Writing Figures of Political Resistance for the British Stage

Volume One (of Two)

Matthew John Midgley

PhD

University of York

Theatre, Film and Television

September 2015

Abstract

This thesis explores the process of writing figures of political resistance for the British stage prior to and during the neoliberal era (1980 to the present). The work of established political playwrights is examined in relation to the socio-political context in which it was produced, providing insights into the challenges playwrights have faced in creating characters who effectively resist the status quo. These challenges are contextualised by Britain's imperial history and the UK's ongoing participation in newer forms of imperialism, the pressures of neoliberalism on the arts, and widespread political disengagement. These insights inform reflexive analysis of my own playwriting.

Chapter One provides an account of the changing strategies and dramaturgy of oppositional playwriting from 1956 to the present, considering the strengths of different approaches to creating figures of political resistance and my response to them. Three models of resistance are considered in Chapter Two: that of the individual, the collective, and documentary resistance. Each model provides a framework through which to analyse figures of resistance in plays and evaluate the strategies of established playwrights in negotiating creative challenges. These models are developed through subsequent chapters focussed upon the subjects tackled in my plays. Chapter Three looks at climate change and plays responding to it in reflecting upon my creative process in *The Ends*. Chapter Four explores resistance to the Iraq War, my own military experience and the challenge of writing autobiographically. Finally, Chapter Five focusses on conscientious objection and the First World War, considering the history play as a strategy for effective resistance and my adoption of it in *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*.

Table of Contents

Volume Two: Accompanying Material

List of Accompanying Material

The following items comprise my professional portfolio:

1. Play texts

a) *The Ends*

b) *Quicksand*

c) *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*

2. Portfolio

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of all the theatre-makers I have had the privilege to work with over the last four years. I would like to give particular thanks to Jonathan Hall, a fantastic playwright and a dear friend whose generous support has seen me through some of the most difficult periods of doubt and struggle.

Many thanks to my supervisor, Mary Luckhurst, for encouraging me to pursue my goals and for all her support along the way. Special thanks must go to Simon van der Borgh, whose knowledge of dramatic writing and superb insight has been invaluable during my creative journey. Duncan Petrie's wise words and advice at a crucial time have been hugely appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner Rachel – for always being there with me.

Author's declaration

None of the material presented within this thesis has previously been published or is under review. Except where stated, all of the work contained within this thesis represents the original contribution of the author. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Introduction

A crisis of resistance

This thesis is concerned with the problem of creating figures of political resistance for the British stage in a 21st century dominated by neoliberal capitalist orthodoxy. As an emerging playwright[1] – one politicised through class, education and military service – who believes in the radical potential of theatre, I am often frustrated, having seen or read a political play, with characters whose resistance is neutralised, becomes corrupted, or takes a form that precludes change (such as silence, inertia, or passivity). In surveying the work of political playwrights throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, it is easy to find oppositional characters who suffer these fates. Which is not to say that these 'negative' examples cannot be productive: frequently, they invite criticism of characters who fail or the forces that oppress them, asking the audience to resist these forces and avoid the same fate.

But my perception is that further examples of failed resistance do little to challenge the 'capitalist realism' that has defined the neoliberal era, contributing to a crisis in representation of political resistance on the British stage that I have sought to address in my own work. Capitalist realism, a phrase coined by Mark Fisher (2009) to describe the 'no alternative' discourse propagated by neoliberals such as Margaret Thatcher, denies the possibility of change and distinguishes the political landscape of the 21st century from that of the 20th. As Fisher notes, it is not only that there is a widespread sense of capitalism as 'the only viable and political system' but that it is 'now even impossible to *imagine* a coherent alternative' (2009:2). Strong

---

[1] Here, emerging defines a playwright who has successfully created stage-worthy plays, who has had some success in the form of minor productions, workshops, or interest from agents and directors, but who has yet to gain a first professional production or wider recognition of their work.

oppositional figures, those who not only oppose hegemony but do so successfully, are much needed as a coherent alternative is sought. The figures of resistance I want to see are those who are active, who speak out, and who challenge the status quo without being rendered politically insignificant by the end of the play. That is not to say that these figures do not suffer setbacks, crises, or become complicit with what they are fighting against at certain points – such straightforward characterisations would be hopelessly removed from their contexts. Creating strong figures of political resistance, as evidenced in the plays analysed here, is tremendously difficult.

