nor France but England gave the world its first communist political programme” (10). In her preface Churchill asserts that “A revolutionary belief in the millennium went through the middle ages and broke out strongly in England at the time of the civil war. Soldiers fought the king in the belief that Christ would come and establish heaven on earth. What was established instead was an authoritarian parliament, the massacre of the Irish, the development of capitalism” (183). Churchill here echoes Hill’s argument that “Although there was considerable popular support for Parliament in the 1640s, the long-term consequences of the revolution were all to

the advantage of the gentry and merchants" (13). This view provides the basis for the allegory for which any reading of the play's politics must account. Geraldine Cousin has discovered in Churchill's notebooks for *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* a diagram—something like a flowchart—consisting of five boxes linked by arrows from left to right. These boxes contain the words "rigidities," "movement," "joy," "crushings" and "disillusion" (20). Clearly, these are for Churchill the archetypical stages of a failed revolution; she also imagines the political events of postwar Britain as another enactment of this schema. This allegorical reading is supported when Churchill records that the workshops that produced *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* began with research into the Crusades, but that reading the long appendix of Ranter writings in Norman Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millennium* (1961) led her to consider the seventeenth century as a more "accessible period" for the play ("Common" 6).[123] Churchill also remembers of the workshops: "We had to learn about something remote and then find how we related to it, so a lot of reading history and finding equivalents—when did it seem to you that anything was possible? The revolutionary hopes of the late sixties and early seventies were near enough that we could still share

[123] Churchill must have read these writings against the grain of Cohn's argument, in which they serve as late evidence of the fanaticism of the millennial beliefs of the middle ages, which, Cohn is at pains to prove, parallel the twentieth-century ideologies of Nazism and Soviet communism. Cohn's appendix was the first modern republication of these writings. Churchill could have seen herself as rescuing these texts from an idiosyncratic historian who is clearly appalled by ideas he feels constitute "a system of self-exaltation often amounting to self-deification; a pursuit of a total emancipation which in practice could result in antinomianism and particularly in an anarchic eroticism; often also a revolutionary social doctrine which denounced the institution of private property and aimed at its abolition" (321-2).

them, but we could relate too to the disillusion of the Restoration and the idea of a revolution that hadn't happened" (qtd. in Ritchie 119).

Though Churchill avoids making explicit parallels, other aspects of the play highlight its allegorical component. The antinaturalistic staging, which I discuss below, shifts attention toward the allegorical aspect inherent in the history play. In his book on Brecht, Frederic Jameson explains that

> The historical play is peculiarly allegorical and anti-allegorical all at once, for it certainly posits a reality and a historical referent outside itself of which it claims, with greater or milder insistence, to be an enlightening and thereby interpretive representation: at the same time the sheer fact of historical existence seems to square the circle, and to close off the process, by suggesting that if the representation does minimally mean something else—namely, the actual historical event—then that is all it means, and nothing more is to be added in the way of supplementary interpretations. (123)

Churchill's play is extremely insistent in its interpretiveness; she uses Brechtian methods to struggle against the "clos[ing] off of the process" of interpretation and thereby engage the interpretive faculties of audience members. Jameson adds that, in the history play, "there must also be a question about the gratuitousness of any historical representation: why this one, what is the point of exhibiting this particular historical episode from out of the innumerable anecdotes of the past?" (123). This is exactly the question Churchill will not let her audience sidestep. And, by forgoing the

didacticism of *Vinegar Tom*, she places the burden of interpretation squarely on the spectator.

Despite the specificity of Churchill's reference to the radicalism of the sixties and seventies, it is also possible that the failed twentieth-century revolution Churchill points to is that attempted by the left after Attlee's 1945 electoral victory. The allegory works in both cases, and one reading does not preclude the other. The "New Jerusalem" rhetoric of the forties and fifties links that moment to the millennial aspirations of the seventeenth century. Churchill states that, in the seventeenth century, "For a short time when the king had been defeated anything seemed possible, and [*Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*] shows the amazed excitement of people taking hold of their own lives, and their gradual betrayal as those who led them realised that freedom could not be had without property being destroyed" (183). The reference here to property suggests nationalization efforts after 1945, and the excitement to which Churchill refers has a parallel in reactions on the left to the election of that year. In the end, the allegory is not so specific that this question must be resolved. The entire postwar period has seen rapid change, and the desire on the part of numerous individuals and groups to turn the world upside down (to borrow the title of Hill's history of radical ideas in the seventeenth century) has been constant.

Churchill is, not surprisingly, discontent with the way the history of the seventeenth century has been told. She writes in her preface that:

> The simple "Cavaliers and Roundheads" history taught at school hides the complexity of the aims and conflicts of those to the left of

> Parliament. We are told of a step forward to today's democracy but not of a revolution that didn't happen; we are told of Charles and Cromwell but not of the thousands of men and women who tried to change their lives. (183)[124]

Though I have found no reference by Churchill to Hill's 1973 history *The World Turned Upside Down*, the similarities between Hill's project in that book and Churchill's here are striking. Hill's introduction has the tone of a manifesto.[125] Referring to David Underdown's history of the same period, Hill writes that "His is the view from the top, from Whitehall, mine the worm's eye view" (11). "We may find," he asserts, "that the obscure men and women who figure in this book, together with some not so obscure, speak more directly to us than Charles I or Pym or General Monck, who appear as history makers in the textbooks" (15). For Hill and his contemporaries, he argues, "experience of something approaching democracy makes us realise that most of our history is written about, and from the point of view of, a tiny fragment of the population, and makes us want to extend in depth as well as in breadth" (13). Hill also argues the importance of the Diggers, Levellers and Ranters

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[124] Brenton also takes issue with the way this history has been written, though for somewhat different reasons. He writes in an essay titled "The Unbearable Heaviness of Being English" that "We had our revolution early, in the seventeenth century, and we do not acknowledge it. We pretend that the Commonwealth failed, whereas everything it stood for came to pass. We have an absurd myth that 'modern' England was founded by the Elizabethans, when it actually was founded by Cromwell" (62).

[125] The real manifesto of "history from below," of course, is E.P. Thompson's 800-plus page *The Making of the English Working Class*. For a good discussion of the impact of Thompson's book, see Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*, especially chapter five, "History from Below." Dworkin asserts that *The World Turned Upside Down* "reflected both [Hill's] intellectual affinity with Thompson and an atmosphere that had been partially transformed by *The Making of the English Working Class*" (184).

for contemporary Marxist intellectuals and politicians, and concludes that "nothing ever wholly dies. Great Britain no doubt fared the worse in some respects for rejecting the truths of the radicals in the seventeenth century, but they were not utterly lost" (307).[126] In language very similar to Churchill's, Hill writes that the middle of the seventeenth century was "a period of glorious flux and intellectual excitement [. . .] Literally anything seemed possible; not only were the values of the old hierarchical society called in question but also the new values, the protestant ethic itself" (12).

The play contains a strong documentary element. In addition to including well-known figures like Oliver Cromwell and Henry Ireton, Churchill brings to life other lesser-known historic persons. Claxton and Cobbe, for example, are based on the Ranters Laurence Clarkson (or Claxton) and Abiezer Coppe (or Cobbe). Gerrard Winstanley appears as well. In addition, Churchill provides in her preface a list of "documentary material," and she worked closely from a transcript of the Putney debates (*Light* 189). These documentary elements coexist with the fact, inherent in allegory, that the author's mediating intelligence is never disguised. The play appears

[126] That these "truths" were not lost is attested to not only by Churchill's play, but also by the leftist politician Tony Benn's May 1976 speech "The Levellers and the English Democratic Tradition," which was later published as a pamphlet. The speech was delivered just a few months before *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* premiered. The occasion was the 325th anniversary of the execution of three Levellers at Burford Church. Benn argues that the Levellers are relevant to the political situation in Britain in the 1970s; he points out that they "press[ed] for reforms many of which are still strongly contested in our country to this day" (5). The Levellers, according to Benn, "argued for universal state schools and hospitals to be provided at public expense three centuries before our generation began, so painfully, to construct the Welfare State, the National Health Service and the Comprehensive School system against so much resistance" (6-7).

as an interpretation or argument, for which the documentary "facts" of the play are marshaled, openly acknowledging that the act of narrating history is a political one.

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire is Churchill's most Brechtian play in its mixture of documentary and polemic, naturalistic elements and stark theatricality, and the individual and the archetypical. In the original production the artificiality of the theatre space, emphasized by certain Brechtian dramatic effects, highlighted the subjective nature of Churchill's interpretation. Churchill recounts that "The play was performed with a table and six chairs, which were used as needed in each scene. When any chairs were not used they were put on either side of the stage, and the actors who were not in a scene sat at the side and watched the action. They moved the furniture themselves. Props were carefully chosen and minimal" (*Light* 185). The characters' costumes, however, were extremely naturalistic. Photographs of that production suggest very "real" characters arrayed in an unreal, artificial space. The absence of naturalistic staging, in conjunction with the presence of the actors looking on, calls attention to the constructedness of the play's argument about history, while the characters themselves register the reality of the historical events and the particularity of the people involved. This particularity, which serves to humanize historical events, is balanced by Churchill's efforts to disrupt the continuity between actor and role. She explains that

> The characters are not played by the same actors each time they appear. The audience should not have to worry exactly which character they are seeing. Each scene can be taken as a separate event

> rather than part of a story. This seems to reflect better the reality of large events like war and revolution where many people share the same kind of experience. [. . .] When different actors play the parts what comes over is a large event involving many people, whose characters resonate in a way they wouldn't if they were more clearly defined. (*Light* 184-5)

The traumatic experiences the characters endure are made immediate by their visible individuality, even as their archetypical quality allows them to stand in for masses of people. Theirs is not the individual suffering associated with naturalism, but a general and widespread suffering registered through individuals. In a review of the original production David Zane Mairowitz comments that one of the play's strengths "is that it can assume a certain given historical foundation and proceed to de-emphasise specific characters and events. In fact the play's history is rooted wholly in a *collective* consciousness which is its protagonist" (24). This is essentially accurate, but what is more remarkable is that Churchill creates this effect without dehumanizing her characters. At the same time, the switching of roles alienates the audience in the Brechtian sense; as Kritzer argues, the play "revises the concept of the history play by offering an active spectacle of heterogeneous participation rather than the typically passive one based on a central figure characterized by unity and the 'timelessness' which Brecht ascribed to 'bourgeois' theatre" (102).

In Churchill's play, the past bears both a causal and a reflective or allegorical relationship to the present. This fact allows the play to retain its allegorical meanings

and to show that people's actions have consequences and, therefore, that people have agency as historical actors. The play can then create tragedy in the Brechtian sense of showing that suffering does not have to happen. By allowing the past to retain its particularity, Churchill avoids the fatalism inherent in the notion that the present merely repeats the past. Brecht writes in "A Short Organum for the Theatre" that

> we must drop our habit of taking the different social structures of past periods, then stripping them of everything that makes them different; so that they all look more or less like our own, which then acquires from this process a certain air of having been there all along, in other words of permanence pure and simple. Instead we must leave them their distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen as impermanent too. (*Brecht* 190)

Churchill's balance of allegory and documentary preserves the particularity of the past. Wardle recognizes this when, after acknowledging the play's resonance with contemporary politics, he argues that Churchill makes no "attempt to minimize the remoteness of the seventeenth-century mental landscape" (20). This remoteness, when combined with the play's allegorical force, allows the audience to reflect that the people and events displayed are both very different from and very similar to themselves. The similarities allow Churchill to argue the urgent necessity of radical social change, and to highlight its difficulties and dangers, while the differences allow

her to avoid fatalism and suggest that the failure of the revolution in the play does not have to be archetypical and that history is not doomed to repeat itself.

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire consists of 21 discrete scenes that occur over an indeterminate period of several years. The play begins with the cast singing apocalyptic verses from "Isaiah." "The earth is utterly broken down, the earth clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly," they sing, evoking the play's atmosphere of turmoil and revolution. This sense of upheaval is intense in the first scene, which shows Cobbe praying. In his prayer he recalls that "The beggar swore when they whipped him through the street and my heart leapt at each curse, a curse for each lash" (191). Cobbe is fairly well off, but his conscience makes him uncomfortable. He tells God, "At table last night when father said grace I wanted to seize the table and turn it over so the white cloth slid, silver, glass, capon, claret, comfits overturned. I wanted to shout your name and damn my family and myself eating so quietly when what is going on outside our gate?" (191-2). The language of upheaval and overturning in Cobbe's prayer and in the verses from "Isaiah" recalls the title of Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*.

The third scene shows the homeless woman Margaret Brotherton tried for vagrancy and sentenced to be "stripped to the waist and beaten to the bounds of the parish" (194). This scene, along with the image of a beggar under the whip in Cobbe's prayer, indicates that the dislocation of individuals is, for Churchill, an important feature of the chaos of the mid-seventeenth century, one generally ignored in textbook histories. As Mark Kishlansky points out, landless migrants like

Brotherton were the focus of a “hysteria over disorder that gripped English society” in the seventeenth century (27). And Hill describes vagrants as, in the eyes of their superiors, “potential dissolvents of society” (40). The Poor Law statutes of 1601 required that each parish take responsibility for its own poor, and earlier acts and traditions required that the poor look to the parish of their birth for support. These circumstances, of course, provided financial motivation for the administrators of one parish to enact the provisions of such laws forcibly against itinerant beggars. Land enclosures were in part responsible for the increase in vagrancy. In *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in Early Modern England* A. L. Beier provides a catalog of punishments used against vagrants. “Stocks and whipping posts,” he writes, “were commonplace in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century towns and villages, standing in marketplaces or on village greens” (159). Whipping was the most common practice; others included branding, hair-cropping, “ear boring” and—Churchill is not exaggerating when one of the Justices of the Peace trying Brotherton suggests it—hanging. Noncorporal punishments included incarceration, impressment, transportation and forced labor.

A large number of vagrants were women. In *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England*, Susan Dwyer Amussen points out that “away from home, seeking both food and employment, vagrants were outside the usual structures used to impose order” (31). For women, the most important of those structures was the family, hence it was the family that was seen to be threatened by homeless women. This threat, in turn, was perceived as a threat against the state. As Amussen

explains, “Because of the ideological relationship between family and state, the control of gender disorder symbolically affirmed all order” (*Ordered* 182). “Many people in the early seventeenth century,” Amussen adds, “thought that society was falling apart; this belief was confirmed by scolding women, the poor, vagrants and day-to-day social tensions” (*Ordered* 216). Sexual “offenders,” including unwed mothers and pregnant women, were, according to Amussen, “a constant reminder that the real order of society was different from the ideal” (“Gender” 207). Brotherton, who is sexually unconventional and apparently unmarried, tells Claxton that she is never on her own, but with “Different men sometimes” (203). Churchill not only shows Brotherton to be subject to both economic and sexual systems of control, but reveals the interrelation of those systems. This circumstance ensures that the women of the play must either be helplessly dependent or live with extreme insecurity.

Irving Wardle points to the treatment of vagrants and squatters as one of the play’s “points of contact with the modern world” (20). Brotherton is the last of a series of vagrants to be tried. The following exchange between her and two Justices of the Peace could evoke for the audience contemporary debates about the welfare state, which, in theory, should have eliminated problems of homelessness and vagrancy. One justice comments that the list of homeless to be tried is long, and this exchange follows:

> 2ND JP. Hard times.
>
> 1ST JP. Soft heart. Yours.
>
> 2ND JP. Step forward please.

1ST JP. I still say he should have been hanged.

2ND JP. He'll die in jail. Name?

BROTHERTON. Margaret Brotherton.

1ST JP. That's no example. Nobody sees it.

2ND JP. Margaret Brotherton. Begging. Guilty or not guilty?

BROTHERTON. I don't know what you mean . . . (193)

The importance of the visibility of punishments links this episode to the issues Churchill later treats in *Softcops*, and Brotherton's inability to understand the Justice's question calls attention to the criminalization of homelessness and vagrancy. For Churchill's audience the first JP's accusation of softheartedness could suggest conservative arguments against the welfare state in which critics decried the creation of a "culture of dependency" and stressed economic individualism as an alternative to state expenditure for the poor. In addition, as Arthur Marwick records, concern over homelessness "came to a head in 1974" and resulted in a government report and an official circular (*British* 238). The homeless, like the vagrants of earlier centuries, were a visible sign of disorder, and were thus the focus of much attention from the political right. And, as Robert Hewison points out, the Vagrancy Act, commonly known as "sus," was in the 1970s a "regular means of harassment" used against immigrants, particularly West Indians, whose migration, like Brotherton's, was compelled by economic circumstances (*Culture* 164).

In the following scene, Thomas Briggs listens to a recruiting speech by Star, a merchant and supporter of Parliament. Star declaims: "life in Babylon is hard and

Babylon must be destroyed. In Babylon you are slaves. Babylon is the kingdom of Antichrist. The kingdom of popery. The kingdom of the king. And it must be destroyed. Because then will come the kingdom of Jerusalem" (194-5). In the context of the play, Star's anti-Catholicism foreshadows the invasion of Ireland, in which Briggs will participate. Star then asks the crowd "And who are the saints?" He answers, "You are. The poor people of this country." Churchill suggests that an egalitarian revolutionary impulse combined with a strongly sectarian religiosity is a powerful but dangerous mixture. Churchill intends Star's support for Cromwell's expedition to Ireland and his mercantile interests, both of which we see later in the play, to cast him in a negative light, and his appeals here should be seen as self-interested and misleading, which Briggs will eventually recognize.

Two scenes later, Briggs enlists. When he signs up, Star tells him,

> You're a Saxon. I'm a Saxon. Our fathers were conquered six hundred years ago by William the Norman. His colonels are our lords. His cavalry are our knights. His common foot soldiers are our squires. When you join this army you are fighting a foreign enemy. You are fighting an invasion of your own soil. Parliament is Saxon. The Army is Saxon. Jesus Christ is Saxon. The Royalists are Normans and the Normans are Antichrist. (199)[127]

[127] For a discussion of the political meaning of 'antichrist' see Christopher Hill's *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England.*

In an essay entitled “The Norman Yoke,” Hill describes the mythology of Norman usurpation of native Anglo-Saxon rights and its importance to the Levellers and other revolutionary groups.[128] In language that closely resembles Star’s, Winstanley writes in *The True Levellers’ Standard Advanced* of “The Norman bastard William himself, his colonels, captains, inferior officers and common soldiers, who are still from that time to this day in pursuit of that victory, imprisoning, robbing and killing the poor enslaved English Israelites” (86).[129] Even in this early scene Star is an unsavory character, and his rhetoric here disguises the reality of an oppression that was not primarily national but rather economic. Like the millennial religiosity in the play, this sort of appeal can facilitate revolution but is not always, Churchill implies, salubrious. Star’s description of the granting of lands to soldiers points ironically to Cromwell’s similar policy, which produced a new ascendancy in Ireland.

In the next scene, Churchill introduces Hoskins, an itinerant female preacher. Hoskins listens to a male preacher proclaiming the right of common people to take up arms against the king and elucidating a strict doctrine of predestination. Hoskins

[128] Though by the seventeenth century there was little basis for this myth, it fits a pattern of concern for lost rights that has often animated resistance to authority in Britain. Dennis Dworkin’s chapter “Lost Rights” in *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain* provides information on the “lost rights” tradition and its continued relevance to postwar radical historiography. In “The Norman Yoke” Hill explains that, though the myth might have a questionable historical basis by the seventeenth century, “It made the permanently valid point that the ruling class is *alien* to the interests of the vast majority of the population. Even if they no longer speak French, whether or not they are of Norman descent, the upper classes are isolated from the life of the working classes, to whose interests they are opposed” (11).

[129] Winstanley saw Parliament after the revolution usurping the position of the Normans. In *An Appeal to the House of Commons*, he wrote, addressing that body, “it will appear to the view of all men that you cut off the King’s head that you might establish yourselves in his chair of government, and that your aim was not to throw down tyranny, but the tyrant. But alas, the King’s blood was not our burden, it was those oppressing Norman laws, whereby he enslaved us, that we groaned under” (119). Star’s use of the myth should be seen as cynical and self-interested in a way Winstanley’s is not.

objects that "no one is damned. We can all bind the king" (200). She continues to harangue the preacher, who finally tries to silence her by quoting St Paul: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (201). After Hoskins asks "what sort of God takes pleasure in pain?" the preacher calls on the congregation to throw her out, which they do with force. The more radical of the Levellers and Diggers believed that any man—and perhaps woman—could become a preacher. Winstanley, for one, "saw the professional clergy as at best superfluous, at worst the paid propagandists of a wicked social order" (Hill, "Introduction" 44).[130] Hill points out that in the seventeenth century itinerant preachers were especially threatening to the established clergy. Dissident sects often believed that "ministers should be itinerants, like the apostles" and many advocated the elimination of professional clergy ("Introduction" 27). As a vagrant, a woman and a heretic, Hoskins is powerless and vulnerable, yet also threatening to the powerful.

Claxton takes Hoskins in and his unnamed wife treats the wounds she has suffered at the hands of the congregation. Claxton's wife tells Hoskins that women must suffer: "For our sin, Eve's sin. That's why you have pain. We're not clean. We have to obey. The man, whatever he's like. If he beat us that's why. We have blood, we're shameful, our bodies are worse than a man's. [. . .] That's why we can't speak" (204). Hoskins replies, "That's all wrong what you said." She answers the wife's

[130] I am not aware that Winstanley discussed female preachers. He did, however, insist that "every single man, male and female, is a perfect creature of himself; and the spirit that made the globe dwells in man to govern the globe" (77).

assertion that children die as God's punishment by arguing that "they die because how we live" (204). Claxton's wife has internalized repressive, masculinist ideologies. In addition to showing the effects of oppression on passive characters like Claxton's wife, Churchill uses other female characters like Hoskins, Brotherton, the anonymous servants who loot a landlord's house and the mother with the starving child—who all have gained some degree of agency or, at least, awareness of their position as women—to suggest that a narrowly political revolution would be insufficient for women.

In the brief but important scene that follows, entitled "Two Women Look in a Mirror," Churchill points to the promise of revolution for women. Two poor women, who have been involved in burning grain and other agrarian resistance, are looking in a broken mirror that one has taken from a landlord's house. "We're burning his papers, that's the Norman papers that give him his lands. That's like him burnt. There's no one over us," one of the women explains to the other (207). This revolt against landlordism and property reflects the coming to power, temporarily at least, of the lower orders of society. The mirror, however, symbolizes a special boon for women. One of the women tells the other that "There's an even bigger mirror that we didn't break. [. . .] You see your whole body at once. You see yourself standing in that room. They must know what they look like all the time. And now we do" (207). This scene indicates that the upheaval of war has produced an epiphanic and utopian moment in which these women have come to see themselves as actors in history and agents in their own lives as never before. The new understanding of themselves and

their situation in society that makes this change possible is represented by the reflection in the mirror. The idea of never having seen one's own reflection is striking and alienating to a modern audience, a feeling which underscores the real, though broken and gradual, progress of women's struggles.

This ecstatic utopian mood carries over to the next scene, in which Briggs describes a battle in which he was wounded and observed bodies being removed from the field. He recounts, "I didn't know which was our side and which was them, but then I saw it didn't matter because what we were fighting was not each other but Antichrist and even the soldiers on the other side would be made free and be glad when they saw the paradise we'd won" (208). Briggs's elation is such that "the pain was less than the joy" (208) "Joy," remember, is the word Churchill used to characterize one of the archetypical phases of revolution. This scene represents the apex of the revolutionary hopes depicted in the play. It is followed immediately by these lines from Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road," sung by the cast:

> All seems beautiful to me.
>
> I can repeat over to men and women, You have done such good to me,
>
> I would do the same to you,
>
> I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
>
> I will scatter myself among men and women as I go,
>
> I will toss a new gladness and roughness among them.
>
> Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me,
>
> Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me.

(208)

Though the insertion of these lines is jarring and wildly anachronistic, Whitman's ecstatic tone is consistent with the language of Briggs and Star. Whitman's poem is, of course, not Christian in any traditional sense, but his language has a kind of religiosity that is similar to that of Churchill's seventeenth-century characters. The socialistic implications of Whitman's poem are confirmed in these lines, which Churchill does not quote: "To see no possession but you may posses it, enjoying all without labor or purchase, abstracting the feast yet not abstracting one particle of it, / To take the best of the farmer's farm and the rich man's elegant villa" (187). This is the only moment of its kind in the play. Though they do not draw a specific parallel between the events of the play and contemporary Britain, these lines bring the issues of the play into a larger frame of reference, suggesting the possibility of an eccentric revolutionary genealogy—or narrative—that could serve as inspiration for latter-day social and political movements.

The long scene that ends act one reenacts the Putney Debates of October and November 1647. In this scene, Churchill provides a history lesson deigned to put the events of the play into a larger political context and to educate her audience about the terms of political debate during the period in question. Many of these terms, she wants her audience to recognize, parallel those that have been debated in postwar Britain. The Putney Debates included representatives of the Levellers, who had petitioned Parliament in the spring of that year for religious freedom and civil liberties, and senior army officers, whom the Leveller leader John Wildman labeled

“Grandees” (Kishlansky 175-6). Among the Grandees were Cromwell and his son-in-law Henry Ireton. The Levellers included Wildman and Colonel Thomas Rainsborough. At Putney, the Levellers presented their *Agreement of the People*, which, according to Kishlansky, “set aside the monarchy, invested Parliament with executive and administrative authority—though no coercive power over religion—and advocated electoral reforms based on the principle of manhood suffrage” (176).

After being more or less forgotten for more than two centuries, Michael Mendle explains, “By the middle of the twentieth century [. . .] the debates the army held at Putney [. . .] became a fixture of the popular consciousness of the seventeenth century” (1). The debates and their result often came to represent—as they do for Churchill—both the betrayal of an egalitarian revolution by Cromwell and the Grandees, and, because of the Levellers’ participation, a landmark in a native radical tradition that might anachronistically be labeled socialist or communist. Some historians, including Kishlansky, have suggested that the debates should be seen as meetings between soldiers that were as much or more concerned with the issue of indemnity as with the Millennium and the New Jerusalem. The indemnity issue was, Mendle explains, “construed as an ignoble and particularist deviation from the ‘larger’ concerns of the day” by those who, like Churchill and Tony Benn, would use the Levellers and their concerns to press political points in twentieth-century Britain. In his interesting essay “The Levellers in History and Memory, c. 1660 to 1960,” Blair Worden points out that “modern interest in the Levellers was unashamedly teleological” in its commonplace assertion that the Levellers anticipated later radical

movements (257). Worden remarks that “Writer after writer remarked how ‘modern’ the Levellers were” and asserts that “The Levellers have owed their twentieth-century standing principally to socialism” (258, 259). But, as Mendle points out, “the world that had embraced the Putney debates—from the naively, affirmatively democratic center to the various lefts—had become on their 350th anniversary in 1997 in some ways as much a period piece as the debates themselves” (4-5). The social ferment of the late sixties and seventies seems a world away from Blair’s Britain, and Churchill’s enthusiasm for the Levellers is a measure of that distance.

The scene begins with Rainborough announcing, “The Putney debates, October the twenty-eighth, sixteen forty-seven. I am Colonel Thomas Rainborough, a Leveller” (208). This interjection marks a shift into a semi-documentary mode. Also present in Churchill’s account are the Leveller Colonel Nathaniel Rich; Edward Sexby, an ‘agitator’ or elected representative from an army regiment; Wildman; Ireton; and Cromwell. Sexby explains the Levellers’ purpose; he and his fellow soldiers, he says, have “found little fruit of our endeavors. Truly our miseries and our fellow soldiers’ cry out for help” (209). Sexby presents the *Agreement of the People*, which, as Churchill describes it here, calls for proportional representation, a newly elected parliament within two years, religious freedom and freedom from impressment into the army. These, Sexby proclaims, are “native rights” (209). Cromwell wonders about the consequence of such proposal: “Would it not be confusion? Would it not be utter confusion?” (209). Wildman testifies that he has met with the agitators of various regiments and that they have accepted the *Agreement* and

concluded that “if an obligation is not just, then it is an act of honesty not to keep it” (210). Ireton is appalled: “If anyone is free to break any obligation he has entered into, this is a principle that would take away all government. Men would think themselves not obliged by any law they thought not a good law” (210). A moment later, Ireton continues:

> I would know what you gentlemen account the right to anything you have in England; anything of estate, land or goods, what right you have to it. If you resort only to the Law of Nature, I have as much right to take hold of anything I desire as you. Therefore when I hear men speak of laying aside all commitments I tremble at the boundless and endless consequences of it. (211)

Ireton’s fear of anarchy reaches a peak when he fulminates, “this leads to the end of all government: if you think something is unjust you are not to obey; and if it tends to your loss it is no doubt unjust and you are to oppose it!” (211). Rainborough tells Ireton, “I wish you would not make the world believe we are for anarchy” (213). Churchill means to show Ireton’s language as an inflammatory rhetoric designed to defend the class interests he represents. The equation of social democracy with anarchy is a feature of conservative rhetoric in the postwar era, and figures notably in the response from the right both to the initiatives of the 1945 Labour Government and to the social movements of the sixties. The broad lines of the debate between Ireton and Rainborough as it touches on questions of property suggest more specifically the controversy concerning nationalization in the forties and fifties.

Ireton objects in particular to the portion of the *Agreement of the People* which demands proportional representation for all "the people of England." In response to Ireton, Rainborough argues that "All inhabitants that have not lost their birthright should have an equal vote in elections. For really I think that the poorest he in England hath a life to live as the greatest he; therefore truly sir, I think its clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under it" (212).[131] The words "poorest he" are one of the best-remembered phrases from the debates. Rainborough's insistence on a native "birthright" has clear populist and nationalist aspects.[132] Like the myth of the Norman Yoke, the notion of birthright in this context locates authentic British (here specifically English) nationality in the lower strata of society. First, according to Leveller arguments as Churchill represents them, the usurpers were the Normans. The Normans have been replaced, however, by the Parliamentarians, and English rights will now be suppressed by Englishmen. The subjugation of the lower classes is again understood in national terms when Wildman argues that "At present one part [of the nation] makes hewers of wood and drawers of water of the other five, so the greater

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[131] As Hill points out, the Levellers at Putney would not have enfranchised servants, laborers, paupers and others ("Introduction" 30). Women too would have remained disenfranchised.

[132] The issue of birthright would come to the fore under Thatcher, when the 1981 British Nationality Act stipulated that children born in the United Kingdom to parents not legally settled would become eligible for citizenship only after ten year's continuous residence (Paul 183). Salman Rushdie comments on this legislation in "The New Empire within Britain." White Britons, he argues, "were blind because you believed the Act was aimed at the blacks; and so you sat back and did nothing as Mrs Thatcher stole the birthright of every one of us, black and white, and of our children and grandchildren for ever" (136).

part of the nation is enslaved. I do not hear any justification given but that it is the present law of the kingdom" (215). This last sentence, considered in a wider context, carries a criticism of the gradualism and reformism often advocated by supporters of the status quo. Insisting that only propertied men should vote, Ireton concludes that, if men have a natural right to vote, "Then I think you must deny all property too. If you say one man hath an equal right with another to the choosing of him that will govern him, by the same right of nature he hath the same right in any goods he sees—he hath freedom to the land, to take the ground, to till it" (213). Cromwell concurs. Ireton's last point about land use points to a central issue in act two, when Churchill introduces the Diggers.

Sexby states near the end of the scene that "though liberty was our end [in fighting] there is a degeneration from it. We have ventured our lives and it is all for this: to recover our birthrights as Englishmen; and by the arguments urged there is none" (215). Rainborough contends that the English soldier has "fought to enslave himself, to give power to men of riches, men of estates, to make himself a perpetual slave" (216). The notion that the people have been led astray by their leaders and that a war has been fought in vain, in Churchill's allegory, extends the play's criticism of Cromwell and the Grandees to the Labour Party and their compromising policy, which led to the postwar consensus and, Churchill suggests, a loss of ideals. This idea of the people betrayed by their leaders—along with the discussion of the Norman Yoke and the English birthright—allows Churchill to point to a beleaguered but genuinely British radical tradition that, like the Levellers, has often been written out

of history. In the context of 1976, the persistence of this tradition could provide solace to a dispirited left which perhaps even then feared that the country would soon be entering another period of reaction.

Act two begins with one of the actors introducing Gerrard Winstanley. In 1649 Winstanley and twenty or so followers began tilling the earth and planting crops on common land at St George's Hill in Surrey. In April 1650, after moving to nearby Cobham Heath, the colony was dispersed by the army, or, more precisely, by local gentry and freeholders as the soldiers looked on (Hill, "Introduction" 29). Over the next few years Digger colonies appeared in other places in England, but none lasted long. Winstanley published several pamphlets including *The True Levellers' Standard Advanced*, which declared the earth a "common treasury" (Winstanley 87). The Diggers denounced predestination and "the buying and selling of goods, wage labour and private property" (Kishlansky 196). In the play, Winstanley exhorts his listeners to "Take notice that England is not a free people till the poor that have no land have free allowance to dig and labour the commons" (219). He continues: "True freedom lies in the true enjoyment of the earth. True religion and undefiled is to let everyone quietly have earth to manure. There can be no universal liberty till this universal community be established" (219). These and other passages are taken directly from historical sources. The Diggers then recount the destruction of their crops and tools and beatings suffered at the hands of soldiers. As Hill shows in *The World Turned Upside Down*, the years in which the Diggers were active witnessed terrible crop failures, inflation, poverty and unemployment. At the same time, as a result of the

continuing enclosure of land by the wealthy and the exclusion of commoners from "waste" lands, much arable land remained out of cultivation. These actions were more galling because the Commonwealth controlled many crown lands, forests and property confiscated from royalists (Hill, "Introduction" 22). The Diggers sought to use this land to alleviate the crisis, but also to challenge the property rights of the wealthy. The historical Winstanley, addressing landlords, argues that "the power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the creation by your ancestors by the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you, their children." "And therefore," he went on, "though you did not kill or thieve, yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword" (99).

Churchill's description of the Diggers and their aims points, as Wardle suggests, to the issue of squatting which, beginning in the late sixties and throughout the seventies, was the subject of serious debate in London and other urban areas (20). Conflicts centered on the right of the homeless to occupy empty buildings without police harassment. There were at the time large numbers of vacant buildings in London and other cities; there was also a widespread housing crisis. Public housing was often inadequate, and the occupation of these empty buildings seemed, to the squatters, a logical expedient. In many cases, the squatters, like the Diggers before them, intended to challenge property rights.[133]

[133] Literary treatments of squatting in postwar Britain include Brenton's *Magnificence* and Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist*. In both cases, squatting is associated with radical political groups.

Two scenes later, Churchill picks up Briggs's story as he leaves for Ireland. He has been an agitator for his regiment. Briggs remains hopeful that, in this role, he can help bring about radical change, but Star tells him that the Army Council is "a council of officers now, you know that. You know an agitator means nothing. But you won't let it go" (221). The Army Council was in fact replaced by a Council of Officers. Briggs is writing a list of proposals, which he justifies to Star by arguing that "If I don't get what I fought for, the whole seven years has been wasted" (222). Star echoes Ireton's views at Putney when he says to Briggs, "If everyone says and does what he likes, what army is it? [. . .] In army or government. There must be some obedience" (223). Briggs rejects this argument: "It's you who mutiny. Against God. Against the people. [. . .] It's Cromwell mutinies" (223).

Briggs is skeptical about the Irish expedition, but Star argues that, "If you still want to serve the cause of the saints, sign for Ireland. [. . .] It's the same war we fought here. We'll be united again. We'll crush the papists just as we did in England. Antichrist will be exterminated." When Briggs objects that the Irish are fighting the same enemy as the army, Star interrupts him by declaring that "The Irish are traitors" (221-222). Briggs concludes the exchange by saying, "If I was Irish I'd be your enemy. And I am" (223). For Churchill the invasion of Ireland is the ultimate betrayal of the egalitarian ideals of the revolution against the king, and Star's speeches show the descent of the revolutionary spirit into religious and national enmity. It is telling that earlier, when Cobbe spoke of Antichrist, he indicated the wealthy and royalists; here Star uses the term to refer to the oppressed people of Ireland. Later in the play,

looking back and questioning the course of the revolution, Briggs recalls a fellow soldier who went mad: "When they burned the church in Drogheda he heard a man inside crying out, 'God damn me, I burn, I burn.'" Briggs asks, "Is that heaven on earth? Or is it hell?" (235). Because of the continuing violence in Northern Ireland, this reference to the most infamous massacre ordered by Cromwell in Ireland would have been highly charged in 1976. Its inclusion shows that Churchill's representation of history contains an element of polemic. Churchill's view is made clear when one of the actors, speaking to a group of soldiers, reads these lines:

> Consider to what end you should hazard your lives against the Irish: have you not been fighting in England these seven years for rights and liberties you are yet deluded of? And will you go on to kill, slay and murder men, to make your officers as absolute lords and masters over Ireland as you have made them over England? [. . .] [T]he cause of the Irish natives in seeking their just freedoms, immunities and liberties is exactly the same with our cause here. (224)

In the political environment of 1976, this passage calls on Churchill's audience to question their own government's policies in Northern Ireland. For the left, as Arden and D'Arcy did in *The Non-stop Connolly Show* a year before, Churchill provides an international perspective that sees the continued rule of Northern Ireland from Britain and the economic oppression of the British working classes as, at root, the same problem.

The next scene, entitled "The Vicar Welcomes the New Landlord," shows Star occupying an estate he has purchased from Parliament. As he explains, "Parliament is selling the confiscated land to parliament [sic] men" (224). He insists that this circumstance does not make him a squire, as the Vicar calls him. Star explains that

> This country can grow enough to feed every single person. Instead of importing corn we could grow enough to export it if all the land was efficiently made profitable. The price of corn will come down in a few years. Agricultural writers recommend growing clover on barren land. I will have the common ploughed and planted with clover. (224)

A claim that the land could provide for everyone was central to the Diggers' thought. But Star sees only profit. When the Vicar informs him that there are squatters on the common, Star explains that he will enclose the land. He argues that, "When I say enclose the commons, I don't mean in the old sense, as the old squire did. I mean to grow corn. To make efficient use of the land" (225). A moment later, Star comments, "Don't misunderstand me, Parson. Times have changed" (226). But, Churchill implies, while a transfer of power has occurred, little has in fact changed. Perhaps Star will bring more land under cultivation and improve farming methods and yields, and turn a large profit for himself in the process. But, Churchill implies, the poor will remain poor and powerless. For Churchill, this hardship will be the result of the continued management of resources and ownership of the means of production by a single narrow segment of society. The Diggers' claim to the common land, for

Churchill, represents a primitive form of communism, and the collective ownership for which they campaign resonates with postwar debates on nationalization.

The two following scenes demonstrate again that little has changed. In the first, a woman struggles to decide whether to leave her child on the doorstep of the mayor of a prosperous town. Her female companion tells her that the child is dying because she, the mother, is starving and cannot produce milk. In the following scene a butcher upbraids his privileged customers:

> No meat for you this week. Not this year. You’ve had your lifetime’s meat. [. . .] All of you that can buy meat. You’ve had your meat. You’ve had their meat. You’ve had their meat that can’t buy any meat. You’ve stolen their meat. Are you going to give it back? Are you going to reach into your pocket and give them back the price of their meat? [. . .] You cram yourselves with their children’s meat. You cram yourselves with their dead children. (228)

These scenes border on agitprop and achieve a symbolic or iconic meaning similar to that of the scene in act one when the women see themselves in a mirror for the first time. This function—along with the obviously Swiftian conceit—moves the play further from documentary toward polemic. Wardle describes the scene in the butcher’s shop as the only one in which the play’s connections to the modern world are “underlined” (20). Because the customers to whom the butcher speaks are unseen, the brunt of his criticism falls uncomfortably on the audience. Churchill asks the audience to examine their own privilege and—here and throughout the play—to

consider how that privilege is contingent on past and present economic and political oppression. Her desire to create this effect suggests that Churchill is imagining a primarily middle-class audience. The audience must be somewhat receptive for this move to be politically efficacious, which could imply that Churchill also conceives her audience as mostly liberal, if not leftist.

A long last scene called “The Meeting” follows after a brief scene recounting the execution of the Leveller Robert Lockyer and the defeat of the Levellers at Burford. Structurally, the scene parallels that depicting the Putney Debates. Not only do both scenes end acts, each is several times longer than any other. Both also involve a large number of characters in conversation. Unlike the Putney scene, however, this scene is in no sense documentary, though Cobbe and Claxton reappear. Rather than telling history from known sources, Churchill imagines a meeting of outsiders who represent those people whose lives and actions have gone unrecorded. The scene transpires in a tavern, with Hoskins, Claxton, Cobbe, Brotherton, Briggs and an anonymous drunk present.[134] Claxton and Hoskins invoke the dead Levellers and Briggs voices his desire to “Avenge Robert Lockyer” (230). The discussion turns to religion. Cobbe rants: “There’s angels swear, angels with flowing hair, you’d think they were men, I’ve seen them. They say damn the churches, the bloody black clergy with their fat guts, damn their white hands. Damn the hellfire presbyterian hypocrites

[134] Hill records that, during this period, “The eternally unsuccessful quest by J.P.s to suppress unlicensed ale-houses was in part aimed at controlling [the] mobile masses, which might contain disaffected elements, separatists, itinerant preachers” (49).

that call a thief a sinner, rot them in hell's jail" (230). Despite his hostility toward the church, Cobbe has not abandoned religion. "God is coming," he declares a moment later, "the mighty Leveller, Christ the chief of Levellers is at the door, and then we'll see levelling" (231). As Hill points out, Winstanley and the Levellers did see Christ as the "Head Leveller" (*World* 106). But Churchill at this point calls the value of millenarian religion into question. Cobbe's radicalism is reduced to a barroom tirade. And Hoskins comments, "what's it matter now if we've no work and no food or can't get parliament like we want? It's only next year. Then Christ will be here in his body like a man and he'll be like a king only you can talk to him" (233). This belief suggests a fatalism and a repudiation of politics. Briggs responds:

> Christ will not come. I don't believe it. Everything I've learnt these seven years. He will not come in some bloody red robe and you all put on white frocks, that will not happen. All I've learnt, how to get things done, that wasn't for nothing. I don't believe this is the last days. England will still be here in hundreds of years. And people working so hard they can't grasp how it happens and can't take hold of their own lives, like us till we had this chance, and we're losing it now, as we sit here, every minute. Jesus Christ isn't going to change it. (233)

Briggs's voice has much authority here, and Churchill appears to be advocating a more pragmatic approach to political resistance based not on faith (in God or revolution) but on individual and collective effort. Briggs's remark about people

"tak[ing] hold of their own lives" recalls Churchill's own desire for "a society in which people can be [. . .] in control of their lives" (qtd. in Aston 3).

The play ends with a short epilogue in which the primary characters recount their lives during and after the Restoration. Hoskins continues to preach the coming of Christ; Brotherton is a thief; Claxton escapes to the Barbados, his "great desire" being "to see and say nothing" (241). Cobbe recounts his trial under the new Blasphemy Act and admits to changing his name. Briggs has the longest speech; after working in a shop for a while, he takes on a severe asceticism:

> I thought I must do something practical. I decided to bring the price of corn down. A few people eat far too much. So if a few people ate far too little that might balance. Then there would be enough corn and the price would come down. I gave up meat first, then cheese and eggs. I lived on a little porridge and vegetables, then I gave up the porridge and stopped cooking the vegetables. It was easier because I was living out. I ate what I could find but not berries and nuts because so many people want those and I do well with sorrell leaves and dandelion. But grass. It was hard to get my body to take grass. It got very ill. It wouldn't give in to grass. But I forced it on and now it will. [. . .] People come to watch. They can, I can't stop them. I'm living in a field that belongs to gentleman that comes sometimes, and sometimes he brings a friend to show. (240-241)

The extremity of this “practical” solution and Briggs’s isolation creates a pessimistic end to the play. Briggs’s speech also evokes the marginalization felt by much of the British left in the mid-seventies, especially by those who had believed in the revolutionary potential of the late sixties and early seventies. Churchill suggests that the kind of personal political action in which Briggs engages is futile outside the context of a larger political program. Briggs has become an oddity, living on the indulgence of a man of property.

When Churchill wrote *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, ideas about the importance of “history from below” had been in wide circulation at least since the early sixties, as had related notions about the subjectivity, partiality and interestedness of purportedly objective history. The play owes clear debts—though not always perhaps directly—to the New Left historiography of Thompson, Hill and others. Churchill’s work here also reflects the use of these historical methodologies by feminists in the seventies to recover the hidden histories of women. In its broad outlines, Foucault’s project in the sixties and seventies can be seen as a related, or perhaps parallel, development to these historical methodologies. Published sources do not indicate that Churchill had read Foucault by the time she was writing *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Nevertheless, the play embodies aspects of his “genealogical” method. Foucault defines “genealogy” as “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today” (*Power* 83). By “erudite knowledge” Foucault means “meticulous, erudite, exact historical knowledge”

(*Power* 82). By "local memories" he means "buried" or "disqualified knowledges" which are "concerned with *a historical knowledge of struggles*" (*Power* 82-3). (Foucault provocatively refers to these knowledges as "colonised" or "subjected" knowledges, which a genealogical history should strive to emancipate (*Power* 85, 86).) In her play, Churchill unites the traditional history of Cromwell and the Civil Wars with the disqualified—though by the seventies at least partially rehabilitated—knowledge of the Diggers, Ranters and Levellers' struggles. The play's allegorical meanings show clearly that this effort is "tactical" in Foucault's sense of the word.