My inquiry asks which oppositional models might contribute to a genuine alternative to the capitalist realism steadily eroding the hard-won social and democratic rights of the 20th century, and what contribution (if any) political plays might make to social democratic and Green discourses. Through the analysis of models of resistance in the work of established playwrights since the First World War, I explore this perceived crisis and its influence on the figures of political resistance I have attempted to create in the three plays submitted here.

The privileging of economic freedoms over social or democratic ones is the defining tenet of neoliberal theory, the full complexity of which will be interrogated in subsequent sections. Neoliberalism has led to deep mistrust of party politics in Britain (Harvey, 2005:3-4; Marsh et al, 2007; Garnett, 2007): so much so that comedian and actor Russell Brand purports to speak for the young generation by

promoting politicians as worthless and voting as pointless.[2] In an era of rampant

inequality and punishing austerity brought about by the collapse of the global

financial system in 2008, an emergent shift away from the traditional political parties

is encouraging and concerning in equal measure. Jeremy Corbyn's landslide election

as Labour leader gives the party a clear mandate to depart from the neoliberal

politics of the New Labour era, and in Scotland the SNP's rise to power has been

based upon social democratic politics that seem radical within the context of New

Labour-era policy. The Green Party has become a significant presence since the

election of Caroline Lucas to parliament in 2010, and gained over one million votes

in 2015. These left-wing gains have been tempered by the rise of popular support for

UKIP in Local, General and European elections[3] and an unexpected Conservative

majority in 2015. Despite signs of renewal, this remains an era in which political

engagement remains low, particularly among younger generations, and political

theatre less prominent – compared to the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s

especially, when Leftist political playwriting flourished amidst the dynamic politics of

the post-war consensus.

I will contextualise my work against a realist tradition[4] in post-war British theatre with

strong links to the imperial realist theatre of the late 19th century, a tradition that

Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, Gregory Burke and other prominent political

playwrights of the post-war period have challenged. This imperial mentality, I shall

---

[2] The 2010 general election saw the third lowest turnout since universal male suffrage in 1918 with 65% overall turnout: analysis revealed 18-24 year-old turnout at 44% and 25-35 year-olds at 55% (Rallings and Thrasher, 2010; Ipsos MORI, 2010). In 2015 turnout rose slightly to 66.1%, with good weather reportedly a factor in this increase. (Knapton, 2015).

[3] UKIP was the highest polling UK party in recent European elections. Tory defector Douglas Carswell triggered a by-election when he resigned as an MP in 2014; winning back his seat to become UKIPs first MP. In the 2015 General Election UKIP became the third largest party, gaining over three million votes (BBC, 2015).

[4] Prominent realist theatre histories include Innes, 2002; Shellard, 1999; Eyre and Wright, 2001; Billington, 2007. For a critique of British theatre's realist legacy, see Rebellato, 1999.

argue, persists in our reluctance to acknowledge a global economic system that subordinates developing nations to developed nations like the UK; and, increasingly, citizens of any nation to global capitalist elites. Although the British Empire has been dissolved, the UK plays a prominent role in a new empire: an occupation not so much martial – although the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq hark back to older imperialisms, as does the thriving arms trade[5] – as disciplinary within a global capitalist economy.[6]

While I consider forms such as documentary theatre in my analysis, my primary concern is with the form in which I work: singly-authored dramatic plays. I will also consider other forms and styles – such as postdramatic theatre, agitprop or community theatre, for example – in exploring the merits of alternative approaches to staging political opposition. The focus is limited to plays that have been staged by major British theatres and companies; that is, those that have informed public discourse (and where research material is more readily available).

Author biography

My first association with theatre occurred comparatively recently. Having grown up in a working-class family in Bradford, the only shows I saw growing up were pantomimes, once a year in January. Theatre was not perceived as a working-class activity, unlike cinema, literature or live music. It was not until university at the age of

---

[5] The 2010-15 Coalition government relaxed restrictions on arms sales to repressive states (Townsend and Boffey, 2014); sales to states on the UK's human rights abuse list totalled £12.3bn in 2013 (Sengupta, 2013).
[6] Following Foucault (1977), disciplinary in the sense that domination has become more discrete: dominant entities, public or private, prefer to coerce rather than enforce. The US attacked Chile, for example, through economic pressure as well as by sponsoring a coup to depose its socialist president, rather than through direct military intervention. Chicago school-trained Chilean economists were as instrumental as the CIA in turning Chile into a neoliberal ally (Kornbluh, 2013).

twenty-three that I would begin to regularly attend performances and read plays, and shortly after to write them. Before reaching university, I spent seven years in the British Army, having joined up at sixteen. It was in the army where I began to become politically aware.