By necessity, much of what could be called specific, local history in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is invented. By conceiving characters like Briggs, Brotherton and Hoskins, Churchill shows the impact of power and ideology on the smallest and most marginalized units of society, which traditional histories largely ignore, except perhaps in generalizations about the "poor" or the "masses." By showing vividly the lives of such individuals, Churchill engages in the type of historical project Foucault advocates when he writes that historical inquiry should be "concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary" (*Power* 96). Foucault writes:

> One needs to investigate historically, and beginning from the lowest level, how mechanisms of power have been able to function. [. . .] [W]e need to see the manner in which, at the effective level of the family, of the immediate environment, of the cells and most basic units

of society, these phenomena of repression or exclusion possessed their instruments and their logic. (*Power* 100)

In Churchill's play, Brotherton's trial, Claxton's wife's comments about women's natural subservience, and Star's suppression of the squatters show the instruments of power working against individuals. In addition, Foucault argues, "We need to see how these mechanisms of power, at a given moment, in a precise conjuncture and by means of a certain number of transformations, have begun to become economically advantageous and politically useful" (*Power* 101). Churchill achieves such insight throughout the play by showing how laws, property rights, religion, sexual mores and even military might were used in a time of great social instability to ensure that economic and power relationships remained essentially unaltered.

Though the discussion of Ireland in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is perhaps most effective as a rallying cry for a leftist audience, and issues of race and ethnicity are peripheral to the play's main subject matter, the references to Ireland do show that colonized peoples are the subject to similar—though often less disguised—exercises of power as are impoverished workers, the dispossessed, and subjugated women in the imperial nation. In addition, the Irish expedition as Churchill describes it shows the potentially revolutionary energies of the lower strata of British society co-opted by the ascendant bourgeois interests Cromwell embodies. While Churchill does not address the intricacies of racism and ethnocentrism—or the important differences between these and other forms of oppression—in great detail in this play, the Irish references, along with the more developed analysis of women's issues,

further her argument that a narrowly class-based leftist politics is inadequate in 1970s Britain.

Cloud Nine

Churchill's unproduced 1972 play *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* deals with a number of ideas that figure prominently seven years later in *Cloud Nine*. From this perspective, the play reads like an experiment in which Churchill is working out ideas about race, revolution, criminality, imperialism and the family that would be developed more fully in *Cloud Nine* and other later plays. Churchill writes in her introduction to the play that "*Hospital* [. . .] combined my interest in Fanon and [R.D.] Laing; Algeria had interested me since the fifties. Fanon's *Black Faces, White Masks* was one of the things (along with Genet) that led to Joshua, the black servant, being played by a white in *Cloud Nine*" (i). *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* is a fairly straightforward dramatization of the final chapter of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, entitled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," which details his experiences while working in 1956 in the psychiatric ward of a hospital in Algeria. Many of the patients in Churchill's play are drawn directly from Fanon's account.

The plot of *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* concerns Monsieur, a colonial administrator, his wife Madame and their daughter Françoise. Her parents

bring Françoise to Fanon because she says that she is dying, curses her parents and refuses to eat, believing that her mother is poisoning her. Later she stops speaking and even moving. Monsieur says of Françoise, "She takes it all, her school, her dresses, her little bird in a cage, everything we do to protect that perfect life she is lucky enough to lead" (103). Madame assures Monsieur that "All the difficult things you have to do are only done to make [Algeria] a place where she can be happy" (103). These comments introduce the theme of the relationship between the patriarchal European family and imperialism. Churchill shows that the family provides a justification of the imperial project and the violence it requires. Later in this play and in *Cloud Nine*, the family is examined as a model for the relationship between the European and subject peoples.

Monsieur and Madame are very nervous about Françoise's sexuality. Monsieur first insists that she is "far too young to take an interest in young men" (106). When Françoise tells Fanon that she has had a boyfriend named Armand, her parents explain that "He was a student who had all sorts of misguided ideas about making concessions to the terrorists." Whatever the truth about Armand's politics, Monsieur and Madame associate control of their daughter's sexuality with French political control in Algeria. Initially, Monsieur and Madame retreat into willful ignorance of their daughter's sexuality, but when it becomes apparent that Françoise has gone out without her parents' knowledge, Monsieur says to Fanon, "We still haven't gotten out of her where she went or what she did. I no longer want to know. If you can make her tell you I can trust you to inform me of the details" (108-9).

Madame also tells Fanon that another doctor “made sure” Françoise was still a virgin. This surveillance is similar to that Monsieur carries out against Algerians; female sexuality and anticolonial violence both threaten the patriarchal order. Clive, the patriarch of the family in *Cloud Nine*, feels a similar anxiety about the sexuality of members of his family and others in his circle.

Monsieur and Madame deny any connection between the violence of Monsieur’s actions against Algerians and Françoise’s condition, but witnessing that violence is clearly at the root of her problem. Françoise tells Fanon that her father has killed many people. “I can’t give you a list of names,” she explains, “but I hear the screams all night” (114). Monsieur admits a few moments later, “Yes I bring my work home with me” (115).[135] In Françoise, Churchill shows a young woman as an unwilling beneficiary (and victim) of the imperial system. At the same time, however, she suffers as a result of the way she and her sexuality are appropriated as ideological signifiers.

Churchill seeks throughout the play to demonstrate the contradictions between imperial ideology and the reality of occupation and oppression. But it is not simply the case that the imperialist dresses his motivations in a cloak of ideology. At a conscious level, Monsieur may well believe in the imperialist’s civilizing mission. He explains to his wife, “But I believe in French culture. I believe in Racine and Proust”

[135] Fanon describes the young woman on whom Françoise is based in detail. She, like Françoise, described the horror of hearing the screams of Algerian prisoners (*Wretched* 277).

(138). But Churchill suggests that the imperialist is also motivated by other desires. Madame accuses Monsieur:

> You say you're bringing them French culture, all those volumes of Proust in the bookcase and Racine and Corneille [. . .]. [T]hat's very fine, but really you like what's exotic, what you would call exotic, you like a bit of highly spiced food and smells of the bazaar and the women in their yashmaks, and you'd like nothing better than to get your hands under a yashmak and I bet you've done it in your time, you filthy Algerian pig. (135)

Though she reveals the insecurity of her own position, Madame has authority here. For Churchill, power and sexuality are inextricably linked in the colonial setting. In addition, it is quite possible—though not absolutely clear—that her father has abused Françoise sexually. This fact would reveal deeply conflicted motives not only in the relationship between the colonizer and the "natives" (frequently spoken of as children), but also in Monsieur's feelings for his family, contradictions which unsettle the symbolic value of the family and necessitate that its meaning be asserted all the more forcefully.

In *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution*, Churchill anatomizes two different but clearly interrelated types of racist discourse that will be crucial for understanding *Cloud Nine*. Both varieties conceive a specialized knowledge of colonial subjects and demonstrate Said's critical point that "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge

gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly powerful dialectic of information and control" (*Orientalism* 36). One strain of racist discourse Churchill dissects is concerned with the "native's" inherent criminality and infantile nature. Monsieur tells Fanon, "The native children are naturally born violent and dishonest [. . .]. The police and magistrates are locked in an endless struggle to curb and suppress and pacify" (102).[136] These lines also point to the depoliticization of violence and crime with which so many of Churchill's plays are concerned. Monsieur claims that the violence in Algeria "is committed by criminals. It is not part of any revolution. The majority of the natives look to us to protect them and restore order. And it is only the French who can pacify the land. Because the Algerian naturally has criminal tendencies" (110). These "tendencies" are particularly useful in justifying the imposition of European civilization on the colonized world. This point is emphasized when a Young Doctor describes his father, who owns a farm: "He's as much a father to his workers as he is to me. And a lazy ungrateful lot of children they are. But one has to put up with that and not expect too much and slowly help them to be more like us" (118). Here the patriarch rules over a metaphorically extended "family" of unruly children, a theme to which Churchill will return in *Cloud Nine*.

The other variety of racist discourse Churchill examines is scientific and medical. When Fanon reads a report on a fifteen year-old Algerian who has killed his

[136] Monsieur's role as a policeman and his valorization of French law illustrates Said's point that "The Orient was viewed as if framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual. Orientalism, then, is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in a class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing" (*Orientalism* 41).

friend for stealing some olives, the Young Doctor notes that “The remarkable disproportion between cause and effect is typical of the Algerian crime of violence” (118-9). He explains that “The Algerian has virtually no cortex. He is dominated by the lower part of the brain just like the lower vertebrates and quite differently from Man as we know him, European Man, who is distinguished from other creatures by cortical thinking. We use the frontal lobes and the Africans don’t” (119). The Young Doctor contends that “The African is like a lobotomised European. It accounts for the impulsive aggression, the laziness, the shallowness of emotional effect, the inability to grasp a whole concept—the African character” (119). Anne McClintock and others have shown that Africans were represented as children in a pseudoscientific “family of man” and that this concept was used to justify European domination.[137] Such thinking gave authority to a notion of the evolution of cultures and provided a scientific basis for stereotypes that were products of the colonizer’s imagination. In McClintock’s words, “With social Darwinism, the taxonomic project, first applied to nature, was applied to cultural history” (37). The idea that African culture, for example, represented an earlier form of development was supported by the notion that African people were similarly backward and primitive. Even the evidently “civilized” Fanon does not shake the Young Doctor’s faith in this pseudoscience; he tells Fanon, “No one would know you weren’t white except to look at you. No one would think you didn’t use your frontal lobes” (120). Churchill’s analysis of the Young Doctor’s

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[137] See particularly chapter one, ”The Lay of the Land,” in McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest.*

views not only exposes a form of scientific racism, but also challenges the teleology embedded in a Darwinistic imperial ideology.

Both these types of discourse support a notion of progress according to which it is the duty of the European to educate and otherwise improve the colonial subject. Madame reveals an important aspect of this vision of progress when she complains that she cannot trust her Algerian servants "to play their part." This comment suggests that a colonial situation requires codified and, importantly, reciprocal roles for both the colonized and the colonizer. She continues: "I'm the first to insist they give up the veil and be educated. I'm a great believer in progress and many of their customs are quite degrading, so how else can they be properly French?" (109). In both this play and in *Cloud Nine*, Churchill calls this idea of progress into question. She poses her challenge most effectively by showing colonial regimes to be many of the things imperialist ideology held the "native" to be: violent, dishonest, brutal, tribalistic (in the negative sense in which the word is used in imperial discourse). When Madame says to Fanon, "I think we are so lucky to live when and where we do and not in some dark age or place," Churchill implies that the era of imperialism is in fact a dark age (139). Though Churchill might well agree that some Muslim practices are degrading to women, she does not accept the complacent ethnocentrism Madame's criticism reveals, and she highlights in this play and elsewhere the degrading features of European attitudes toward women. If Churchill recognizes any progress in the play it is that Algerians are beginning to refuse the roles scripted for them by the colonizer.

But in *Cloud Nine* Churchill challenges the idea of progress implied in the term “postcolonial” by suggesting that British imperial attitudes have changed little since the late nineteenth century. That play—like Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain*, produced the following year—is set both in the present and in the imperial past. This structure allows Churchill, again like Brenton, to suggest that the situation in Northern Ireland is an atavistic continuation of Britain’s imperial past. At the same time, the chronology shows the extent to which the problems of the present are determined by the past. In addition, Churchill shows that Victorian attitudes toward women and sexuality have modern equivalents. In Janelle Reinelt’s words, “The Victorian era was both different and the same as our own time. Churchill suggests that it is a particular kind of ahistorical smugness to think we have transcended it” (*After* 89).

Churchill sets the first act of her play in Africa at the height of the Victorian empire. Based on Churchill’s explanation in the preface to the published edition that a hundred years elapse between the two acts, act one is set in 1879, though she might not have intended such precision (246). Act one concerns the life of a single family, headed by the patriarch Clive; the black servant Joshua; and a few other English people. The first scene calls attention to the kind of imperial rhetoric parodied, for somewhat different purposes, in Osborne’s *The Entertainer* and Arden and D’Arcy’s *The Hero Rises Up*. The cast sings:

> Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride.
>
> Now meet the world united, now face it side by side;

> Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie, roam.
>
> From bush and jungle muster all who call old England 'home'.
>
> Then gather round for England,
>
> Rally to the flag,
>
> From North and South and East and West
>
> Come one and all for England! (251)

Clive then sings alone: "This is my family. Though far from home / We serve the Queen wherever we may roam / I am father to the natives here, / And father to my family so dear" (251). Clive's final point is crucial to Churchill's attack on colonialism and patriarchy, providing the basis for her assertion of a fundamental equivalence between racial and sexual oppression. Clive then introduces his wife Betty, who is played by a man. "My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be," he sings, "And everything she is she owes to me" (251). Betty then sings, "I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life / Is to be what he looks for in a wife. / I am a man's creation as you see, / And what men want is what I want to be" (251).

McClintock comments that "the colonies—in particular Africa—became a theatre for exhibiting the Victorian cult of domesticity and the reinvention of gender" (34). Through various "rituals of domesticity," McClintock explains, "women and colonized peoples were wrested from their putatively 'natural' yet, ironically, 'unreasonable' state of 'savagery' and inducted through the domestic progress narrative into a hierarchical relation to white men" (35). Clive suggests later in the play that women and Africans are similarly savage. A few moments after she sings,

Clive asks Betty what she has done that day. She responds that she has “read a little.” When Betty adds that she was reading poetry, Clive tells her, “You’re so delicate and sensitive,” to which Betty responds by saying that she also played the piano (253). This image of the sheltered European woman would seem to belie the misogynist ideology which holds that woman are savage. The implication of Clive’s remarks, however, is that Betty has been improved—and protected—by being held firmly within the orbit of the patriarchal male. Churchill identifies a process by which these ideas are transmitted, and suggests that women are often complicit in their maintenance, when Maud tells Betty that “The men have their duties and we have ours” (257). A moment later Maud praises Betty for conforming to the role prescribed for her: “You were such a success as a young girl. You have made a most fortunate marriage” (258).

The black servant Joshua, played by a white man, is introduced next. Joshua is both a representative of the African population and an archetypical colonial subject. His relationship with Clive is crucial because, as Terence Ranger explains, “Part of the self-image of the European in Africa was his prescriptive right to have black servants.” “For most Europeans,” Ranger continues, “the favoured image of their relationship with Africans was that of paternal master and loyal servant” (223). Joshua sings:

> My skin is black but oh my soul is white.
>
> I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
>
> I only live for him. As you can see,

What white men want is what I want to be. (251-2)[138]

Clive comments, "My boy's a jewel. Really has the knack. / You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black" (251). Recalling Bhabha's idea of mimicry, the colonial subject must be the same but different. Despite his whiteness on stage, Joshua remains "black." Were Joshua actually white, the logic of his subordination would be broken. (Though the English upper classes subordinated the white working classes and the Irish, an evolutionary and racial logic was at work in those instances too, as McClintock and others have shown.) Joshua's exaggerated and artificial Englishness is a matter of pride for Clive as long as he is confident in the absoluteness of a racial difference that makes identity with the master, as opposed to mimicry, impossible.

Clive's son Edward is introduced next. He is effeminate and played by a woman. In the second act it becomes clear, if it was not already, that Edward is homosexual. In the first act, like Betty and Joshua, Edward is trying to be what the patriarch wants him to be. He sings, "What father wants I'd dearly like to be. / I find it rather hard as you can see" (252). Clive is annoyed that Edward plays with dolls and cannot throw a ball well. Edward further complicates the play's analysis of oppression by adding the issue of sexuality. In addition to the troubling implication that male homosexuals are essentially feminine, Churchill's characterization of

[138] Another precedent for Churchill's representation of Joshua's divided state is William Blake's "The Little Black Boy":

> My mother bore me in the southern wild,
> And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
> White as an angel is the English child;
> But I am black as if bereav'd of light. (24)

Edward, and especially his appearance on stage as a woman, disguises the differences between the forms of oppression suffered by women and gay men. Clive's daughter Victoria also appears in this scene. She is a dummy. At her young age, Victoria is apparently so peripheral to her father's interests that she has no identity at all. In the logic of act one a character can acquire an identity only as a dispensation from Clive.

Though other sources were available to Churchill, Fanon clearly provides her a precedent in her analysis of the imperial family. Fanon writes that "there are close connections between the structure of the family and the structure of the nation. Militarization and the centralization of authority in a country automatically entail a resurgence of the authority of the father. In Europe and in every country characterized as civilized or civilizing, the family is a miniature of the nation" (*Black* 141-2). This model of authority is not confined to the European state itself, but also structures the state's relations with its colonies. McClintock explains that in imperialism

> Because the subordination of woman to man and child to adult were deemed natural facts, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social *difference* as a category of nature. The family image came to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an organic element of historical progress, and thus become indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism (45).

A biological relationship between individuals is employed analogically to naturalize unequal relationships between groups of people. Churchill may have been familiar

with this analysis from Fanon, who argues that "The family is an institution that prefigures a broader institution: the social or national group. [. . .] The white family is the workshop in which one is shaped and trained for life in society" (*Black* 148-9). This point accords well with Churchill's project in *Cloud Nine*. The family, with Clive at its head, not only disciplines its members but, ideally, forms them as subjects so thoroughly that discipline is not needed. This process extends well beyond the biological family, as Joshua demonstrates. Churchill's depiction of Joshua highlights Fanon's key point that "The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative of the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior*" (*Black* 93). In the following passage, Fanon, speaking the voice of an archetypical colonial subject, describes a condition very similar to Joshua's:

> I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself into step with the white world [. . .]. Then I will quite simply try to make myself white; that is I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human. (*Black* 98)

For Fanon this power is also a strategy of knowledge. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he writes that "the settler is right when he speaks of knowing [the natives] well. For it is the settler who brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence"

(36). The familiarity born of mimicry, though, can also become a disguise, and it becomes clear that Clive does not and cannot "know" Joshua well enough to perpetuate his control over him indefinitely.

The other author Churchill points to as an influence on the play's treatment of race is Jean Genet. Genet is particularly significant because he is a playwright who provided Churchill a model for bringing ideas about race to the stage. Passionately opposed to colonialism and intensely interested in race relations in Europe and the United States, Genet was a hero to some elements of the left. Churchill writes in her introduction to *Cloud Nine* of "the parallel between colonial and sexual repression, which Genet calls the 'colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised repression'" (245). She is, in fact, quoting not Genet, but Kate Millett, who writes that Genet's "mature plays are studies in what one might call the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized repression which must conquer itself before it can be free" (350). In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millet chooses Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Genet to illustrate aspects of literary depictions of sexual and power relationships. Genet is chosen "to present a contrast" to the others (vii). "Genet," Millet asserts, "submits the entire social code of 'masculine' and 'feminine' to a disinterested scrutiny and finds it odious" (19). In addition, in Millett's words, "Genet has come to understand how sexual caste supersedes all other forms of inegalitarianism: racial, political and economic" (20). His play *The Balcony* shows, for Millet, "the futility of all forms of revolution which preserve intact the basic unit of exploitation and oppression, that between the sexes, male and female, *or* any of the substitutes for them" (20). Millet

could be accused—as perhaps could Churchill—of suggesting that racial and economic oppression are merely "substitutes" for a more fundamental gender oppression. But Millet's insistence that any meaningful change in society will entail changes in gender relations, so similar to Churchill's, not only shows a congruence in their views but also suggests that the two authors' interest in Genet is determined by similar imperatives.

Christopher Innes has observed that in all of Genet's plays, his "characters are roles, not personalities defined by a coherent set of internal qualities, but masks giving shape to a void or reflected images in a receding perspective of mirrors" (*Avant* 108). Genet writes in the epigraph to *The Blacks: A Clown Show*, the play of his that most clearly influenced Churchill, that "One evening an actor asked me to write a play for an all-black cast. But what exactly is a black? First of all, what's his color?" (3).[139] This anti-essentialism accords with Churchill's ideas about race. *The Blacks* was, in fact, performed by an all-black cast. In the play a group of blacks—who are within the fiction of the play actors performing roles—reenact the murder of a white woman before another group of blacks in white masks who make up the "Royal Court." While some characters wear white masks, others are seen "blacking up" in order to exaggerate their racialized characteristics. The action is essentially a mock trial that occurs simultaneously with a real trial happening off stage. With actors playing actors and a play within-the-play, *The Blacks* involves multiple levels

[139] *The Blacks* has been performed successfully in Britain and the United States, beginning with a 1961 Royal Court production directed by Roger Blin, who directed the play's original French production.

of theatricality, which leaves the "reality" of the events depicted radically undecided. The ultimate effect is to show that racial identity is the product of social systems, that it is scripted like a dramatic role, and that it is, with no essential basis outside discursive practices, open to negotiation and semiotic play. Though these ideas are abstract, Genet expresses unmistakable outrage that such artificial categories are used to oppress people. Thinking about *The Blacks*, Genet asks:

> What then goes on in the soul of these obscure characters that our civilization has accepted into its imagery. But always under the lightly foolish appearance of a caryatid holding up a coffee table, of a train-bearer or a costumed servant bearing a coffee pot? They are made of fabric, they do not have a soul. [. . .]
>
> When we see blacks, do we see something other than the precise and sombre phantoms born of our own desire? But what do these phantoms think of us then? What game do they play? (qtd. in White 429)

Perhaps the most crucial parallel between *The Blacks* and *Cloud Nine* is the notion that racial identities are reciprocal in the sense that whiteness and blackness have come to be defined relationally. This idea should not imply equilibrium, however, since the powerful define racial categories in their own interest. In Genet's play, the blacks have no existence outside the projections of the white imperialist mind. (Fanon expresses this idea succinctly when he writes, "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man" (*Black* 231).) For Genet, racism—and even "race" itself—is a product of

the European imagination and *The Blacks*, in Genet's own words, is "intended for a white audience" (4). Churchill's similar analysis of racism also implies a mostly white audience.[140]

Act one of *Cloud Nine* is similar to Genet's play in other ways as well. In both, the farcical and conspicuously theatrical action on stage progresses while violence occurs off stage. In each case, the action is haunted by a violence that is never clearly delineated, but which constitutes some form of resistance to racial oppression. In each instance this violence suggests the deadly seriousness of the issues treated on stage, and seems to confirm Fanon's assertion that "From birth it is clear to [the colonized subject] that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called into question with absolute violence" (*Wretched* 37). Or, as Millet concludes in her reading of Genet's play, "Blacks, colonials, women, all prisoners of definitions imposed on them by others, must, if they are not to become the victims of their own self loathing [. . .] find freedom by an angry assertion of selfhood and solidarity" (354). Both Churchill and Genet exercise circumspection about imagining the form such an assertion of selfhood would take, a fact that suggests again that Churchill, no less than Genet, is writing for a white audience and is primarily concerned to make that audience conscious of their own prejudices.

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[140] Churchill, though, is less confrontational than Genet. Genet sought to shock and indict his audience. At the end of the play Archibald, who acts as a master of ceremonies directing much of the onstage action, tells the actors who play the Court that "We are what [the whites] want us to be. We shall therefore be it to the end, absurdly. Put your masks on again before leaving" (126). In context, this line carries the threat that violence will be turned against the whites in a way that confirms their deepest fears about the savagery of the blacks.

In the first scene of act one, Churchill begins to sketch the dynamics of the imperial "family" in both its biological and metaphorical forms. Betty complains that Joshua dislikes her and tells Clive that, when she asked him to bring her a book, Joshua said, "Fetch it yourself. You've got legs under that dress" (255). Clive protests that "Joshua has been my boy for eight years. He has saved my life. I have saved his life. He is devoted to me and mine" (254). When Joshua says that he merely made a joke by saying that his legs were tired when the book was close at hand, Clive lectures him: "Madam doesn't like that kind of joke. You must do what Madam says, just do what she says and don't answer back. You know your place, Joshua" (255). But as Joshua leaves, Clive gives him a wink. Clive here is the father disciplining squabbling children—though neither Betty nor Joshua is his offspring. Betty and Joshua's relative position within the "family" is not as clear as Joshua's status as a servant suggests. As a longtime, loyal servant Joshua appears to be the ideal colonial subject. As such, Joshua is accorded some of the prerogatives of his sex, as Clive's wink indicates. Though Joshua's place in the hierarchy of the family is below Betty's, their position is analogous relative to Clive; Joshua is Clive's "boy," not Betty's.

Edward enters a moment later, carrying Victoria's doll. Betty tells him he must not let his father see him with it and, a moment later, "You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never, never. No one will talk to you, you won't be on the cricket team, you won't grow up to be a man like your papa." Edward replies, "I don't want to be like papa. I hate papa" (275). Edward later confesses his words to Clive and asks him to "please beat me and forgive me." Clive responds:

> Well, there's a brave boy to own up. You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand. (276)

Here the male father/son relationship (as opposed to a neutral parent/child one) is archetypical and unassailable. (It matters little that the monarch happens to be a woman.) This relationship transcends all particulars and is worshiped as a sublime form. Since women cannot be fathers or sons, they are excluded from the hierarchy.

In the first scene Churchill reveals the unrest among the Africans occurring off-stage. Caroline Saunders, a young widow who lives nearby, arrives, fleeing the violence. The situation allows Clive to play the role of the patriarch to the fullest. Clive tells Mrs Saunders, as she is most often referred to in the text, that "It is an honor" to help her and that "It is positively your duty to seek my help. I would be hurt, I would be insulted by any show of independence" (258). When Maud asks Clive what has happened, he replies, trying to avoid the subject, "This is not an easy country for a woman" (259). Maud responds, "I heard drums. We are not children" (259). Clive downplays the conflict, explaining that "The tribes are constantly at war, if the term is not too grand to grace their squabbles" (259). Clearly, Clive feels obliged not only to provide the women physical protection, but also to keep them under a kind of psychological quarantine.

Clive and Harry's attitudes toward the Africans in this scene are typically condescending and demeaning. Harry grants that the Africans are "affectionate people," but adds that "They can be very cruel of course" (260). Clive responds, "Well they are savages" (260). Joshua, who is at his most sycophantic in this scene, is apparently exempted from Clive and Harry's judgments. Joshua tells Clive that, among the Africans, "There are many bad men, sir, I pray about it. Jesus will protect us." Clive responds, "He will indeed and I'll also get you a weapon" (260). By giving Joshua a weapon, Clive bestows something amounting to honorary status as a white man. But this may well be the weapon Joshua fires at Clive at the end of act one. Joshua's exaggerated subservience could seem artificial, but at this point in the play he appears to be a genuinely loyal servant whose mimicry of the colonizer demands that he absolutely reject his own culture. This rejection is emphasized later when Edward asks Joshua to tell him a "bad story" (279). Joshua responds with a creation myth involving a "great goddess" (279). These, we presume, are the beliefs of Joshua's culture. When Edward asks if the myth is true, Joshua replies "Of course it's not true. It's a bad story. Adam and Eve is true" (280).

Very soon Churchill begins to create a complex network of sexual intrigue that is sometimes farcical and at other times poignant. Clive and Joshua leave Harry alone and Betty enters. Harry tells her that he thinks of her while he is exploring. When she asks where he been he replies:

> Built a raft and went up the river. Stayed with some people. The king is always very good to me. They have a lot of skulls around the place

> but not white men's I think. I made up a poem one night. If I should die in this forsaken spot, There is a loving heart without a blot, Where I will live—and so on" (261)

The triteness of the lines he composes, especially in light of his homosexuality, suggests that Harry is performing a role that masks his real desires. The echoes of *Heart of Darkness*—the trip up river, the skulls—are obvious here. More importantly, Betty has come to represent "civilization" for Harry much as his Intended does for Kurtz. Harry tells Betty, "you are safety and light and peace and home" (261). "But," Betty comments, "I want to be dangerous," suggesting that this symbolic function is repressive of women. She tells Harry, with a clear sexual implication, "When I'm near you it's like going out into the jungle. It's like going up the river on a raft. It's like going out in the dark" (261). Betty, like Kurtz's Intended, is desexualized, a point which Churchill elaborates in act two. Later Harry tells Betty, "you are a star in my sky. Without you I would have no sense of direction. I need you, and I need you where you are, I need you to be Clive's wife" (268). Clearly, a sexual relationship with her would destroy Betty's symbolic value for Harry. Also, Harry sees the family itself, not just Betty, as symbolic. Later he tells Clive, "A chap can only go on so long alone. I can climb mountains and go down rivers, but what's it for? For Christmas and England and games and women singing. This is the empire, Clive. It's not me putting a flag into new lands. It's you. The empire is one big family. I'm one of its black sheep" (266). It becomes clear later that Harry's exclusion as a "black sheep" is related to his homosexuality. But his intense desire to be part of the heterosexual

family fetishized in imperial ideology causes him, having set aside his compunctions regarding his friendship with Clive, to try to take Betty in his arms. But Betty runs into the house. When Harry realizes that Joshua has witnessed the episode, he propositions Joshua: “Shall we go in a barn and fuck? It’s not an order” (262). Joshua replies, “That’s all right, yes,” and the scene ends.

Despite the fact that Joshua apparently complies willingly with Harry’s wishes, the off-stage sex act between the two is enabled by Harry’s prerogative as a white imperialist and occurs within the power differential between the two individuals involved.[141] Harry’s caveat that his request is “not an order,” implies that it could be and perhaps has been in the past. Churchill gives no indication of Joshua’s own sexual orientation and Harry’s desire is clearly the motive force behind the encounter. Africa here is a forum for the playing out of the colonizer’s desires, while “native” desires are rendered invisible. Harry is not an entirely unsympathetic character and, while his request may be an exercise of imperial power, in the heterosexist world of the play it is not only that. Though Churchill gives no details about the encounter between Harry and Joshua, it could be considered—especially as Joshua replaces Betty so immediately as an object of Harry’s desire—to feminize Joshua, though this reading would be more certain were Harry not gay. (This point is

[141] The sex act between Harry and Joshua can be compared to the infamous rape scene in Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain*, which premiered the following year. But in Churchill’s play the act occurs off-stage, is presumably nonviolent, and cannot be construed as rape in the normal sense of the word. For Churchill, much more attuned than Brenton to issues of homosexuality, the incident is not primarily a metaphor for imperialism, though it seems to be made possible by imperial prerogative.

further complicated in performance, with Betty played by a man.) Africans were in fact feminized in imperialist discourse; as McClintock points out, in the imperial encounter, "the rhetoric of *gender* was used to make increasingly refined distinctions between the different races. The white race was figured as the male of the species and the black race as the female" (55). The argument that Joshua is feminized is strengthened by the seeming interchangeability of racial and sexual subordination under the authority of the white patriarch and by the absence of African women in the play.

The proliferation in the play of sex acts not sanctioned by patriarchal authority suggests that such ideological formations cannot contain the full range of human emotions and desires. And Clive—the patriarch himself—cannot contain his own urges. In his case, there is the further suggestion that ideological strictures make taboo relations all the more desirable. It is clear from early on that Clive and Mrs Saunders are having an affair. Scene two begins with Mrs Saunders leaving the house and Clive protesting that she will be "shot with poisoned arrows" or "raped by cannibals" (262). Though he is acting as prescribed by imperialist ideology in protecting Mrs Saunders, his personal motivations are less chivalrous. He tells her, "Caroline, you smell amazing. You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous" (263). Clive then ducks under her skirt. Mrs Saunders receives pleasure from Clive's efforts, but tells him, "I wish I didn't enjoy the sensation because I don't like you, Clive. I do like living in your house where there's plenty of guns. But I don't like you at all" (263). The fascination of an adulterous

relationship for Clive can be seen as the result of the desexualization of the woman—Betty—in her "proper" role as wife and mother. If Betty represents to Harry something like the what Intended represents to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, Mrs Saunders—much like the mysterious African woman in Conrad's novel—represents for Clive an elicit sexuality associated with the "dark" African continent. Though the racial dynamic is not the same in these instances, they reveal similar aspects of the imperial imagination and suggest that women and Africans are similarly savage.

Later in scene two, Edward tells Harry that he "make[s] up adventures" involving the two of them" (269). Edward tries to give Harry a necklace that he has taken from Betty's jewelry box and tells Harry that he loves him. It becomes clear that Harry has been abusing Edward when Edward says to him, "You know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. I try to do it myself but it's not as good. Don't you want to any more?" (270). Though Harry insists that "it's a sin and a crime and it's also wrong," he acknowledges that they will do it again. Among the illicit relationships in the play, this is the one in which the more powerful of the participants is most culpable because it involves a child. It also complicates the play's message about homosexuality. In its characterization of Edward, Harry, Ellen and, in act two, Lin, the play is generally liberationist. While Edward's effeminacy appears to be innate, the revelation of the abuse he has suffered leaves open the suggestion that his sexuality is the result of childhood trauma, a view which does not further a liberationist project. Harry's pederasty is troubling for similar reasons.

A few moments later, Betty admits to Ellen that she is in love with Harry Bagley. As Betty describes a liaison with Harry, which has apparently occurred offstage, Ellen acts out his role, stroking Betty's hair, putting her arm around her waist and finally kissing her. This exchange ensues:

> BETTY. Ellen, whatever are you doing? It's not a joke.
>
> ELLEN. I'm sorry, Betty. You're so pretty. Harry Bagley doesn't deserve you. You wouldn't really go away with him?
>
> BETTY. Oh Ellen, you don't know what I suffer. You don't know what love is. Everyone will hate me, but it's worth it for Harry's love.
>
> ELLEN. I don't hate you, Betty, I love you.
>
> BETTY. Harry says we shouldn't go away. But he says he worships me.
>
> ELLEN. I worship you Betty.
>
> BETTY. Oh Ellen, you are my only friend. (271)

Churchill explains in her introduction that, while "Harry's homosexuality is reviled, Ellen's is invisible" (245).[142] She also suggests that making female homosexuality visible is part of the play's project (245). Later, when Joshua tells Clive about Ellen's desire for Betty, Clive will not listen. He says to Joshua "you go too far. Get out of

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[142] Millet, in the context of her discussion of Genet, observes that "Whatever its potentiality in sexual politics, female homosexuality is currently so dead an issue that while male homosexuality is gaining a grudging tolerance, in women the event is observed in scorn or in silence" (337).

my sight" (285). Clive's incredulity and willful blindness reinforces Churchill's point that lesbianism cannot be recognized. Later Betty tells Ellen, "You're quite pretty, you shouldn't despair of getting a husband" (281). When Ellen again declares that she loves Betty, she responds, "I love you too, Ellen. But women have their duty as soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can" (281). Ellen's desire is also effaced by her status as a governess. Just as Clive and Harry can express their desires but not Joshua, so Betty can express her desires but Ellen cannot be heard.

After Betty exhorts Ellen to become a mother, an important exchange occurs between Harry and Clive concerning the subject of Harry's relationship with Betty. When Harry asks him to "say nothing about it," Clive replies, "I know the friendship between us, Harry, is not something that could be spoiled by the weaker sex. Friendship between men is a fine thing. It is the noblest form of relationship" (282). Harry concurs. Clive continues, "There is the necessity of reproduction. The family is all important. And there is the pleasure. But what we put ourselves through to get that pleasure, Harry" (282). These lines follow:

> CLIVE. There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us. Between men that light burns brightly.
>
> HARRY. I didn't know you felt like that.
>
> CLIVE. Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us.
>
> HARRY. Clive –
>
> CLIVE. Think of the comradeship of men, Harry, sharing adventures,

> sharing danger, risking their lives together. (282)

Churchill shows the contradiction in an ideology that extols heterosexuality while degrading women and demonstrates that this ideology is detrimental not only to women but also to gay men. A moment after this exchange, Harry embraces Clive, then apologizes for misunderstanding. Clive responds immediately: “My God, Harry, how disgusting” (282). Harry then asks that Clive “not betray [his] confidence.” Clive responds:

> CLIVE: I feel contaminated.
>
> HARRY: I struggle against it. You cannot imagine the shame. I have tried everything to save myself.
>
> CLIVE: The most revolting perversion. Rome fell, Harry, and this sin can destroy an empire.
>
> HARRY: It is not a sin, it is a disease.
>
> CLIVE: A disease more dangerous that diphtheria. Effeminacy is contagious. How I have been deceived. Your face does not look degenerate. Oh Harry, how can you sink to this.
>
> HARRY: Clive, help me, what am I to do?
>
> CLIVE: You have been away from England too long. (282-3)

Harry’s self-loathing is rooted in imperial culture and in a scientific discourse—to which Clive’s comments allude—in which homosexuality is pathologized. Clive’s suggestion that “effeminacy” can “destroy an empire” suggests again the importance of the heterosexual family to imperial ideology and reveals the anxiety latent in the

unsettling parallel between Britain and Rome. Clive asks, “You don’t do it with the natives, Harry? My God, what a betrayal of the Queen” (283). Sex with Africans, who were often characterized not only as primitive but also as sexually degenerate, would be a greater violation of the ideal heterosexual family. In a rhetorical flourish typical of imperialist discourse, Clive’s assertion that Harry has been too long away from England attributes “degeneracy” not only to Africans but to the continent itself. Clive devises a hasty solution to the situation, explaining to Harry, “You must save yourself from depravity. You must get married” (283). He first suggests that Harry marry Mrs Saunders. When Mrs Saunders refuses, Clive arranges a match between Harry and Ellen, who are, of course, both gay.

In the next scene, Clive and Joshua return from flogging some black stable “boys” on whom Joshua has informed for their involvement in the unrest occurring offstage. Mrs Saunders asks Joshua if he minds beating his own people. He replies that they are not his people, which Mrs Saunders interprets to mean that they are members of a different tribe. Joshua explains that this is not the case, but that they are “bad people” (276). Joshua remains for Clive the ideal colonial subject, but the recent violence seems to have shaken the master’s belief in his mission. He reflects:

> You can tame a wild animal only so far. They revert to their true nature and savage your hand. Sometimes I feel the natives are the enemy. I know that is wrong. I know I have a responsibility towards them, to care for them and bring them all to be like Joshua. But there is something dangerous. Implacable. The whole continent is my enemy. I

> am pitching my whole mind and will and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it will break over me and swallow me up. (277)

Clive cannot conceive resistance to imperialism except as the action of recalcitrant children or, as in these lines, partially tamed animals. This passage is followed almost immediately by another in which Clive speaks of women in terms very similar to those he has just used to describe Africans. When Betty confesses her desire for Harry, Clive replies, "Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman. You are not unfaithful to me, Betty. I can't believe that you are" (277). Again here the darkness and inscrutability of women link them with the Africans. Clive tells Betty, "I have never thought of you having the weaknesses of your sex, only the good qualities," revealing again the dichotomous image of woman at the heart of imperial ideology (277). He reassures her that her desire for Harry must have come in "a moment of passion such as women are too weak to resist. But you must resist it, Betty, or it will destroy us. We must fight against it. We must resist this dark female lust. Betty, or it will swallow us up" (277). Clive uses the word "swallow" in connection with both the African continent and this "female lust." For him women and Africans—similarly childlike, deceitful and excessively passionate—seem beyond his understanding and, ultimately, his authority. Churchill shows that Clive's incomprehension is the product not of an essential African or female character radically opposed to that of the white male, but of imperial racism and sexism.

Mrs Saunders reports in the next scene that she found Joshua "putting earth on his head" because his parents were killed by British soldiers the night before. "I think you owe him an apology on behalf of the Queen," she tells Clive. Clive calls Joshua, tells him that he is "Horrified to hear what happened," and asks him if he wants the day off to go to his "people" (284). Again Joshua insists that the Africans are not his "people." Nor does he wish to attend his parents' funeral. Clive tries to comfort Joshua by telling him, "I'm sure [your parents] were loyal to the crown. I'm sure it was all a terrible mistake." Joshua replies, "My mother and father were bad people." When Clive objects, Joshua tells him, "You are my father and mother" (284). Fanon's comments about the Antillean family are relevant to Joshua's situation:

> the Antillean family has for all practical purposes no connection to the national—that is, the French, or European structure. The Antillean has therefore to choose between his family and European society; in other words, the individual who climbs up into society—white and civilized—tends to reject his family—black and savage—on the plane of the imagination. (149)

Joshua's climb in society—to what is still a rather lowly position—is made possible by his rejection of his own family and culture. Fanon has shown that the "European structure" he describes is modeled on the European family. Thus this national "structure" can become a surrogate family for the colonial subject.

The final scene of act one shows the farcical marriage of Harry and Ellen. Clive makes a speech to congratulate the newlyweds as the scene closes. He assures

his listeners that “Dangers are past. Our enemies are killed. [. . .] All murmuring of discontent is stilled.” “Long may you live in peace and joy and bliss,” he tells Harry and Ellen (288). This seems a typical comic ending, with conflict resolved and a marriage ceremony. But the marriage is doomed and the violence that has taken place offstage has created a sense of foreboding. The happy ending is then preempted when, while Clive is speaking, Joshua raises a gun to shoot him. Edward sees Joshua and puts his hand over his ears, but does not alert the others. The scene goes black.

Apollo Amoko notes that very few critics have commented on Joshua’s action at the end of the first act. Amoko suggests that “this decontextualized act appears to be a contrived re-enactment of the stereotype of the randomly violent and murderous African” (54).[143] Though Amoko allows that “Churchill may have intended Joshua’s violence at the end of the act to represent a belated act of native resistance,” he adheres to his interpretation, writing that “the completely decontextualized nature of the shooting undermines its dissident potential” (54). Amoko apparently believes the act is “decontextualized” because it is unexpected and individual. Though it is obviously out of character for Joshua, it is hardly “decontextualized” in that it comes after the murder of his parents and the destruction of his village. And the unrest occurring offstage throughout the play provides an obvious interpretive context. For these reasons, Joshua’s violence is not random or unmotivated.

[143] I do not think the episode is such a “re-enactment”; still, Amoko does not imagine that such a move could be critical and subversive, a point which should be obvious from Genet.

Churchill, in fact, suggests that Joshua's action is motivated, but not by the death of his parents, when she writes that it is "important that [Joshua] is genuinely and totally devoted to Clive all the way through [. . .] He is completely devoted to Clive in and through the killing of his parents (though obviously still partly of his own world in putting earth on his head). It is only when Clive turns on him—get out of my sight—that he flips" (qtd. in Fitzsimmons, *File* 49). Churchill refers here to Clive's response when Joshua tries to tell him about Ellen's desire for Betty. Joshua's outrage, if it is really a response to this rejection and not an anti-imperialist gesture, testifies to the effectiveness in his case of the process of subject formation he embodies. But without the benefit of Churchill's comment, Joshua's intentions are unclear to the audience. But his action demands that the audience consider its motivation. Without countervailing evidence in the play itself, viewers could easily understand the shooting as an act of resistance or revenge. As the only African in the play, Joshua carries some weight as a representative of colonized Africans. This representativeness makes it possible to see Joshua's action as foreshadowing the independence movements of the twentieth century. Within the play, however, this interpretation is a dead-end because Joshua's action is the endpoint (with the minor exception of Clive's comment at the end of the play about Africa becoming communist) of any discussion of Africa or Africans in the play. If Joshua's action does foreshadow colonial independence, the elimination of race from the play's concerns after that point could imply that decolonization marks an end to the history of imperialism. Rather than suggesting any lingering effects of British imperialism in

Africa and Asia, act two refers only to the lingering crisis in Northern Ireland. In *Serious Money* (1987) Churchill will show that many forms of modern capitalism are based on and help to uphold relations between governments and people that closely resemble those of the imperial era. But in *Cloud Nine*, her concern seems to be limited to formal imperialism of an older type. Churchill's comment that Joshua is motivated by his rejection by Clive suggests that he has not conceived of resistance in national terms.

In my view, the cross-casting of Joshua suggests that his identity is more stable than it is, and that he is the finished product of a process of colonial subject formation. While he is in many ways the ideal colonial subject, Churchill's characterization of Joshua suggests that the process can never be complete. Though he proclaims early on that "What white men want is what I want to be," a slippage is evident almost from the beginning, starting with his insubordinate remarks to Betty. And, though Joshua disavows his own parents and says that they were bad people, the distraught gesture of putting earth on his head and his violence against Clive suggest that his efforts to conform to Clive's image of him are conflicted and ultimately unsuccessful. This reading leaves open the possibility that his shooting Clive does in fact represent the wakening of an anticolonial consciousness. Joshua's whiteness on stage could be as much a product of the blindness of the colonizer's gaze to the reality of colonial subjectivity as it is of Joshua's desire to emulate whites. Leaving aside the fact that there were no black actors in the Joint Stock company, Joshua might have been performed more effectively by a black actor in a white mask as in Genet's *The*

Blacks. Like Fanon's metaphor of the mask, this would have demonstrated the artificiality and impermanence of the colonized subjectivity even at its most well established, a point which, I feel, comes out in Joshua's action at the end of the scene. Were he truly the ideal colonial subject, he could never have conceived such violence and would have accepted both the death of his parents and Clive's rebuke with equanimity. In a situation of racial subjugation the outward signs of race—black skin in Joshua's case—cannot cease to be powerful signifiers and the colonial subject can never become the colonizer's equal. Thus the psychic ambivalence suggested by the metaphor of the mask—or, in a slightly different way, by Churchill's cross-casting—cannot be resolved short of dismantling the imperialists' power.