I was directly involved in the Iraq War of 2003. Having joined up in 1999, recent conflicts involving UK forces had been UN peacekeeping missions in the Balkans and I (naively) believed at the time that this is what war would be from now on: primarily humanitarian, and sanctioned by international law. I held an essentially Fukuyaman 'end of history' worldview, though of course I wouldn't have recognised it as such at the time.[7] The events of September 11th 2001 changed the environment considerably. If I lost faith in the UN during the failure to broker a peaceful solution, it was following the parliamentary debates and votes on whether to engage in war with Iraq in early 2003, in the face of such strong public opposition, that really politicised me – I was already waiting in the Kuwaiti desert (with 200,000 other soldiers) as Tony Blair's government manufactured consent (Prince, 2011; Sahlane, 2013). This moment, incidentally, has been the subject of several verbatim plays (Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2004) and Norton-Taylor's *Justifying War* (2003) are discussed below).[8]

The subject of resistance, then, resonates with my experience in several ways. Having been involuntarily complicit in an imperialist war fought by wealthy nations against poorer nations, the difficulty of resistance is something that I am all too aware of. As a soldier, refusal to follow orders would have resulted in imprisonment,

---

[7] Infamously, Fukuyama proposed in 'The End of History?' that the end of the Cold War signalled 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government' (1989:4).

[8] A note on dates when referencing plays: the dates cited indicate the year of the published text being referred to. Date of first performance may also be given, where necessary, and will be clearly marked as such.

even though the democratic process that precipitated those orders had been corrupted. The million people who marched against the war on 15th February 2003 were similarly cheated (BBC, 2003; Syalm et al, 2003). We are fortunate in the UK to have democratic rights: to vote for our government, to call that government to account and to be protected from persecution by the state. That nobody has been called to account[9] for Iraq suggests that something is wrong with our democracy, begging the question: do we still have the capacity for effective political resistance in this country? All of the plays submitted here engage with this question to some degree.

Despite a theatre system that tends towards conservatism[10] – where work that is perceived to be uncomfortable or might otherwise fail commercially is eschewed in favour of programming aimed to put 'bums on seats' – I want my work to be performed on main stages.[11] This ambition will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to realise. My worldview challenges many of the beliefs Britain holds about itself: about our society, our place in the world, and how the world is perceived. Imperialism, whether in Iraq or Mesopotamia, can be a thorny subject yet also a non-issue.[12] Theatre scholar Baz Kershaw asserts that main stages – fringe stages, even – no longer support challenging work (1999), and Joe Kelleher has more recently claimed

---

[9] The long-delayed Chilcot Inquiry finally published its findings in July 2016. Tony Blair and other senior figures were highly criticised in the report for their style of government and decision-making, with the Inquiry concluding that 'the UK chose to join the invasion of Iraq before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted. Military action at that time was not a last resort' (Harding, 2016). Before its release, some sources had gone so far as to suggest Blair could have faced war crimes charges as a result of the Inquiry (Hope, 2015).

[10] For background and theoretical discussion of conservatism in British theatre since 1980, see Peacock (1999) and Kershaw (1999); I explore the idea more fully in Chapter One, 'Resistant art in the neoliberal age.'

[11] I should add that this does not mean foregoing production in fringe spaces.

[12] Newly elected Labour leader and deputy leader Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were both savaged in the press for recent comments about Palestinian resistance to Israeli aggression and Northern Irish resistance to British rule respectively. At the same time, vast swathes of the public remain indifferent to or ignorant of Britain's past and recent imperial history.

that 'theatre's instrumentalism [and] use as a means of guiding our actions and changing the world, does not work – never did, never will' (2009:57). Edward Bond, one of our greatest living playwrights, turned his back on British main stages in the mid-1980s because he could not get challenging plays produced in the right way (Billingham, 2013:15). My contention – supported by the move of David Edgar, David Hare and Howard Brenton especially to mainstream theatre from agitprop in the 1970s – is that main stages are the highest-profile spaces that we have, public platforms that I do not believe political playwrights should abandon. If I am to write challenging drama, I want as large an audience to challenge as possible. I conceive of my playwriting as helping to shape the public discourse – around war, economics, or inequality – in the way that activists outside of theatre, such as Stop the War Coalition, The People's Assembly or Occupy, have done. In this sense I am following a strong tradition of political playwriting in Britain, a small, but representative proportion of which will be documented in this research. I want to provoke debate, to insist that, contrary to the proponents of neoliberal orthodoxy, there *is* an alternative. I want my plays to help convince people that they *can* challenge growing inequality, or climate destruction, or the next war.