Clive and Joshua together form the dyad of colonizer and colonial mimic as described in Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man." Bhabha hints that mimicry can be used subversively against the colonizer. Firstly, he suggests that mimicry always contains a "difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary power" (86). "[T]he success of colonial appropriation," Bhabha continues, "depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (86).[144] Secondly, to the extent that mimicry is like a mask, it can also be a

[144] Archibald suggests a similar point in Genet's *The Blacks* when he tells the other blacks that "Politeness must be raised to such a pitch that it becomes monstrous. It must arouse fear" (33).

disguise that screens the colonial subject from the gaze of the master. Having described the colonial subject as a "'partial' presence," Bhabha adds: "As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically" (90). In light of his action at the end of act one and his insolence with Betty and Edward, Joshua's exaggerated servility when Clive is present suggests that his mimicry may have this camouflaging function. Though this residual difference in mimicry could perhaps be obscured on stage by the presence of two white actors, the cross-casting could make this aspect of mimicry all the more dramatically effective, especially if we imagine that Clive actually sees Joshua as white. I do not at all mean to suggest that Joshua is plotting Clive's death from the beginning or that he is even aware of the complexities of his subject position, but the slippage within mimicry allows his violent act—whether resistance or retribution—to occur.

Act two takes place in Britain in 1979. Betty, Victoria and Edward reappear. Churchill explains that "A hundred years have passed, but for the characters only twenty-five" (246). She cites two reasons for this chronology. First, she felt that the African scenes "would be stronger set in Victorian times, at the height of colonialism, rather than in Africa during the 1950s." Secondly, the participants in the Joint Stock workshops for the play all felt that "they had received very conventional, almost Victorian expectations [about sex and marriage] and that they had made great changes and discoveries in their lifetime" (246). The chronology also emphasizes Churchill's

point that contemporary conditions are historically determined and that, in this sense, the past remains present. New characters in act two include Victoria's friend Lin and her daughter Cathy, Victoria's husband Martin and Edward's lover Gerry. Edward and Betty are now played by a man and a woman respectively, but Cathy is played by a man. In the original production the actor who played Betty in the first act played Edward in the second, and the actor who played Edward played Betty.

Set at the end of the seventies, act two of *Cloud Nine* is in part a comment on the efforts of leftists and feminists in the sixties and earlier in the seventies to radically reform society. No such transformation has occurred, and Churchill sees the efforts of the radical movements of that period as only very partially successful. She believes, however, that progress has been made. Churchill links this movement with a change in the play's dramatic form: "The first act, like the society it shows, is male dominated and firmly structured. In the second act, more energy comes from the women and the gays. The uncertainties and changes of society, and a more feminine and less authoritarian feeling, are reflected in the looser structure of the act" (*Cloud* 246). The advances Churchill recognizes are apparent at the intersection of the personal and the political. She explains that

> all the characters in [act two] change a little for the better. If men are finding it hard to keep control in the first act, they are finding it hard to let go in the second: Martin dominates Victoria, despite his declarations of sympathy for feminism, and the bitter end of colonialism is apparent in Lin's brother, who dies in Northern Ireland.

> Betty is now played by a woman, as she gradually becomes real to herself. (*Cloud* 246)

Mentioning Ireland in this context links the decline of empire to a weakening of patriarchy. Whether this weakness is the result of pressure from without or a consequence of patriarchy's internal contradictions, it is again clear that Churchill sees patriarchy and empire as interdependent formations. Martin's good intentions and Betty's self-realization reflect a gradual change in mores both necessitated and made possible by the still incomplete—but well advanced—dissolution of empire. Edward experiences a similar transformation to Betty's whereby he comes to terms with his homosexuality and achieves a measure of happiness with Gerry. Though Churchill shows that woman and gays are still subject to oppression and discrimination, there is a wider range of possibility open to them than in the past.

All of act two occurs in an urban park. Victoria and Lin sit while Cathy and Victoria's son Tommy, who never appears on stage, play with other children. Victoria says that she lets Tommy play with toy guns in the hope that "he'll get it out of his system and not end up in the army." Lin then tells her that her brother Bill is in the army in Belfast. "I've got a friend who's Irish and we went on a Troops Out march," Lin adds, "Now my dad won't speak to me" (291). In the next scene Lin hears that Bill has been killed. She tells Victoria, "I rung my father. You'd think I'd shot himself [sic]. He doesn't want me to go to the funeral" (303). The conflict between Lin and her father indicates a generational difference, though the fact that Bill was in the army indicates that the difference may also be related to gender. But the scenes in

the playground suggest that violent behavior is learned and not innately associated with either sex. Cathy asks Lin, "Can I have [Bill's] gun?" (304). This question undermines the notion that males are naturally violent and females naturally pacifistic, and Churchill implies that such stereotypes are in fact the result of narrowly constructed gender roles. In the context of Churchill's project in the play, violence and oppression must be culturally and historically determined.

Lin explains that she left her husband two years earlier. "He let me keep Cathy and I'm grateful for that," she tells Victoria. When Victoria tells her that she "shouldn't be grateful," Lin explains that she is a lesbian. Victoria still insists that Lin shouldn't feel grateful, and Lin replies, "I'm grateful he didn't hit me harder than he did" (291). A moment later, Edward, who is working in the park as a gardener, enters and tells Victoria that Betty is there as well. Lin asks Edward if he's gay. He responds, "Don't go around saying that. I might lose my job" (292). Later he says to Lin, "I wish you hadn't said that about me. It's not true" (292). By showing that Lin's sexuality could compromise her custody rights and that Edward's could lead to him losing his job, Churchill demonstrates just how partial progress has been on this front and that what progress has occurred has mostly taken extralegal forms. And Edward's denial of his gayness testifies to the continued stigma attached to homosexuality.

Betty has left Clive. She complains, "I'll never be able to manage. If I can't even walk down the street by myself. Everything looks so fierce" (298). Betty tells Lin that, by habit, she still puts out two cups for coffee and that she doesn't "know who to do things for" (301). Betty also explains, "I've never been so short of men's

company that I've had to bother with women" and adds that women "don't have such interesting conversations as men. There has never been a woman composer of genius. They don't have a sense of humor. They spoil things for themselves with their emotion" (302). Betty's difficulty being alone, which is understandable, is exacerbated by the dependency she has felt in the past, and her views on women contain the residues of masculinist ideologies. She is unable to see, for example, that, historically, it is not genius but opportunity that women have lacked.

In act two, scene three, Victoria, Lin and Edward are drunk and attempt to perform a ceremony in the park. Victoria speaks this invocation:

> Goddess of many names, oldest of the old, who walked in chaos and created life, hear us calling you back through time, before Jehovah, before Christ, before men drove you out and burnt your temples, hear us, Lady, give us back what we were, give us the history we haven't had, make us the women we can't be. (308)

Giving women a history is, of course, very much a part of Churchill's agenda. The fact that the history outlined in this speech is somewhat fanciful only emphasizes the extent to which women have been written out of standard histories. The revelers apostrophize the goddess as the "Goddess of breasts" and the "Goddess of fat bellies and babies. And blood blood blood" (309). Though these phrases conjure an essentialist notion of women as carnal and maternal, this affirmation represents for Churchill a kind of empowerment. Victoria explains that, in the past, "The priestess chose a lover for a year and he was king because she chose him and then he was

killed at the end of the year" and imagines a matrilineal society that preexisted patriarchy (309).[145] "The women," Victoria adds, "had the children and nobody knew it was done by fucking so they didn't know about fathers and nobody cared who the father was and property was passed down through the maternal line" (309). When a stranger arrives, Lin and Edward goad Victoria into propositioning him. "Hello," Victoria says, "We're having an orgy. Do you want me to suck your cock?" (310). The stranger turns out to be Martin. They all jump on him and, according to the stage directions, "start to make love to him" (310).

Another stranger soon appears, in a soldier's uniform. It is Bill, Lin's dead brother. Churchill explains that the invocation of the goddess, after initially promising a "move into the supernatural," in fact "turns out to be a joke, [. . .] then it turns out that real magic has somehow started" (qtd. in Fitzsimmons, *File* 53). Lin asks Bill if he has come to tell them something. He replies:

> No I've come for a fuck. That was the worst thing in the fucking army. Never fucking let out. Can't fucking talk to Irish girls. Fucking bored out of my fucking head. That or shit scared. For five minutes I'd be glad I wasn't bored. Then we'd come in and I'd be glad I wasn't scared and then I was fucking bored. Spent the day reading fucking

[145] This idea recalls the Pictish society as represented in Arden and D'Arcy's *The Island of the Mighty*. Compare especially the Balin/Balan plot. Brenton also uses the concept of a matrilineal Celtic society for anti-imperialist purposes in *The Romans in Britain*. Though Churchill does not identify the society Victoria imagines is Celtic, the association would be available to the audience and would resonate with the discussion of Ireland later in the scene.

> porn and the fucking night wanking. Man's fucking life in the fucking army? No fun when the fucking kids hate you. I got so I fucking wanted to kill someone and I got fucking killed myself and I want a fuck. (311)

The soldier leaves immediately. This speech provides a perspective on the British presence in Northern Ireland that contrasts markedly with accounts readily available from the government or through the media. But neither is Churchill's description of the conflicted emotions of a British soldier in Ireland typical of anti-imperialist rhetoric. Bill is uninterested in why he was there, and holds no illusions about an imperial mission. Whether or not these attitudes are characteristic, Bill's sentiments reflect, for Churchill, the "bitter end" of imperialism in which reluctant and, in this case, disaffected soldiers, motivated perhaps by economic pressure, carry out the orders a government and a military hierarchy operating on outmoded notions of Britain's imperial destiny.[146]

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[146] Churchill's most direct comment on the legacies of British imperialism and the Irish situation comes in the television play *The Legion Hall Bombing*, which she describes as "the only documentary play I've done" ("Caryl" 81). The play is based on the case of Willie Gallagher, who was tried for the bombing of the British Legion Hall in Strabane, Northern Ireland in 1975. Churchill obtained a transcript of the trial and visited Northern Ireland to meet lawyers and others involved in the case. Despite eyewitness testimony that seemed to exonerate them, the defendants were found guilty on all counts. The script was a shortened version of the transcript that highlighted the incomplete and contradictory aspects of the evidence and the judge's sole responsibility for the verdict. Churchill added short voice-over commentaries at the beginning and the end. (For details of the program see Kritzer, pp. 55-7. The script is unpublished.) The BBC, after delaying transmission for several months, demanded changes in the opening commentary and the elimination of the epilogue (Cousin 115). That epilogue reads:

> This is a British court in Northern Ireland. It is different from any court in England. In 1972 a committee was set up under Lord Diplock, an English judge, to find ways of dealing with terrorists other than by internment without trial, which was causing widespread disapproval. According to the Diplock Committee, it was difficult to get

In the first scene of act two, Lin and Victoria discuss problems with baby sitters and Lin suggests that Martin baby-sit so that she and Victoria can go to the movies. Lin then asks Victoria, "Will you have sex with me?" Victoria hesitates, saying, "I don't know what Martin would say. Does it count as adultery with a woman?" Lin replies, "You'd enjoy it" (296). By the final scene of the play, Victoria and Lin are lovers and living together, along with Edward. Edward is unemployed, but explains, "I am working though, I do housework," a point which echoes the feminist affirmation of the value of unpaid (usually female) labor (315). Martin is learning to mind Tommy and Cathy. Betty has taken a job and is managing her own money. These arrangements point to the possibility of recasting the family in a pragmatic way in order to suit the needs of individuals and distances the family from any essential biological definition.

Gerry turns up and makes arrangements to have dinner with Edward. Then Harry Bagley from act one enters. He and Gerry "pick each other up" and leave (315). A moment later, Maud enters and tells Betty, "Let Mrs Saunders be a warning

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> convictions in the courts, because of the intimidation of potential witnesses and the difficulty of finding impartial jurors for sectarian crimes. They therefore recommended a different kind of trail for political offences, which was adopted under the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act of 1973. There is no jury. The judge sits alone. And the rules of evidence have been altered so that a confession is allowed as evidence even if it was obtained by threats or force. (qtd. in Itzin 280)

Churchill and the director Roland Joffe refused the cuts and asked for a meeting with BBC officials, which they were denied. Churchill suggested a disclaimer absolving the BBC of responsibility for the content of the commentary, but was again refused. The program was broadcast with substantially amended commentary on August 22, 1978. At their request, Churchill and Joffe's names did not appear in the credits. Churchill wrote in 1978 that "The BBC have not banned this play but they have distorted it so that its meaning is changed. This kind of censorship is more subtle and more dangerous that simply banning plays" (qtd in Fitzsimmons, *File* 40).

to you, Betty, I know what it is to be unprotected" (316). Ellen arrives as well, and Edward from act one has appeared briefly in the previous scene. These appearances by characters from act one suggest again the difficulty of change for both individuals and societies. Clive returns to speak the play's final lines: "You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can't believe you are. I can't feel the same about you as I did. And Africa is to be communist, I suppose. I used to proud to be British. There was a high ideal. I came out onto the verandah and looked at the stars" (320). Both women and Africans, whom he struggled so mightily to control in act one, have slipped beyond Clive's grasp and even his knowledge. The nostalgia here strikes a note similar to that of Colonel Redfern's speeches in *Look Back in Anger*. Clive though is a much less sympathetic character than Redfern, and Churchill's attitude toward such nostalgia is much less ambiguous than Osborne's. In light of what has come before, Clive's rather poetic sentiment is an obfuscation of the realities of decolonization. Churchill clearly does not regret the decline of the particular form of Britishness Clive embodies, and she would likely view Africa becoming communist as a sign of progress.

After Clive's concluding speech, the Betty of act one comes on and hugs the Betty of act two. This image of wholeness and reconciliation makes sense in light of this long monologue, which Betty speaks a few minutes earlier:

> I used to touch myself when I was very little, I thought I'd invented something wonderful. I used to do it to go to sleep with or to cheer myself up and one day it was raining and I was under the kitchen table, and my mother saw me with my hand under my dress rubbing away,

> and she dragged me out so quickly I hit my head and it bled and I was sick, and nothing was said, and I never did it again until this year. I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there. And one night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. I thought my hand might go through space. I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there. It felt very sweet, it was a feeling from very long ago, it was very soft, just barely touching, and I felt myself gathering together more and more and I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them, and there was this vast feeling growing in me and all round me and they couldn't stop me and no one could stop me and I was there and coming and coming. Afterwards I thought I'd betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. And I cried because I didn't want to be. But I don't cry about it anymore. (316)

The psychological independence Betty has achieved frees her from a self-definition that can be validated only through the male gaze. She becomes present to herself in a way that allows her to escape the sexual surveillance practiced by Maud and Clive. The effectiveness of this surveillance once it is internalized is evoked in Betty's initial fear of touching herself and the separateness that entails. Betty has changed in a way that allows her to recognize and respect not only her own sexuality, but also

that of her son. Betty says to Gerry, “I think Edward tried to tell me once but I didn’t listen. So what I’m being told now is that Edward is ‘gay’ is that right?” (319). “Well,” she continues, “people say it’s the mother’s fault but I don’t intend to start blaming myself. He seems perfectly happy” (320). The fact that Betty still conceives homosexuality as something for which one can be at fault suggests that her views have not changed entirely, but in act one she cannot acknowledge, or even see, Edward’s (or Harry’s or Ellen’s) sexuality.

McClintock writes in *Imperial Leather* that “imperialism cannot be fully understood without a theory of gender power. Gender was not the superficial patina of empire, an ephemeral gloss over the more decisive mechanics of class or race. Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise” (7). In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill succeeds in showing that familial metaphors and gender categories were used to discriminate between races and to justify the imperialist project. As we have seen, Kate Millett argues that gender oppression is archetypical and that other categories of discrimination including class and race are merely substitutions for the primary category of gender. Churchill does not contend exactly this, but rather that the filial relationship is the archetype and that both women and the colonized are ideologically constructed as the children of the patriarch. Like Millet then, Churchill implies that there is little difference in the ways in which women and colonized peoples are subjugated by white males. In this analysis, the unique ways in which oppression occurs to different groups of people in particular times and places seems somewhat

incidental. Churchill implies that imperial race relations can be adequately understood through to their metaphorical similarity to gender and familial relationships. But because metaphor by definition flattens difference and implies a priority of meaning among unique objects, the use of sex and gender relationships as a way of understanding the racial order of imperialism cannot be sufficient.

McClintock, by contrast, argues that "Race and class difference cannot [. . .] be understood as sequentially derivative of sexual difference, or vice versa." She continues: "the formative categories of imperial modernity are articulated categories in the sense that they come into being in historical relation to each other and emerge only in dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence. [. . .] However, I do not see race, class and gender as structurally equivalent of each other" (61). *Cloud Nine* does little to show the differences between colonial and sexual repression, and the supremacy of the familial model tends to efface those distinctions. This problem is embodied in Churchill's comment in a 1983 interview that she "looked at England's relation to Ireland and how it is like a male/female relationship." "The traditional view of the Irish," she explains, "is that they're charming, irresponsible, close to nature, all the things that people tend to think about women" (qtd. in Aston 35). Despite the importance of these insights to understanding the workings of imperial ideology, the relationship between the two nations resembles that between the sexes only metaphorically and the metaphor can obscure as much as it explains.

I hesitate to indict an author for sins of omission, especially when it can be taken as a conscientious reluctance to try to represent the suffering and subjectivity of

an "Other."[147] Nevertheless, I feel that *Cloud Nine* suffers from the absence of an African character in act two, and that this criticism is somewhat justified in light of the continuity of most of the characters across the temporal divide between the acts. It would seem impossible that Joshua himself could reappear, but, especially because of postwar immigration, it would be perfectly conceivable to include a new African (or other non-white) character. In fact, the absence of a non-white character could, especially for metropolitan British audiences, undermine the extent to which the play is representative of 1970s Britain. Though other characters change by act two, the act largely belongs to Betty and her monologue on masturbation gives the play a measure of closure. The play focuses at this point on the self-realization of the imperialist—albeit a woman—and withholds any such fulfillment from the colonial subject. And Northern Ireland, to which Churchill does refer the second act, cannot stand for the whole of the former empire because of the different racial dynamic at work there. The chronological gap between the first and second acts of *Cloud Nine* focuses attention on the ways in which Britain changed between the height of the Victorian empire and the late 1970s. Most commentators on British history—and not only conservatives—see this interval as a period of unremitting decline. Churchill, however, suggests that, while much has remained the same, Britain has changed a little bit for the better. This

[147] Although Churchill has attempted something like this with Joshua, it can be argued that he is a creation of the European imagination and that Churchill does not really try to represent his subjectivity. Thus we see little of Joshua's psychology and he remains essentially inscrutable—though this portrayal is itself problematic because such inscrutability is frequently ascribed to Africans by a racist imperial discourse.

change consists mainly in the advance of liberal ideas regarding sexuality and the family. She does not choose to highlight the gradual but real changes in the racial and ethnic ideologies of Britishness that play a such a prominent role in her first act.

Top Girls

Churchill's *Top Girls*, like many of the plays I've discussed, including *The Entertainer*, *Plenty*, *Brassneck*, and *The Churchill Play*, is preoccupied with the political well-being and, perhaps more importantly, the moral standing of Britain in the postwar era. Though *Top Girls* has relatively little to say, explicitly at least, about race and empire, the "state of the nation" in this period can hardly be discussed without reference to the dismantling of the British Empire and the social and political legacies of imperialism. And the political movement—Thatcherism—to which *Top Girls* is a direct response was very much a reaction to the real and perceived decline of Britain since the war. According to David Cannadine, "Thatcher came to believe that the problems of the late 1970s, culminating in the miners' strike, stagflation, and the Winter of Discontent, were merely the end point of a century-long period of national decline, of which the years since 1945 had been the worst." For Thatcher, Cannadine continues, the "permissive society" of the sixties "added moral decay to economic degeneration" (*Britain* 22). In addition, *Top Girls* premiered in August

1982, just two months after the end of the Falklands War, which Thatcher very explicitly and publicly construed as an opportunity for Britain to reclaim a measure of the imperial greatness it had lost. In critiquing Thatcherism, *Top Girls*, like the other "state-of-the-nation plays" I've discussed, engages the rhetoric of national decline. Churchill does not accept Thatcher's diagnosis of Britain's decline; for her, Thatcher herself is the most disturbing symptom of the real crisis facing the nation.

The play consists of three acts. The first consists of a single long scene that lasted over forty minutes in production (Naismith vii). Act two contains three scenes of varying length, and act three, like the first, consists of a single long scene.

Churchill sets the first act in a restaurant. The occasion is a celebration of Marlene's promotion to managing director of the Top Girls employment agency. The party includes, in addition to Marlene, five female personages known from history and literature. The two undoubtedly historical women among the five are the Victorian traveler Isabella Bird and the thirteenth-century Japanese courtesan and Buddhist nun Lady Nijo. Of questionable historicity—certainly better known from legend than fact—is Pope Joan, who is thought to have been Pope during the years 854-856. Dull Gret is the subject of the Brueghel painting *Dulle Griet*, which shows Gret dressed in armor and an apron charging through hell at the head of a crowd of women, routing the devils there. (Interestingly, the painting is reproduced in *Brecht on Theatre*. In a section entitled "Alienation Effects in the Narrative Picture of the Elder Brueghel," Brecht praises "the great war painting *Dulle Griet*" (157).) Patient

Griselda, the heroine of a story told by Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer, arrives late. The effect of the scene is radically antinaturalistic. The fantastic element of this first scene is the undisguised product of the author's imagination, rather than an effort at psychological realism, as Churchill implies when she comments that "If you want to bring characters from the past onto stage then you can do it, without having to find a realistic justification, such as presenting it as Marlene's dream" (qtd. in Fitzsimmons, *File* 61-2). This juxtaposition of real and imagined women makes an important point about the relationship between literary and artistic representations and scripted societal roles.

The first to arrive after Marlene is Isabella Bird, who lived from 1831 to 1904. Marlene envies Isabella's life as a traveler, telling her "I'd like to go somewhere exotic like you but I can't get away. I don't know how you could bear to leave Hawaii. I'd like to lie in the sun forever"(55).[148] But Isabella's travels were nothing like the hedonistic escape Marlene desires. As Churchill describes them, they were the struggle of a restless woman to find a place in the world outside of the social constraints to which British women of Isabella's class were subject. Isabella's father was a clergyman. "I tried to be a clergyman's daughter," she tells Marlene, "Needlework, music, charitable schemes. [. . .] I studied the metaphysical poets and

[148] Throughout *Top Girls* and other later plays, Churchill's characters often interrupt each other and speak simultaneously. The interjections are marked with a slash inserted in the text where a subsequent line begins before another ends. Other times interrupted speeches pick up after intervening dialogue. For my discussion here, I have most often omitted the slashes and indicated omitted intervening dialogue with an ellipsis. In quoting a few extended passages of dialogue, I have retained the slashes.

hymnology. I thought I enjoyed intellectual pursuits" (57). These are typical "accomplishments" prescribed for young women of Isabella's background in order to make them marriageable. But Isabella recalls that she was "more suited to manual work. Cooking, washing, mending, riding horses. Better than reading books" (58). These activities are associated either with men or with working-class women. Later in life, she rejected the domestic sphere altogether, remembering that at one point in her travels she "longed to go home, but home to what? Houses are so dismal" (61). This rejection also extended to motherhood; she explains that "I never had any children. I was very fond of horses" (72). Though she is a bit wistful when she makes this comment, Isabella was apparently capable of having children and chose not to.

Isabella had a very close relationship with her sister Hennie, who stayed home in Scotland. After Hennie died, she wondered, "How could I go on my travels without that sweet soul waiting at home for my letters" (65). But she soon "determined to leave [her] grief behind and set off for Tibet" (66). This detail not only suggests that Isabella's break with home is not absolute, but also recalls the sentiments of male imperialists and explorers, which Churchill represents in Harry Bagley's speeches to Betty in *Cloud Nine*. Thus, in addition to taking up traditionally masculine roles and activities, Isabella comes to occupy a masculine position in her relationship with her sister, which points to the difference in the opportunities available to men and women and shows that no role exists for an independent woman without a family except those traditionally considered masculine. Isabella eventually married John, the doctor who nursed Hennie during her fatal illness. Later, when Griselda tells of her oath to

obey the Marquis, Isabella comments, "I swore to obey dear John, of course, but it didn't seem to arise. Naturally, I wouldn't have wanted to go abroad while I was married" (75). The absolute division of the roles of traveler and wife suggests again the limitations imposed on women. Isabella remained discontent after her marriage. She declares that she "cannot and will not live the life of a lady" (80). At the same time, however, she claims, "I always travelled as a lady and I repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press that I was other than feminine" (62). Near the end of her life, Isabella traveled to Morocco. "I was seventy years old," she continues, "What lengths to go to for a last chance of joy" (83). Churchill criticizes the fact that joy, for Isabella, is not accessible within her own society and culture. She presents Isabella as a strong and, especially by Victorian standards, extremely independent woman. Yet Isabella's achievements are individual and isolated from any community of women. It is also important to note that, because of her class standing, the opportunities she had, circumscribed as they are, would not have been available to many British women.

Isabella's narrative raises questions about travel and privilege. It also exemplifies the ambiguous position of the woman imperialist. She recalls a trip she was able to make despite a painful spinal condition. She "managed very well," even as her "muleteers suffered fever and snow blindness," a comment which makes clear the privilege that allowed her to enjoy relative comfort (67). Isabella tells Marlene, "I sent for my sister Hennie to come and join me. I said, Hennie we'll live here together and help the natives. You can buy two sirloins of beef for what a pound of chops costs in Edinburgh" (55). This comment both articulates the civilizing mission of

imperialism and demonstrates the economic advantage that derives from it. In Isabella's case this desire to "help the natives" is linked to religion. She is a member of the Church of England and tells Marlene that "Good works matter more than church attendance" (59). Isabella's later comments on her travels reveal a deep ethnocentrism:

> Such superstition! I was nearly murdered in China by a howling mob. They thought the barbarians ate babies and put them under railway sleepers to make the tracks steady, and ground up their eyes to make the lenses of cameras. [. . .] [T]hey were shouting, 'child-eater, child-eater.' Some people tried to sell girl babies to Europeans for cameras or stew! (69)

When she returned to England, Isabella felt she had "done no good" in her life and undertook a number of philanthropic projects including lecturing the Young Women's Christian Association on "Thrift" (72). "I talked and talked explaining how the East was corrupt and vicious," she explains, "My travels must do good to someone beside myself. I wore my self out with good causes" (72). The charity works Isabella engaged in indicate an impulse analogous to the civilizing mission of the imperialist, but here directed toward the lower classes in Britain.

Lady Nijo is next to arrive. She recounts her experience as a young woman growing up in a strictly patriarchal and hierarchical society and her eventual exile from that culture. In her youth, Nijo was a servant. She describes an incident that occurred when she was fourteen in which the Emperor of Japan, by arrangement with

her father, had sex with her, ripping her gowns in the process. "[W]hen the time came," Nijo recalls, "I did nothing but cry" (57). Churchill uses this incident not only to show the extent of patriarchal authority but also to point out the distance between Marlene's and Nijo's understanding of women's roles, which becomes apparent when Marlene asks, "Are you saying he raped you?" Nijo replies, "of course not, Marlene. I belonged to him, it was what I was brought up for from a baby" (57).[149] Just before he died, Nijo's father told her to "serve His Majesty, be respectful, [and] if you lose his favour enter holy orders" (57). Eventually she does lose favor and becomes an itinerant Buddhist nun. When Marlene suggests that her father meant Nijo to remain in a convent and "not go wandering around the country," she replies, "Priests are often vagrants, so why not a nun?" (57). This seems like an assertion of independence, which Marlene thinks is "wonderful" (57). But Nijo herself is ambivalent. She tells the others, "I can't say I enjoyed my rough life. What I enjoyed most was being the Emperor's favorite and wearing thin silk." This comment shows that her career was not as the flight of a rebellious woman, but an involuntary exile (58). The extent to which Nijo's thinking remains constrained by social authority is revealed when she comments that "The first half of my life was sin and the second all repentance" and is confirmed when Marlene asks, "But don't you get angry? I get

[149] Nijo conforms very much to an orientalist image of the subservient oriental woman. Her story also echoes the orientalist stereotype regarding the inherently authoritarian nature of oriental societies. The import of these orientalist aspects of Churchill's characterization of Nijo and medieval Japanese society is somewhat mitigated by the fact that, especially with the inclusion of Griselda's story, these characteristics are clearly shown not to be unique to oriental societies.

angry." Nijo replies, "But what about?" (59). The power of patriarchal authority is seen most clearly when Nijo tells of an event that occurred when she was eighteen at the Full Moon Ceremony. At this ceremony men "beat their women across the loins so that so that they'll have sons and not daughters" (80). Nijo explains that what angered her was not the beating she suffered, but the fact that the Emperor let his attendants beat her as well. Later Nijo and some other women surprised the Emperor in his rooms and "beat him till he cried out and promised he would never order anyone to hit us again" (81). The women's objection, however, was not to the abuse they had suffered but to the violation of class boundaries.

Nijo's story introduces themes of motherhood and adoption that become important later in the play. When she was seventeen, Nijo became pregnant by a man named Akebono. When the child was born, Nijo remembers, Akebono "wrapped the baby in white and took it away. It was only a girl, but I was sorry to lose it" (70). Here patriarchal authority extends to the denial of maternal rights, and its strength is reflected in Nijo's own disdain for a girl child. Akebono's wife took the child when her own died. Nijo visited the girl once anonymously and saw that she "was being brought up carefully so she could be sent to the palace like I was" (72). This detail emphasizes the fact that gender roles are learned and anatomizes one way in which repressive social practices are reproduced. Nijo later had a son by the priest Ariake, but never saw that child after it was born. Then she had another child, also with Ariake. But Ariake died before this son was born and Nijo was able to keep him. Nijo explains that "oddly enough I felt nothing for him" (72). Churchill suggests here and

later in the play that the maternal relationship is good and natural and that social forces that disrupt it are destructive and inhumane.

Pope Joan arrives soon after Nijo. Because Joan is highly educated and thinks in philosophical and religious terms, she speaks very differently from the others. For example, she tells them that "Damnation only means ignorance of the truth. I was always attracted by the teachings of John the Scot, though he was inclined to confuse God and the world" (58-9).[150] But Joan has only been able to obtain her education by masquerading as a man. She left home at twelve with a sixteen-year-old male companion. Joan explains that they wanted to study in Athens and that she had to dress as a boy because women were not allowed in the library. Eventually, she recalls, "I forgot I was pretending" (63). "I decided to stay a man," she explains, "I was used to it. And I wanted to devote my life to learning" (65). Joan then went to Rome. There she gained renown as an ecclesiastical scholar. Later, she explains, "Pope Leo died and I was chosen. All right then. I would be Pope. I would know God. I would know everything" (66). "I thought God would speak to me directly," Joan tells the others, "But of course he knew I was a woman" (68).

After becoming pope, Joan took one of her chamberlains as a lover and became pregnant. This posed a problem because, in Joan's words, "Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope" (69). The topic of adoption is raised again.

[150] This effect is most dramatic when, near the end of the act, Joan recites a long passage from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* in Latin. The passage concerns the pleasure a person may derive from witnessing the misfortunes of others and proceeds to examine the detached perspective of the intellectual. I hardly need to say that, because the passage is spoken in Latin, any thematic relevance Churchill might have intended would be lost on the large majority of her audience. The recitation in Latin does, however, emphasize the extent to which, as a woman, Joan was isolated by her education.

Foreshadowing the revelations to come about her own past, Marlene comments that "the only thing to do was get rid of it somehow" (69). Nijo, drawing on her own experience, concludes, "You had to have it adopted secretly" (69). But, Joan explains, "I didn't know what was happening. I thought I was getting fatter, but then I was eating more and sitting about, the life of a Pope is quite luxurious. I don't think I'd spoken to a woman since I was twelve" (70). Without realizing what was happening, Joan went into labor in during a procession on horseback. She got off the horse and sat down. "I heard people screaming," she remembers, "'The Pope is ill, the Pope is dying.' And the baby just slid out onto the road" (71). One of the cardinals shouted, "The Antichrist" and fainted (71). Joan was dragged out of town by her feet and stoned to death, along with the child. Joan's story, like Marlene's later in the play, shows the conflict between maternity and the economic and intellectual advancement of women in a male-dominated society. Churchill argues that this conflict does not arise from some natural separation of male and female spheres, but that it is the product of persistent but changeable societal norms.

Dull Gret speaks very little. Though Griselda and Pope Joan do not come from privileged backgrounds, Gret is the only character in the first act (except for the unspeaking waitress) who can easily be identified with the lower orders of society. Her silence, and her ungrammatical speech when she does talk, registers this difference between her and the other characters. But Gret does have one long speech. Very near the end of the scene, with little provocation except perhaps drunkenness, she describes her battle with the devils in hell:

> Hell’s black and red. It’s like the village where I come from. There’s a river and [. . .] a bridge and houses. There’s places on fire like when the soldiers come. There’s a big devil sat on a roof with a big hole in his arse and he’s scooping stuff out of it with a big ladle and it’s falling down on us and it’s money, so a lot of the women stop and get some. But most of us is fighting the devils. [. . .] But [the creatures of hell] don’t hurt, you just keep going. Well we’d had worse, you see, we’d had the Spanish. We’d all had family killed. My big son die on a wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run him through with a sword. I’d had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards. I come out my front door that morning and shout till my neighbors come out and I said, “Come on, we’re going where the evil come from and pay the bastards out.” And they all come out just as they was [. . .] from baking or washing in their aprons, and we push down the street and the ground opens up and we go through a big mouth into a street just like ours but in hell. [. . .] Oh we give them devils such a beating. (81-2)

Not only is this by far Gret’s longest speech, it is, as Linda Fitzsimmons observes, one of the few of any length in the play that was not, in the original production, interrupted by other characters (20). Gret has had ten children and much of her suffering comes from the violence they suffer. She is in some ways reminiscent of Brecht’s Mother Courage; Brecht’s admiration for Brueghel’s painting could also indicate a relationship between the two characters. In a violent and militaristic

society, Gret has been oppressed both because of her gender and her class. The collective action on the part of lower-class women which Gret describes (and Brueghel's painting shows) contrasts with the isolated, individual actions of the other characters and introduces the problem of reconciling class-based politics and feminism that is central to the second and third acts of the play.

Patient Griselda enters about two-thirds of the way through the scene. She is disinclined to talk, but Marlene coaxes her story out of here. Griselda was fifteen when, on his wedding day Walter, a Marquis, stopped his carriage outside Griselda's cottage and asked her father to allow her to marry him. Griselda explains: "he said it wasn't an order, I could say no, but if I said yes I must obey him in everything" (75). Marlene interjects, "That's when you should have suspected" (75). Griselda replies, "But of course a wife must obey her husband" (75). Griselda soon gave birth to a daughter. When the child was six weeks old, Walter told Griselda that the people hated her because she was "just one of them" and that they were restless because she had had a child (76). Walter tells her that they must get rid of the child. Griselda explains that Walter "said he wouldn't snatch her, I had to agree and give her up" (76). She agreed, and soon after a man came to take the child. When Marlene asks Griselda if Walter was "normal" at first, she replies, "Of course he was normal, he was very kind" (76). Griselda continues to defend Walter, explaining that he "found it hard to believe I loved him. He couldn't believe I would always obey him. He had to prove it" and that giving up the child was "hard for him too" (76). Several years later, after Griselda gives birth to a son, Walter repeats his request and the child is taken

away. After this, Griselda explains, it was twelve years until Walter "tested" her again (78). On this occasion he told her that the people wanted him to marry another woman who would provide him with an heir. She returned to her father. Soon afterward, Walter sent for Griselda to help him prepare for the wedding. "The girl was sixteen and far more beautiful than me," Griselda remembers, "I could see why he loved her. She had a younger brother with her as a page" (78). Just before the wedding, Walter kisses Griselda and tells her that the young girl and her companion are actually her children.

The characters react quite differently to Griselda's story, and their reactions are roughly correlated with their acceptance or rejection of women's oppression or, to put it somewhat differently, the success with which they have been conditioned to accept female subservience. Marlene believes at first that Walter had the first child killed. When Griselda comments that it "was Walter's child to do what he liked with," Marlene—the modern, apparently emancipated woman—tells her, "Walter was bonkers" (77). Isabella, who is presented here as a sort of Victorian proto-feminist, is politely appalled, exclaiming, "Oh my dear" (77). Gret, sullen and undeluded, simply says, "Bastard" (77). When Griselda tries to explains that Walter's actions were a test of her love for him, Joan struggles to comprehend, asking, "He killed his children to see if you loved him enough?" (77). Nijo, whose attitudes resemble Griselda's more than any of the others', tells her, "I understand. Of course you had to, he was your life" and asks, "And were you in favour after that?" (77). Griselda replies, "Oh yes, we were very happy together. We never spoke about what had happened" (77). When

Griselda finishes her story, Marlene swears that “Walter’s a monster” and asks “Weren’t you angry? What did you do?” Griselda replies only that Walter “suffered so much all those years” (79). Marlene wryly concludes, “You really are exceptional, Griselda” (79).

Churchill’s appropriation of Griselda’s story—the fiction of a male author—suggests that she is conscious of the ways in which the European literary tradition supports masculine authority. As a literary artifact, the story of Patient Griselda is a hegemonic representation of women as obedient and dependent. The story, perhaps conceived originally as a exemplum for medieval wives and daughters, becomes in Churchill’s hands an object lesson in subjugation of women. But by including Gret, also an invented character, Churchill can—without claiming knowledge of Brueghel’s intentions—suggest the subversive potential of representation, or at least show that representation is not necessarily hegemonic.

Nijo is the only non-Western character in the first act.[151] The difference in cultures is emphasized when Isabella says, “I tried to understand Buddhism when I was in Japan but all this birth and death succeeding each other through eternity just filled me with the most profound melancholy” (60). Isabella’s ethnocentrism is mirrored when Nijo asserts that she “had never heard of Christianity” and refers to

[151] Significantly, Nijo was played in the first production by a white actress. No effort was made to change her hair color or otherwise make her look more stereotypically Japanese. This decision—whether or not it was a matter of necessity—prevents an easy identification of race and identity and highlights the constructed, non-natural quality of culture. In production, the choice could complicate any criticism of the orientalist aspects Churchill’s characterization of Nijo’s because it suggests a deliberate effort to undermine the racial essentialism that underlies orientalism.

Christians as “Barbarians” (60). A moment later, Isabella replies, “There are some barbaric practices in the east” (60). This exchange dramatizes the relativity of cultural assumptions and the hazards of judging cultures by external standards. The mutual incomprehension between Nijo and the other characters points to the cultural specificity of each character’s experience. On the whole, however, the first act tends to universalize women’s oppression. Though Churchill conveys some of the cultural specificity of her characters’ experience, the conceit of the act necessarily decontextualizes that experience. Looking at women’s experiences across cultures could further Churchill’s project by showing that oppression is culturally specific and not in any sense natural. In the conspicuously artificial space of the first act, however, there is a danger that the importance of understanding oppression within a particular cultural context might be diminished by the apparently equivalent and archetypical nature of many of the characters’ experiences. For some members of the audience, this might even suggest that male dominance is, if not natural, inevitable. For a British audience, this effect could discount the importance of interrogating national traditions as they impinge upon women’s freedoms.

Churchill appears in this first act to celebrate the progress women have made as figured in Marlene. Marlene helps create this impression when she toasts the others: “We’ve all come along way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements” (67). Though Isabella is talking about Marlene’s accomplishment and not about women in general, the hopeful note she strikes when she tells Marlene, “I’m sure it’s just the beginning of something

extraordinary" also contributes to the feeling that Churchill is praising Marlene and women like her (67). But this impression is severely undercut later in the play, and there are hints even in the first act that Churchill is not applauding Marlene's advancement unreservedly. Nijo's comment that Marlene has been promoted "Over all the women you work with. And the men" suggests the persistence of hierarchical relationships that allow for the advancement of only a few members of either sex at the expense of others and that successful women like Marlene have merely usurped a traditionally male position in a inequitable system that remains largely unchanged, ideas which Churchill elaborates in act two and three (67). More significant is the presence of an unspeaking waitress in the first act. Her silence and servility demonstrates that the luxury of the dinner—the tangible sign of Marlene's success—is made possible in part by the continued exploitation of other women.

In the second and third acts, Churchill abandons the antinaturalistic methods of the first. The universalizing tendency of the first act, which suggests a common experience of female oppression across cultures and through centuries, is balanced in the later acts by an examination of the status of women in a very particular time and place: Thatcherite Britain in the early 1980s. This choice could suggest that the conspicuously theatrical elements of the first act are somehow inadequate, or perhaps simply too indirect, to address the very topical issues Churchill treats in the later acts. Though the first act, with its alienation of aspects of the audience's own culture and its playful theatricality, is Brechtian only in very general ways, this move toward a more naturalistic (and more traditional) mode could constitute, if not a rejection of

Brecht, perhaps a reservation on Churchill's part about the expressive range and political limitations of Brechtian theatre. Whatever the case, Churchill's choice testifies to her belief in the urgency of the issues she addresses in the later parts of the play. Even in the subsequent acts, however, the memory of the first persists, and the stylistic disjunction between the acts could itself serve a Brechtian purpose.

Much of act two consists of Marlene and her co-workers Win and Nell conducting interviews with Top Girls clients. All three of the interviews make the point that women are required to present themselves in a certain way, both by being attractive and by being—often falsely—assured and aggressive. In the first of these interviews, Marlene speaks with a client named Jeanine, a secretary who wants a "change" (84). She is twenty and makes a hundred pounds a week. She wants "prospects," she tells Marlene, "I want more money" (84). When Jeanine explains that she is "saving to get married," Marlene asks, "does that mean you don't want a long term job, Jeanine? [. . .] Because where do the prospects come in? No kids for a bit?" (85). They agree that Jeanine should not tell employers that she is getting married. Jeanine says that she might accept a job with an advertising company, but Marlene explains that such companies are "looking for something glossier" (85). Marlene suggests a job as a secretary to the marketing manager of a knitwear firm, but adds that she "sent [the manager] a girl before and she was happy, left to have a baby, you won't want to mention marriage there" (86). When Jeanine comments that she would like a job in which she could travel, Marlene tells her she must plan ahead to become a "personal assistant to a top executive in a multinational" (86). Marlene

then asks, “Is that where you want to be in ten years?” “I can’t think about ten years,” Jeanine admits (86). “Your presentation’s OK, you look fine,” Marlene concludes, “just be confident and go in there convinced that this is the best job for you and you’re the best person for the job” (87). This interview shows very well the pressures a woman in Thatcher’s Britain faces, both as a woman and as a worker in an aggressive capitalist culture. Marlene’s comments about Jeanine’s appearance and her lack of a “glossy” image suggest that women are not yet judged on their merits. The positions Marlene suggests would require Jeanine to become an assistant to a powerful male and are not unlike the jobs to which women have long been relegated. The necessity of hiding her engagement—which might make her seem “available” to her employer—and postponing pregnancy impinges on her ability to manage her personal life and control her body. Churchill also proposes that the requirement that a twenty-year-old have a concrete plan for what she will be doing in ten years is another stultifying influence of capitalism.

In two other interviews, Churchill elaborates her views on women’s economic status in postwar Britain. In one Win interviews a woman named Louise, who is 46 and has worked the same job for 21 years. Win explains that Louise’s age is “not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it’s not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something” (105). Louise says that she has “lived for” the company she works for and that she has “built up a department” but “spent twenty years in middle management.” She continues: “I’ve seen young men who I trained go on, in my own company or elsewhere, to higher

things" (105-6). Louise is describing a "glass ceiling" that preserves male prerogative and economic advantage despite an apparent increase in women's opportunities. Win asks Louise if she is the only woman in the company. She replies:

> Apart from the girls of course, yes. There was one, she was my assistant, it was the only time I took on a young woman assistant, I always had my doubts. I don't care greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work. But I did take on this young woman, her qualifications were excellent, and she did well, she got a department of her own, and left the company for a competitor where she's now on the board and good luck to her. She has a different style, she's a new kind of attractive well-dressed—I don't mean I don't dress properly. But there is a kind of woman who is thirty now who grew up in a different climate. They are not so careful. They take themselves for granted. I have had to justify my existence every minute. (106)

The age discrimination she faces makes Louise's resentment of younger, more attractive and more assertive women understandable. Louise has achieved some success by "pass[ing] as a man," whereas younger women, as she describes them, conform to an image fostered in postwar culture of an independent, career-oriented woman. Louise's dismissive attitude toward "the girls" suggests that she retains some masculinist ideas about women's work. Along with her envy of her former assistant, this attitude shows how little the business world Louise inhabits fosters any sort of feminine solidarity.