The first of my plays, *The Ends* (2012), explores resistance in an era of neoliberal capitalist orthodoxy and looming ecological collapse. *Quicksand* (2013) follows a group of soldiers in the build-up to the Iraq War and charts the consequences of the subsequent decade of conflict on their lives. The final play, *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins* (2014), considers resistance under extreme circumstances through the experiences of conscientious objectors during World War One. Though distinct in setting and subject matter, they are linked by the motivation to contest the capitalist

imperialism that, as I shall argue below, has remained a constant in British history since the first days of empire. Each play is built around characters who attempt to defy capitalist imperialism in one way or another.

Realism and Empire

Realism is a contested term that has multiple – sometimes contradictory – meanings. In one sense it is the mode or style that places real camels and 'natives' on stage in William Muskerry and John Jourdain's imperial play *Khartoum!* (1885), a play nominally about the siege of the city. 19th century realism, then, often focussed on a surface or photographic realism frequently obscuring facts that contradicted dominant discourses.[13] Camels notwithstanding, the actual events of the siege were reversed in the play to have the British emerge victorious over the Mahdist 'insurgents'. In reality, the Mahdist army was only defeated thirteen years later in 1898 (Bratton et al, 1991:141). The realistic staging of *Khartoum!* is designed to convince the audience of its factual accuracy, its truth, and deny the uncomfortable idea that the British Empire could be defeated by one of its colonies, not to mention the fact that the insurgents were justified in fighting a foreign invader. The insurgency contradicts several of the false assumptions upon which the British Empire was built – namely that the British were a superior, civilising force in the world and that this superiority both justified and made inevitable Britain's dominance. The play's fictional plot, presented as reality, seeks to hide these contradictions.

---

[13] Realism during this period, as Raymond Williams has described, has come to be understood as 'naturalism'. The perception is of an artistic method focussing on surface mimesis that has been abandoned, that is distinct from realism; but Williams contested this reductive view, noting that much drama (circa 1977) fitted the description of naturalism (1977:65). Benedetti writes: 'Naturalism, for [Stanislavsky], implied the indiscriminate reproduction of the surface of life. Realism, on the other hand, while taking its material from the real world and from direct observation, selected only those elements which revealed the relationships and tendencies lying under the surface', in *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, fourth, revised edition (London: Methuen, 2008), p. 17 .

In Ruby Cohn's analysis, realism was 'the mimetic representation of middle-class values' that succeeded melodrama and the well-made-play, and it is unsurprising that in 19th century Britain its values were essentially imperial (1991:1-2). Or that, as Holder argues, these realist plays helped to educate the British public in 'the business of Empire' (1991:133).

The danger in this mode of representation exceeds re-affirmation of existing values. Rather, realism is active in value-creation, neatly upholding the moral superiority inherent within the myths of empire; namely, that the British were bringing civilization to the savage, undeveloped world (rather than, as in Marxist analysis, exploiting it for commercial and material gain). The centrality of the imperial project to national identity inevitably influenced the theatrical system of production beyond the decline of empire itself (Cochrane, 2011; Harvie, 2005). For Cohn, this influence continued at least until 1956, recognising in Jimmy Porter that 'a single character as a specific country is a dangerous equation […] since most audiences still want to respond to the specificity of individuals on stage' (1991:21).

Some authors have identified the role of nation-oriented culture as instrumental in bringing 'imagined coherence' to nation states (Zarilli et al, 2006: 260-61). In this way, State-of-the-Nation plays like *Look Back in Anger* claim to represent not only the imperial nostalgia of Jimmy Porter, but through him the imperial nostalgia of Britain – or more specifically, the young generation in Britain – affirming the 19th century belief in empire that, as the work of Churchill's generation of playwrights attests to, was certainly not held by many young people.