In the final interview, Nell confers with a woman named Shona who claims to have been working as a traveling salesperson. Nell asks her about her ability to close a deal: "that's what an employer is going to have doubts about with a lady as I needn't tell you, whether she's got the guts to push through to a closing situation. They think we're too nice. They think we listen to the buyer's doubts. They think we consider his needs and feelings" (115). Shona replies that she "never consider[s] people's feelings." Nell is impressed and raises the possibility of Shona working at Top Girls. She asks Shona to tell her more about her present job. Shona describes driving a Porsche, staying in posh hotels and eating steaks and smoked salmon on an expense account (117). Nell immediately recognizes the story as a fabrication. Nell asks her, "And what jobs have you done? Have you done any?" Shona replies, "I could though, I bet you" (117). Shona's dissimulation and her elaborate fiction of a glamorous career further testify to the power of the image of a modern business woman fostered by the individualistic ethos of Thatcherism.

Marlene's sister Joyce and Angie, who we believe at this point to be Joyce's daughter but is in fact Marlene's, appear in scene two, along with Angie's friend Kit. Angie is sixteen and Kit is twelve, but Kit is clearly sharper and, in some ways, more mature. The girls are hiding from Joyce in the back yard of Joyce's house. As she calls, Angie complains that Joyce won't let her go to a movie and tells Kit that she wishes Joyce were dead (87). Angie even imagines killing Joyce; she tells Kit, "I'm going to kill my mother and you're going to watch" (90). She also tells Kit, "If I don't get away from here I'm going to die," at which point Joyce emerges again from the

house, this time offering the girls tea and chocolate biscuits if they come in. When there is no response, Joyce says so that Angie can hear, "Fucking rotten little cunt. You can stay there and die. I'll lock the back door" (91). Kit explains to Angie, "my mother says there's something wrong with you playing with someone my age. [. . .] People your own age know there's something funny about you. She says you're a bad influence" (93). All the characters who know her concur that there is something "wrong" with Angie. Churchill strongly suggests that Angie's condition—which is never explicitly defined—is rooted in her relationships with Joyce and Marlene. Neither sister has, Churchill demonstrates, been a suitable mother to Angie.

Angie tells Kit that she is going to London to see her Aunt Marlene. "She's special," Angie explains, "My mother hates her" (94). After Kit presses Angie repeatedly to tell her why her aunt is so special, Angie says, "I think I'm my aunt's child. I think my mother's really my aunt" (95). When Angie leaves to clean her room, Joyce tells Kit that Angie, who has dropped out, should have stayed in school. Kit replies that Angie "didn't like it" Joyce responds: "It wouldn't make no difference to Angie. She's not going to get a job when jobs are hard to get. I'd be sorry for anyone in charge of her. She's better get married. I don't know who'd have her, mind. She's one of those girls might never leave home" (96-97). Joyce's unsympathetic assessment of Angie's prospects, Churchill implies, is realistic in the political and economic climate of Thatcher's Britain. For women who cannot be what the marketplace demands, the poverty of a menial job or the dependence of a homemaker are the only options. Though *Top Girls* does not propose a model for a more

egalitarian society, it does argue that exploitative economic relationships are inherent in capitalism and that the failure to achieve a truly socialist society in the postwar period has been a major setback for women. As the scene ends, Angie returns wearing an "old best dress," which is slightly small on her (98). While Joyce chastises her for wearing the dress and not cleaning her room, Angie picks up a brick. When Joyce leaves, Angie tells Kit, "I put on this dress to kill my mother" (99).

Scene three returns to the Top Girls agency. Nell and Win discuss Marlene's promotion and the fact that she was chosen over a man named Howard Kidd. Nell says that "Howard thinks because he's a fella the job was his as of right. Our Marlene's got far more balls than Howard and that's that" (100). Even for these apparently liberated women, the qualities required for success, as it is defined here, are inherently masculine. That Marlene's promotion has deprived Howard of some of these qualities is suggested when Win refers to him as a "Poor bugger" (100). Nell and Win are pleased with Marlene's success, but remain competitive and jealous. They see the increased opportunities for women in business entirely in terms of their own desires and aspirations, not as an advance for women as a group. Nell expresses a desire to move on, commenting that "There's not a lot of room upward" after Marlene's promotion (100). Win and Nell are pleased that Marlene, not Howard, will be their boss. But when Marlene asks Nell, "Do you feel bad about it?" Nell replies, "I don't like coming in second" (104).

Angie arrives a few moments later. Marlene doesn't recognize her at first and then assumes that she has come with Joyce. Marlene is put out when it becomes clear

that Angie has not purchased a return ticket and wants to stay with her. She tells Angie that she can sleep on the sofa. Angie tells Marlene, “I knew you’d be in charge of everything” and comments that Marlene’s visit a year before “was the best day of my whole life” (110).

Angie and Marlene’s conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Howard Kidd’s wife. Mrs Kidd says that Howard is “feeling poorly” and is “in a state of shock” after being passed up for the promotion. She asks Marlene, “What’s it going to do to [Howard] working for a woman? I think if it was a man he’d get over it as something normal” (112). Though Mrs Kidd is made to seem old-fashioned, she is not entirely unsympathetic. Churchill makes it easy to see her anxiety as the result of her precarious economic position and dependence on her husband when Mrs Kidd explains, “It’s me that bears the brunt. [. . .] I put [Howard] first every inch of the way. And now what do I get? You women this, you women that” (112). When Mrs Kidd explains that Howard has “a family to support,” it becomes clear that she wants Marlene to let Howard have the job (113). But Marlene is not sympathetic, saying that Howard “can go and work somewhere else” (113). Mrs Kidd then attacks Marlene, telling her, “You’re one of these ballbreakers that’s what you are. You’ll end up miserable and lonely. You’re not natural” (113). “Ballbreaker” suggests again the challenge to masculinity Marlene embodies, while Mrs Kidd’s accusation that Marlene is unnatural shows the power of sexist stereotypes, even for women. Marlene asks Mrs Kidd, “Could you please piss off?” (113). Angie tells Marlene she is

“wonderful” after Mrs Kidd leaves (113). She comments a moment later that “This is where I most want to be in the world” (113-4).

The third and final scene of act two shows Angie and Win in conversation. Angie is attracted to the confidence and independence of women like Win and Marlene, and asks if Win thinks she could work for Top Girls. Win replies gently, “Not at the moment” and asks Angie what she can do. Angie replies, “I don’t know. Nothing” (118). Angie then falls asleep and Nell arrives with news that Howard Kidd has had a heart attack. Marlene says simply, “Poor sod.” Nell remarks, “Lucky he didn’t get the job if that’s what his health’s like” (120). Win tells Marlene that Angie wants to work with them. She replies, “Packer in Tesco more like” and explains that Angie is “a bit thick” and “a bit funny.” When Win tells Marlene that Angie thinks she’s wonderful, she replies coldly, “She’s not going to make it” (120).

Act three takes place a year earlier. Marlene visits Joyce and Angie, bringing several gifts for Angie, including the dress she puts on in act two. The estrangement between the sisters is immediately evident. Marlene has not visited for six years. After Joyce tells Marlene that she should have written that she was coming, it comes out that Angie called and invited Marlene without Joyce’s knowledge. When Marlene says that she does not feel welcome, Joyce tells her: “You can come and see Angie anytime you like, I’m not stopping you. You know where we are. You’re the one went away, not me. I’m right here where I was. And will be a few years yet I shouldn’t wonder” (124). Kit arrives and Joyce tells Marlene that Kit is “Like a little sister to [Angie] really. Angie’s good with children” (126). Marlene asks Angie if she

wants to be a teacher or a nursery worker, and Joyce replies, "I don't think she's ever thought of it." Then Marlene asks Angie directly what she wants to do, but again Joyce speaks for her: "She hasn't an idea in her head what she wants to do. Lucky to get anything" (126). Joyce tells Marlene that Angie is "not clever like you" (126).

Churchill does not specify where Joyce and Angie live, but it is some distance from London. For Marlene, her travels and her career are an escape; for Joyce, who tells Marlene that she has "four different cleaning jobs," Marlene's decision to leave is a betrayal (136). London and the United States represent for Angie and Joyce an entirely different world from their own. Angie treasures a postcard from the Grand Canyon that Marlene sent and asks her to take her with her next time she goes to America. Angie is certain Marlene will go again soon because "People who go [to America] keep going all the time, back and forth. They go on Concorde and Laker and get jet lag." Angie also comments that she "want[s] to be American" (129). Marlene's view of Joyce's home as backward and provincial also points to the profound economic and cultural divisions between London and much of the rest of Britain. The sisters represent two cultures; one affluent, mobile and aggressively modern, the other comparatively old fashioned and impoverished. Angie is rooted in the latter, but envies the former, which is for her little more than a seductive image of the possibilities she has not known.

The sisters' differences have much to do with their attitudes toward their parents. Marlene, who has been more distant from and critical of her parents, especially their father, recalls getting drunk with Joyce after their father died. "I got

drunk," she remembers, "You were just overcome with grief" (126). Joyce tells Marlene that she still puts flowers on the grave. Marlene asks if she has seen their mother recently. Joyce replies that she visits her every Thursday. When Marlene tells Joyce a few minutes later that she has visited their mother earlier in the day, Joyce asks if she recognized her. A crucial exchange begins when Marlene comments that her mother has had an awful and wasted life. Joyce becomes defensive, telling Marlene, "don't go on about Mum's life when you haven't been to see her for how many years" (132). When Joyce comments that Marlene was very eager to leave, she replies: "I couldn't get out of here fast enough. What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed? Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch fucking tell me what to do" (133). This exchange comes a few minutes later:

> JOYCE. You say mother had a wasted life.
>
> MARLENE. Yes I do. Married to that bastard.
>
> JOYCE. What sort of life did he have? / Working in the fields like
>
> MARLENE. Violent life?
>
> JOYCE. an animal. / Why wouldn't he want a drink?
>
> MARLENE. Come off it.
>
> JOYCE. You want a drink. He couldn't afford whisky.
>
> MARLENE. I don't want to talk about him.
>
> JOYCE. You started, I was talking about her. She had a rotten life because she had nothing. She went hungry.
>
> MARLENE. She went hungry because he drank the money. / He used

to hit her.

JOYCE. It's not all down to him. / Their lives were rubbish. They

MARLENE. She didn't hit him.

JOYCE. were treated like rubbish. He's dead and she'll die soon and what sort of life / did they have? (138-9)

For Marlene, her mother's marriage was something terrifying that convinced her at the age of thirteen that she must leave home. She describes watching her father beat her mother, and says that she still has dreams about it (139). This experience seems to be at the root not only of her flight, but also of her feelings about the necessity for women to be strong and independent. The sisters' different views on domestic violence are important. Joyce excuses—or at least mitigates—her father's crime by showing its roots in economic oppression, a defense motivated by class feeling. Here, Churchill implies a criticism of a leftist analysis that sees economics as the sole determining factor in social problems. For Marlene, her father's actions are, even now, horrific and cannot be extenuated. By contrasting these viewpoints, Churchill makes available a perspective in which domestic violence is seen to be both conditioned by deprivation *and* absolutely objectionable.

Marlene and Joyce then discuss Angie. "I don't know how you could leave your own child," Joyce says. "You were quick enough to take her," Marlene replies, "You couldn't have one so you took mine" (133). Marlene gave birth when she was seventeen, and Joyce's apparently unofficial adoption of Angie made possible Marlene's escape to London and, eventually, her career. When Joyce observes that

Marlene would "be getting a few less thousand a year" if she had kept Angie, Marlene replies, "I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money" (134). Joyce draws Marlene's attention to this woman's privilege by asking, "So what's that got to do with you at the age of seventeen?" (134). Joyce concludes, "You shouldn't have had it if you wasn't going to keep it" (134). When Marlene asks, "Don't you want her?" Joyce replies, "Of course I do, she's my child" (134). Though Churchill is not making a detailed case for the rights of adoptive parents, this exchange implies that motherhood is not defined simply by biology. A moment later Marlene tells Joyce, who is infertile, "I've been on the pill so long I'm probably sterile" and that she has had two abortions (135). These details point again to the incompatibility of "success" as defined by Marlene and motherhood.

After a their tempers cool for a moment, Joyce and Marlene argue again, about politics this time. This new argument begins when Marlene comments that she thinks the eighties "are going to be stupendous" and Joyce asks, "Who for?":

> MARLENE. For me. / I think I'm going up up up.
>
> JOYCE. Oh for you. Yes, I'm sure they will.
>
> MARLENE. And for the country, come to that. Get the economy back on its feet and whoosh. She's a tough lady, Maggie. I'd give her a job. / She just needs to hang in there. This country
>
> JOYCE. You voted for them, did you?

MARLENE. needs to stop whining. / Monetarism is not stupid.

JOYCE. Drink your tea and shut up, pet.

MARLENE. It takes time, determination. No more slop. / And

JOYCE. Well I think they're filthy bastards.

MARLENE. who's got to drive it on? First woman prime minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote.

JOYCE. What good's the first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. / Great adventures.

MARLENE. Bosses still walking on worker's faces? Still Dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the individual. Look at me. (138)

Marlene's comment about "whining" recalls Thatcher's sentiments about the left and, particularly, the social movements of the sixties and seventies. Though Marlene calls Joyce a "parrot," she herself seems to be speaking a political rhetoric uncritically because it justifies her own priorities and choices. At the same time, she radically oversimplifies Joyce's position. Though Joyce is not an entirely admirable character and is certainly not a mouthpiece for Churchill, the weight of this argument is on her side. Thatcher epitomizes for Churchill the successful woman who has turned her back on women as a group; in this sense she resembles the women at the Top Girls

agency. Churchill's criticism of the individualism Marlene voices is illuminated by her recollection of the time when she was working on *Top Girls*:

> Thatcher had just become P.M.; and also I had been to America . . . and had been talking to women there who were saying things were going very well: they were getting far more women executives, women vice-presidents and so on. And that was such a different attitude from anything I'd met here, where feminism tends to be much more connected with socialism and not so much to do with women succeeding on the sort of capitalist ladder. All those ideas fed into *Top Girls*. (qtd. in Naismith xxii)

Elsewhere Churchill argues that "things have got much worse for women under Thatcher" ("Caryl" 78). The relative stability and affluence of those years, she wants to show, have been accompanied by social and ideological retrenchment. Churchill commented in an interview at the time of the first American production of *Top Girls* that "there's no such thing as right-wing feminism" (qtd. in Stone 82). For Churchill, conservative politics and patriarchal authority are inseparably linked, and it mattered little that in the eighties the leading figure in British politics was a woman. Joyce conveys Churchill's critique of Thatcherite individualism when she tells Marlene that she, Marlene, would be ashamed of her if she came to the Tops Girls office. But, Joyce says, "I'm ashamed of you, think of nothing but yourself, you've got on, nothing changed for most people, has it?" (139).

“I don’t believe in class,” Marlene says finally, “Anyone can do anything if they’ve got what it takes” (140). Perhaps Marlene’s comment is simply a provocation; perhaps her investment in Thatcher’s ideology actually prevents her from recognizing the importance of class differences. Joyce asks what will happen to those who don’t have “what it takes.” Marlene responds, “If they’re stupid or lazy or frightened, I’m not going to help them get a job, why should I?” (140). “What about Angie?” Joyce asks, “She’s stupid and lazy and frightened” (140). When Marlene replies that Angie will be “all right,” Joyce responds, “I don’t expect so, no. I expect her children will say what a wasted life she had. If she has children. Because nothing’s changed and it won’t with them in” (140). Churchill uses this dialogue to argue that much greater and more fundamental changes will be necessary if “ordinary” women—here represented by Joyce and Angie—are to advance as a group. Joyce leaves and Angie comes downstairs. These lines follow:

> ANGIE. Mum?
>
> MARLENE. Angie? What’s the matter?
>
> ANGIE. Mum?
>
> MARLENE. No, she’s gone to bed. It’s Aunty Marlene.
>
> ANGIE. Frightening.
>
> MARLENE. Did you have a bad dream? What happened in it? Well you’re awake now, aren’t you pet?
>
> ANGIE. Frightening. (141)

Thus the play ends. It is not clear how much Angie has overheard, but her repetition of the word “frightening” seems to be both her assessment of her own situation and relationships and Churchill’s comment on the state of the nation and its culture under the Conservative government.

Churchill explains that she “quite deliberately left a hole in [*Top Girls*], rather than giving people a model of what they could be like. I meant the thing that is absent to have a presence in the play” (qtd. in Stone 80). She provides no political model, either for the individual or society. Though Churchill is very critical of Marlene, neither is Joyce a model. She is more sympathetic in some ways, but Churchill suggests that her narrow, Labourite leftism cannot provide an adequate understanding of the position of women in society, or any basis for a feminist politics. Though some of the women in the first act have admirable qualities, none of them provide a model either. None are sufficiently conscious of their position as women and some, particularly Nijo and Griselda, are too thoroughly enmeshed in masculinist ideologies to conceive any resistance to or even critique of sexist ideologies. Gret has more agency and is undeluded, but is unable to articulate any feminist position. Joan, who in terms of education and articulacy is Gret’s opposite, cannot use her learning to further a feminist project, largely because of the sexism of learned institutions, including the Church. One can imagine a combination of qualities of various characters being politically efficacious, but any such formulation remains speculative.

Marlene has had much more opportunity than any of the other women. Churchill argues that she has squandered that opportunity by being content with

material gains. As Geraldine Cousin puts it, "There is a wider range of possibilities open to [Marlene] than was available to [the] women from the past, but her horizons are narrower" (96). Churchill is most critical of Marlene's failure to imagine a path other than the one she has taken—to fill that "absence" in the play. Because she is smart and relatively empowered, she is all the more to blame. By supporting the capitalist philosophies of Thatcherism, Churchill implies, Marlene actually checks the advancement of other women. As Elaine Aston argues, "Marlene's stable positioning functions as an oppressive 'block' to the desires and aspirations of other women. This is especially true of her positioning in relation to Angie's narrative" (41).

Churchill's critique of Thatcherism in *Top Girls* parallels the efforts of leftist thinkers to understand the movement. In his 1988 essay "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists," Stuart Hall describes the impact of Thatcherism on British culture.[152] According to Hall, "Thatcherism has succeeded in reversing or putting into reverse gear many of the historic postwar trends" Thatcherism, he continues,

> has begun to dismantle the terms of the unwritten social contract on which the social forces settled after the war. It has changed the currency of political thought and argument. Where previously social need had begun to establish its own imperatives against the laws of market forces, now questions of "value for money," the private right to

[152] This essay, and those in Hall's *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, are the best leftist theoretical accounts of Thatcherism that I know.

> dispose of one's own wealth, the equation between freedom and the free market, have become the terms of trade, not just of political debate in parliament, the press, the journals, and policy circles, but in the thought and language of everyday calculation. There has been a striking reversal of values: the aura that used to attach to the value of public welfare now adheres to anything that is private [. . .]. (40)

These developments are registered in Marlene's rejection of working-class politics, in her individualism and in her exaltation of Thatcher's economic policies. According to Hall's Gramscian concept of hegemony, ways of viewing the world are conflictual and even the most well-established ideology exists in an unstable equilibrium with others. What Hall describes here is a moment in which this equilibrium shifts radically. In this moment, "the circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire not only the constraining power of dominance over other modes of thought but also the inertial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: what the world is and how it works" (44). This power comes to define what is "rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable" (44). The triumph of Thatcher's ideas allows Marlene's greedy individualism to seem normal and natural and causes criticisms of those ideas such as Joyce articulates to seem ridiculous and outmoded.

Conclusion

All of Churchill's plays challenge her audience's assumptions about the world. This should not suggest that her plays are confrontational; in fact, they often seem to depend for their success on a very sympathetic, even politically and socially like-minded audience. But Churchill does not allow her audiences an easy spectatorship. She consistently attempts to engage her spectators intellectually and to distance them from aspects of their own culture. In this sense, Churchill's theatre practice is quite similar to Brecht's. In Kritzer's words, "Churchill, like Brecht, eschews the Aristotelian evocation of pity and fear in favor of stimulating new understandings of specific social situations through 'astonishment and wonder.'" "[L]ike Brecht," Kritzer continues, "Churchill seeks to empower audiences against oppression rather than encourage the serene acceptance of an apparently inevitable fate" (3). But, though I would argue that *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is one of the most important Brechtian plays written in postwar Britain, concrete examples of Brechtian influence are usually hard to detect in Churchill's plays. Churchill suggests a reason for this difficulty in a letter to Janelle Reinelt:

> I don't know either the plays or the theoretical writings in great detail but I've soaked up quite a lot about [Brecht] over the years. I think for writers, directors and actors working in England in the seventies his ideas had been absorbed into the general pool of shared knowledge and attitudes, so that without constantly thinking of Brecht we

> nevertheless imagine things in a way we might not have without him. (qtd. in Reinelt, *After* 86)

These comments, especially in light of the fact that *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* resulted from Joint Stock workshops, suggest that much of the Brechtian character of that play may have come from Churchill's collaborators. The same might be true of the Brechtian aspects of *Cloud Nine*, which are harder to recognize in part because of the other more readily identifiable influences in that play. Churchill has clearly been influenced by Brecht, but Brecht in Britain was no longer new by the time she was writing the plays I discuss here, and his influence had become diffused and to some degree unconscious. In Churchill's case, Brecht's influence is also obscured by her borrowings from other playwrights such as Genet and by the theoretical influences of Fanon, Foucault and others.

While it is often difficult to point out specific Brechtian elements in Churchill's plays, her historical project is, in its broad outlines, very similar to Brecht's. In her chapter on Churchill in *After Brecht: British Epic Theatre*, Reinelt explains that

> Brechtian historicization actually works in three modes simultaneously. In representing the past, the specificity of its conditions, its "Otherness" from now, and the suppressed possibilities through which it might have been otherwise are presented. Then the relationship of the past to the present is shown to consist of analogous conditions, unchanged and/or unexamined legacies that make the

> latent possibilities of the past act as a springboard to present possibilities. Finally, the representation of the present must be such that it is seen from a distance similar to the way the "past" is seen, that is, historically. (87)

The first of these modes is most apparent in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, with its emphasis on the lost opportunities presented by the English revolution. The broken chronology of *Cloud Nine* and the fantasy of the first act of *Top Girls* build analogies between past and present like those described in Reinelt's second mode. *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is entirely predicated on such analogical meanings, though the connections between past and present remain implicit and are not reflected in the structure or chronology of the play. The last mode, according to Reinelt, is the most difficult to realize. But both *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* achieve this effect. *Cloud Nine*, as Reinelt contends, "requires the first act to present the second. [. . .] The audience, conditioned by the first act to look critically at the behavior and social context of characters in the past, must now continue to examine matters close to home" (87). In a passage I quoted earlier, Reinelt argues that Churchill "suggests that it is a particular kind of ahistorical smugness to think we have transcended [the past]" (89). Reinelt is referring to the Victorian era as depicted in *Cloud Nine*, but the argument applies equally well to the historical periods represented by the women in the first act of *Top Girls*. In that act, a critique of smug ethnocentrism accompanies the attack on the "ahistorical smugness" Reinelt identifies. *Cloud Nine* and, in a different and less obvious way, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* treat imperial

history in a way that denies the audience the comfort of imagining that with the formal dissolution of its empire Britain has washed its hands of the past.

Brecht only infrequently focuses on gender issues in his plays (*Mother Courage* and *The Good Person of Setzuan* being the most notable exceptions). Nor do his theoretical writings have much to say on the subject. Nevertheless, Brecht's dramaturgy has been important for Churchill and many other feminist playwrights. Asked in a 1984 interview whether there is "a female aesthetic," Churchill comments that the dearth of plays by women makes the question difficult. But, she recalls,

> I remember before I wrote *Top Girls* thinking about women barristers—and how they were in a minority and had to imitate men to succeed—and I was thinking of them as different from me. And then I thought, "wait a minute, my whole concept of what plays might be is from plays written by men. I don't have to put on a wig, speak in a special voice, but how far do I assume things that have been defined by men?" There isn't a simple answer to that. And I remember long before that thinking of the "maleness" of the traditional structure of plays, with conflict building in a certain way to a climax. ("Caryl" 76)

I am not certain that the question of an *essentially* female aesthetic is a productive one, especially for feminist playwrights who are well aware of the potentially restrictive nature of various essentialisms. Yet because there is a historical correlation between a masculinist world view and certain modes of theatrical expression, there can be a culturally specific feminist (not female) aesthetic. Kritzer argues—without

implying any essential female (or male) aesthetic—that “The dominant ideology of patriarchal-capitalist culture may function most effectively in the meta-theatrical realm of theatrical convention, structuring basic expectations and assumptions about dramatic character, action and language as well as the use of actors, space and other theatrical resources” (6). This fact, Kritzer maintains, “has made representation appear unalterably patriarchal to some feminists” (6). For the theatre scholar Elin Diamond, the main value of Brechtian dramaturgy lies in its challenge to the conventions of representation that have dominated European theatre. She writes that “Brechtian theory gives us the means of defusing realism’s narrativity, of prying loose actor/signifier from character/signified, of exposing or alienating the illusionistic apparatus” (“Mimesis” 61). Churchill, as I have shown, consistently strives toward these ends. “But,” Diamond stresses, “Brecht never denied referentiality” (“Mimesis” 61). Rather, he tried to historicize both representation and subjectivity. This is particularly important for feminists, “whose empirical, historical project,” according to Diamond, “continues to be the recovery of women’s texts and activities.” Feminist playwrights thus have “a stake in truth—in contributing to the accumulation and organization of knowledge by which a culture values or forgets its past” (“Mimesis” 59). Following this reasoning, Churchill’s theatre is anti-illusionistic but, like Brecht’s, always realistic in its insistent reference to the social and political forces at work in particular times and places. Therefore, the playful and fantastic aspects of Churchill’s plays never undermine her efforts to create a feminist “history from below.”

While acknowledging that "Brecht's own representations of gender and sexual difference are subject to severe critique from a feminist perspective," Reinelt argues that, for feminist playwrights, "Brecht is particularly helpful in his critique of the bourgeois theatre practices of staging the Universal" (*After* 82). Reinelt quotes Brecht's assertion that "The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternally human.' Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself" (qtd in Reinelt, *After* 82). Reinelt explains that, "Since materialist feminists also theorize socially constructed (gender) systems that are in no sense eternal, fixed, or unchanging, the exposure of bourgeois theatre conventions that inscribe universality and the deconstruction of capital M-Man as subject are salient goals for feminist as well as Brechtian theatre" (*After Brecht* 82). Reinelt writes elsewhere that "For feminists, Brechtian techniques offer a way to examine the material conditions of gender behavior (how they are internalized, opposed, and changed) and their interaction with other socio-political factors such as class," something Churchill consistently strives to do ("Beyond" 154). Churchill understands oppression as the result both of relatively easily identifiable political and economic relationships and of related processes of subject formation carried out through the ideologies and institutions of a culture. This view requires that humans be conceived as socially conditioned subjects and the abandonment of any essentialist idea of human nature. Churchill dramatizes the construction of subjects in *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* in ways that challenge an audience's essentialist assumptions not only

about gender and class, but also about racial and sexual difference. Brecht's "capital M-Man" has historically been not only a bourgeois Man but also, importantly, a European Man. The production of this subjectivity has entailed the construction of a racial "Other." Therefore, the deconstruction of this "universal" subjectivity, then, must account for the reciprocal nature of the subjectivities forged in Europe's encounter with the "Other." Churchill recognizes this necessity in her most interesting work on race in *The Hospital at The Time of The Revolution* and *Cloud Nine*.

This insight seems to have come to Churchill mostly through Fanon's writings. The continuing importance of Fanon to Homi Bhabha and others shows that Churchill's ideas about imperial racism as elaborated in the 1970s are not outmoded. But they seem limited. This limitation is largely a result of the ease with which she conceives equivalencies between racism and other means of subjugation, particularly gender oppression. *Cloud Nine* in particular suggests that these various forms of oppression are merely permutations of the archetypical power relationships embodied in the patriarchal European family. While it is important to show the relationship between racism and sexism, the nature of both can be obscured if too little attention is paid to the differences between them. Still, *Cloud Nine* remains a landmark not only in postwar-British drama, but also in the broader effort among progressive elements in British society to come to terms with the nation's imperial history and to understand the racial dynamics of the postwar era.

CONCLUSION

Imperial History

The crucial context for my study is Britain's imperial past. As a historical inquiry, my project has had been two purposes: to understand how imperial history has affected the ways in which Britons conceive their own identities—and those of others—in terms of race, nationality and, in some cases, gender; and to understand the ways they conceive and narrate history, especially as these ways reflect widely held notions of progress, decline and national destiny. After establishing this context, my task has been to describe the ways in which the plays I discuss reflect changing understandings of history and identity in the post-WWII period and how they participate in debates on issues of nationality and belonging in a turbulent and transitional historical moment.

The idea of memory evoked in my title is crucial for a number of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, memory makes possible the nostalgic, even elegiac tone of a number of the plays I've discussed. This tone also characterizes a large body of postwar British literature. I hope that my study has shown that nostalgia takes many forms, often with quite different political valences. But memory is not only a way of grasping change and loss; it is also a way seeing continuity across and within historical rupture. In either case, it is memory that enables people to understand the present in terms of the past. For this reason, I am most concerned with what could be

described as a collective historical memory. While this type of memory may be buttressed by written historical narratives, I mean to indicate a much broader category of remembrance that enables a group of people (defined variously in terms of nationality, regional loyalty, class, race and ethnicity) to understand and, in some cases, to shape their political and social identities. Though such memories are often partial (in both senses of the word), exclusionary, constructed, and sometimes simply false, they are nonetheless incredibly powerful and politically volatile.

But memory, even collective memory, is instantiated in the individual. This point is made clear in Jimmy Porter's remarks about Colonel Redfern, India and the "Edwardian Summer." These speeches are foundational to my project. Nowhere else in the plays I examine do we see such a powerful evocation of a traditional form of Britishness from the inside, as a felt and lived experience. Though Jimmy is critical of much of what Redfern represents—and realizes that a lot of it is "phoney"—he cannot achieve an outsider's distance from the image. Osborne's essays, and the trajectory of his political thought, suggest that he occupied a position similar to Jimmy's. Most importantly, Jimmy demonstrates the extent to which collective memories, even, perhaps especially, ones not based in an individual's own experience, can affect people's understanding of the world and their place in it. These cultural memories, along with dominant political ideologies and various types of patriotic discourse, underlie the imperial structures of feeling which are the main object of my inquiry. It is also important to observe that the playwrights I examine after Osborne, younger and writing at a greater chronological remove from the era of

Britain's unquestioned might, are able to develop more critical perspectives on the dominant forms of British imperial identity.

In a discussion of longstanding European conceptions of empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that "Empire exhausts historical time, suspends history, and summons the past and the future within its own ethical order. In other words, Empire presents its order as permanent, eternal, and necessary" (11). Imperial discourse posits a singular historical narrative in which present national and global political structures naturally came to be, and endorses only one vision of the future, in which that state of affairs remains essentially unchanged. History, of course, can never really be "suspended," and the narrative of empire must continually be refashioned and reauthorized. In a discussion of Renan, Ian Baucom describes a crucial aspect of this process when he identifies in modern European nationalism "a forgetfulness essential to the construction of a narrative of national identity." This forgetfulness "manifests itself [. . .] as an act of forgetting that precedes and enables an act of determinate and authorized remembrance, a provisional erasure of history which clears the space for a reinscription of the event within the legitimate narrative of national belonging" (52). What must be erased and forgotten are "those marks of internal differentiation or rupturing [. . .] whose illegitimate memorialization would fragment the national community" (52).[153] Many of the plays I discuss, including *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, *The Hero Rises Up*, *The Churchill Play*, *Light Shining in*

[153] The example Baucom provides from Renan of an event that must be erased from historical memory is the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, in which French soldiers and Catholic clerics slaughtered a group of Huguenots.

Buckinghamshire, and *Cloud Nine*, seek to remember and recover the "hidden histories" of women, the working class and ethnic and racial others in order to undermine the dominant narratives of nationalist history. As I have argued, this effort mirrors the political project of many leftist historians and cultural studies scholars in postwar Britain.

Robert Hewison writes that "British cultural life has been crippled by nostalgia: for the innocence of childhood, for pastoral life, for the world of the country house, for some moment in the not-too-distant past when the community seemed whole" (*Too Much* 301). Among the plays I treat, nostalgia of this sort is most apparent in *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*. In Osborne and many other postwar-British writers, this nostalgia is largely a product of feelings about empire, and it is often impossible to dissociate the two. Hewison observes: "The backward glance became almost a fixed stare by the early 1950s, but even those whose politics inclined them to be progressive [Orwell, for example] were hindered by a hankering after a past period of communal solidarity that probably never was" (*Too Much* 301). Hewison's comments testify to the power and prevalence of nostalgia across the political spectrum and help explain why the avowedly leftist playwrights I discuss seem so susceptible to what seems, initially at least, to be a fundamentally conservative structure of feeling. Nostalgia has in a number of cases, Hare being perhaps the most striking example, complicated the playwrights' political projects, though the counter-hegemonic potential of nostalgia is sometimes apparent,

as in Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Brenton's *The Churchill Play* and Hare's own *Plenty.*

The idea of decline has always haunted the imperialist discourse. Hardt and Negri explain that "The theory of the constitution of empire is also a theory of its decline" (370). The apparently inevitable rise and fall of empires, and the resulting succession of imperial states, is central to imperialist thinking. This pattern of historical thought underlies the anxiety of the imperialist, which has often led to outrageous abuses in the name of empire. But this mode of thought also accounts in part for the ineradicable opposition to empire from both within and without. For opponents of empire, this cycle of rise and fall can inspire hope or promote resignation depending on where the present moment is located in the cycle. In their bolder, often utopian moments, the playwrights who follow Osborne in my analysis strive to combat the fatalism associated with this thinking and imagine an escape from a seemingly eternal historical cycle.

Continuing Debates on National Identity

Most commentators on postwar Britain have characterized the period as one of increasing uncertainly about the identity and direction of the nation. Ian Jack's statement in his editorial introduction to a 1996 *Granta* volume entitled "What Happened to Us?" that the British "have absolutely no idea how things will work out"

exemplifies a mood that became widespread beginning in the 1990s (8). With the loss of the polarizing presence of Margaret Thatcher, and as memories of World War II and the empire continued to fade, the nation began to seem more and more politically and culturally adrift. This feeling was for many white Britons, as it had been for decades, in part a product of contentious race relations and sometimes confusing debates on multiculturalism. As Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues persuasively in *Imagining the New Britain* (2000), for many Britons "Integration and change have surpassed understanding" (2).

In light of this present mood of uncertainty, the clarity and confidence with which the playwrights I consider here (after Osborne) were able, in the sixties, seventies and early eighties, to articulate a vision of what kind of nation Britain would have to become to advance peacefully and with some stability into the future is striking. (Though this vision is usually only implicit, as in *The Churchill Play* or *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, it is, in the end, quite clear.) This confidence, however, was a result of what in retrospect seems an oversimplified notion of British social and political dynamics. The playwrights imagined a socialist, egalitarian society in which economic and social privilege would be eliminated. Racial and gender discrimination would be done away with as well, but these issues were clearly secondary to economic concerns; one can often sense the unstated assumption, in both the plays and the authors' non-dramatic writings, that, once exploitative economic structures are replaced, racial and gender-based antagonism will disappear. Though Arden and D'Arcy, Brenton and Hare are concerned with ethnic identity and,

occasionally, women's issues, and Churchill's plays bear witness to the growing importance of race and gender in British politics, these playwrights' image of the future is based primarily on the redress of class grievances. In the last two decades, however, social class alone has increasingly come to seem an inadequate basis for understanding Britain's future (or, for that matter, its past). Class remains a powerful force in British culture, but race, ethnicity and gender are now, for many scholars and commentators, of comparable importance. Among the playwrights I discuss, Churchill most exemplifies these changes. But her work is by no means an endpoint in the debate on national identity that has transpired in the theatre. She is most appropriately seen as a crucial figure in a developing debate that continues beyond the chronological scope of my project.

Arden and D'Arcy, Hare, Brenton and Churchill all challenge certain varieties of Britishness, and Arden and D'Arcy and Brenton sometimes envision growing nationalism in the "four nations" of the United Kingdom as a tool for dismantling the apparently decrepit British state. Even in this uncertain period, however, others are now imagining a changed and revitalized British identity as a means of moving into the future. In his *Nationalism, Devolution and the Challenge to the United Kingdom State* (2001), Arthur Aughey notes that "many of those who make the most persuasive and unrepentant intellectual case for a positive Britishness and who seem to care most about it are not of British 'stock'" (60). The reasons for this perhaps counterintuitive fact, as Aughey suggests, are the same as those that have led Nairn and likeminded scholars to forecast the eminent break-up of Britain with such certainty: the recent

‘invention’ of both the British state and British identity and, especially, the disjunction between that state and any single, homogeneous ethnic population. The historian Hugh Kearney writes that “In the days of empire, ‘British’ implied an imperial identity. Today, however, if the terms ‘British’ and ‘Britishness’ are to mean anything, they should surely stand for a civic identity within the United Kingdom, i.e. British citizenship” (“Importance” 24). Alibhai-Brown, for one, argues the value of this civic identity for non-white Britons and other minorities. She asks: “The four nations will carve out their own spaces and entitlements—and where does that leave all those who are hybrids, nonconformists, black and Asian Britons?” (“Muddled” 26). British identity, here opposed to English identity, has always been capacious and inclusive. In times of greater stability and confidence, social and political elites championed these qualities both at home and abroad. Regardless of the fact that this inclusiveness often grew out of practical political imperatives rather than high-minded principles, and despite the way pressures of immigration and imperial decline revealed in many cases a great hypocrisy in arguments about British “tolerance,” as a model for a functional, non-essentialist form of national identity, Britishness continues to hold promise for those excluded by traditional definitions of the nation.

The political theorist Bhikhu Parekh, one of the most important contemporary thinkers concerned with the issue, writes that “Since national identity is a product of history, it can also be remade in history unless one naively assumes that history somehow came to an end at a particular point in time” (“Discourses” 504). The plays I have discussed show that Arden and D’Arcy, Hare, Brenton and Churchill, though

they don't articulate their position on the subject explicitly, share a view similar to Parekh's on this point. They also seem to reject, along with Parekh, what he calls a "volitionist view of national identity," in which that identity can be rewritten as if the collective imagination of a community were a blank slate. Parekh rejects this view because a national identity is made up of "historically evolved structures [that] persist over time and restrict choices" ("Discourses" 504). Parekh recognizes that "The past is not a passive storehouse of material from which each generation chooses whatever it likes for the reconstruction of its national identity." Instead he advocates a "constructivist view of national identity" that allows people some agency in fashioning new forms of national identity, but only within a field circumscribed by historical formations. In this conception, these formations become the raw materials with which people seeking to reform national identities are constrained to work. Parekh explains that "inherited institutions" do not foreclose people's choices "in a rigid and mechanistic manner" ("Discourses" 504). In order to be successful then, any effort to conceive a new mode of national belonging must thoroughly account for the history of these institutions and recognize that, again in Parekh's words, "A coherent view of national identity must grow out of a constant dialogue between the past and the present in which each interrogates and illuminates the other" ("Discourses" 504).

The playwrights also recognize these imperatives. Among the plays I discuss, Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Cloud Nine*, and Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* make this point most clear. In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill dramatizes a crucial moment in the making of Britishness and focuses the

audience's attention on the many ways in which things could have been different. In *Cloud Nine* she uses the disjunction between historical time and the characters' personal chronologies both to dramatize the persistence of seemingly outmoded ideologies and to show the gradual and painful processes by which ideological forms of Britishness change. Similarly, Brenton uses disorienting chronological breaks and anachronisms to make connections between past and present concrete and to argue that a British identity forged by imperialism must be discarded and replaced with more inclusive forms.

Parekh describes a number of "confusions [. . .] bedeviling the discussion of national identity." These include: "such untenable beliefs as that the national identity is a coherent whole, that it can be stated in a crisp formula, that it can and ought to be fostered by the state, that it can be insulated against change, that the state derives its legitimacy from its capacity to express and preserve the national identity, and that no society can last without a collectively shared thick identity" ("Discourses" 504). Many of these assumptions are challenged in important ways in the plays I've examined. This accomplishment might seem a purely negative one in the absence of a coherent vision of a pragmatic and expansive new form of Britishness. But, as Brecht shows, an effort to undermine or strip away dominant ideological forms (such as traditional conceptions of Britishness) is absolutely essential in order to clear a space for any ideological intervention. The insights these plays achieve into the past and future of British national identity are the product of historical research, a politicized view of historical narrative, and the care with which the playwrights tailor their

arguments to the historical moments in which their plays were produced. These efforts bear out Parekh's contention that all "redefinitions and changes [of national identity] require deep historical knowledge of the country and a feel for its past, as well as a rigorous and realistic assessment of its present circumstances and future aspirations" ("Defining" 6).

The historian Cynthia Herrup writes in her introduction to a volume of the *Journal of British Studies* devoted to questions of national identity and decline that, in recent decades, "the stresses of migration, the triumphs of international consumerism, and the insights of postmodernism have reemphasized that nationhood as well as statehood is a status created from practices, values, and memories often newer, more partial, and more exclusionary than once believed" (307). The forces Herrup describes—and resistances to them—have politicized identity as never before. More specifically, the denaturalizing effects of these forces have brought national identity more and more into the political arena by showing that it can be made and unmade. For traditionalists, primarily but not exclusively on the political right, a Britishness felt to be under siege requires an increasingly vigorous defense. For others, especially among the political left and those who for various reasons remain outside traditional definitions of Britishness, these effects encourage the constructivist view of identity that Parekh advocates. During the period covered by my project, Arden and D'Arcy, Brenton, Hare and Churchill moved toward such an outlook, albeit by different routes and at varying rates. Their plays are most effective in addressing the increasingly complex debates on national identity when they show that national and racial

categories, which have so often been linked both in the popular imagination and in academic and political discourses, do not have any natural or biological basis and are in fact fluid and often, even when apparently ratified by long tradition, of very recent origin. In addition, the playwrights argue that definitions of national belonging are often highly contingent on the political imperatives of social and economic elites, further politicizing issues of national identity for their largely left-leaning audiences.

The End of the Postwar Era?

I suggested in my introduction that the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas conflict might be an appropriate endpoint for my study. Though I still resist the need to choose a single defining date to bracket my work, it is perhaps fitting that the most recent of the plays I discuss (*Top Girls*) was produced a couple of months after that conflict ended. For my purposes, that war demonstrates a continuity in the issues with which I began my study. The war made it clear that the questions about imperialism and its relationship to national identity that are raised in Osborne's early plays remained central to political or cultural analysis in the early 1980s. As Kathleen Paul puts it, the Falklands War "demonstrate[d] that despite the fiasco of Suez, the wave of independence celebrations throughout the empire, and the entry into the European Community, the British national identity still retained an element of imperialism. The

jingoism and the patriotism stemmed from a conviction that the invasion constituted a blow to Britain's imperial pride and therefore had to be staunchly resisted” (185).

But no subsequent event brought these feelings to the surface to such a degree and, especially with the passing of Thatcherism, the Falklands war seems like a final expression, in its unabashed form at least, of a dominant type of imperial Britishness. Since the early eighties, and particularly after Thatcher, the nature of British political culture has changed in important but often as yet inscrutable ways. So too have the terms of the debate on national identity. For these reasons, I don’t think it is accurate to conceive the present moment in British history as a continuation of the postwar period. Though I can’t say exactly when the postwar era ended—any specific date would be arbitrary—much has changed in Britain since even the most recent of the plays I discuss was produced. World War II is no longer so crucial a reference point in British political discourse, and the political identities of the mid-twentieth century have been drastically transformed or even supplanted by newer alignments, in part due to the ever-increasing pressure of questions concerning race, ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality. Imperial historiography has also been transformed, as has the popular discourse on Britain’s imperial past. Of course there are no absolute caesuras in history, and many of the social and political developments of the postwar period will continue and even accelerate, often, surely, in unexpected ways. These continuing transformations, in combination with new and as yet unforeseen pressures, will ensure that the imperative to interrogate inherited forms of British identity and to

imagine alternative ways of conceiving the nation and its people will remain compelling well into the future.

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VITA

Adam Daniel Knowles was born in San Diego, California on September 26, 1970, the son of Susan Rae Knowles and Gary Walter Knowles. After completing his work at Patrick Henry High School, San Diego, California, in 1988, he entered The University of California at San Diego. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and American Literature and Writing from The University of California at San Diego in December 1992. He graduated magna cum laude and with high departmental honors. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin in August 1993. He received the degree of Master of Arts in English from The University of Texas at Austin in May 1995. He has taught composition and literature classes as The University of Texas at Austin and The University of Pittsburgh.

Permanent Address: 4915 Orcutt Avenue, San Diego, California 92120

This dissertation was typed by the author.