An alternative definition of realism was argued for by Bertolt Brecht, who demanded that 'our conception of *realism* needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of convention' with the sole aim of exposing truth and the causal network that would allow us to understand how things come to be (2001:109). Raymond Williams described Brecht's model as interpretive realism, an artistic method that interprets events or social relations (often from a certain political standpoint, such as Marxism) rather than merely reproducing them. This realism delves beneath the surface, and is less a question of form than a type of art (Eagleton, 1976:72). Much of Churchill's work can be described as realist in this sense: although the narrative and formal techniques are, at times, joyously non-'realistic', her texts deconstruct received notions of the subject to get closer to how the world 'really' is – exposing the racism and sexism of imperialism in *Cloud Nine* (1985), for example, or the banal evil precipitating total war in *Far Away* (2008). The absurd, in other words, can be more real than reality itself. Additionally, this form of playwriting often signifies more universally than mimetic realism, whose significance can be confined to particular characters and situations. *Far Away*, with its dystopian ironies and chaotic final act, can be a play about any war of the 20th century (and up to the present) whereas Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (2008) and *Stuff Happens* (2004) are more likely to be received as plays about the Iraq War.[14]

Other political playwrights such as Arnold Wesker and Trevor Griffiths would take up Brecht's challenge to see things as they really are – not just to describe but to interpret – but without the formal disruptions of Churchill or Brecht himself. While this

---

[14] Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* (1928), one of the great anti-war plays, combines the emotional appeal of mimesis with expressionist techniques.

opened them up to the critique that their drama shows 'what is' but not 'what might be', leaving the status quo undisturbed, these playwrights contended that the *nature* of the reality recreated is key – that it is possible to critique dominant discourses within the bounds of mimetic representation. Furthermore, these playwrights argued that political change can *only* be achieved through mimetic realism – that which is interpretable by a wide audience who can identify with the representation of 'real' characters and situations (Patterson, 2003:15-18; Gale and Deeney, 2010:293-97).

Patterson distinguishes these broadly contrasting schools of political dramatic writing as reflectionist and interventionist: the first mimetic, in characterisation and causality realistic (Wesker, Griffiths, early Arden); the second interpretive and non-naturalistic (Churchill, Barker, Bond).[15] Both strands, in fact, are vulnerable to the postmodern accusation of falsely claimed objectivity, of 'really seeing the world as it is' (and as it might be), aimed at 19th century surface realism. Postmodern theories of subjectivity[16] have contested the individual's capacity to transcend their own interpretive bias, further complicating all forms of realism, which has initiated the development and theorisation of postdramatic forms (Lehmann, 2006; Jürs-Munby et al, 2013).

In the context of oppositional politics, both forms of realism have struggled to articulate how resistance to political hegemony takes place. In Wesker's *Roots* (1960), a reflectionist play whose characters' speech and actions resemble those of a working-class rural Norfolk family, Beatie Bryant struggles to overcome the political

---

[15] Although, as Patterson notes, writers adopted different styles during their careers; Osborne would go on to experiment with forms very different to the 'kitchen-sink' realism of his first play. The categorisation of the writers above relates to certain plays or periods in their career.

[16] Notably, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler.

ignorance of her family (and herself) and the received socialism of her boyfriend Ronnie, only finding her voice at the very end of the play. We are left unsure whether Beatie's fledgling resistance will flourish or not. In Churchill's *Hospital at the Time of Revolution* (1990a), Fanon, a doctor caught between colonial state and indigenous rebellion, can only respond with silence. For Churchill especially, the possibility of resistance and the danger of complicity have been central to her work.

Today the capacity for culture to challenge or reinforce hegemony is widely acknowledged (Yudice, 2003; Da Costa, 2010; Harvie, 2013), and the same dichotomy between mimetic realism and non-naturalistic realism remains relevant to political theatre in the 21st century. The divide has widened even further, as playwrights understood to be postdramatic[17] have experimented with form amidst a fairly consistent adherence to mimetic realism on main stages: most obviously in the contrast between verbatim forms of documentary theatre and the formal experiments of Sarah Kane or Martin Crimp[18] – writers all too aware of realist theatre's tendency to mirror society's dominant values. I would align my own work, at least formally, with writers in the mimetic realist mode such as Mike Bartlett or Gregory Burke. As with other working-class political writers, this is partially motivated by the desire to communicate with a wide audience that more experimental forms can preclude. My interpretation of events, choice of protagonist and dramatic situations are driven by my commitment to exposing the causal network underlying societies and nations.

---

[17] These writers may not necessarily self-identify as postdramatic writers. Lehmann's term has been used to retrospectively theorise practices that theatre-makers developed organically.

[18] Crimp has written plays in both mimetic (dramatic) and non-mimetic (postdramatic) modes, examples being *Cruel and Tender* (2004) and *Attempts on her Life* (1997), respectively.

Political resistance

Political resistance is the need or desire, at an individual or collective level, to reveal and oppose injustices resulting from the routine operation and deliberate misuse of power. This target is often described as the status quo, system 'that maintains, or is committed to maintaining, the existing state of affairs' (OED) in which particular injustices are perpetuated. Since the collapse of grand oppositions, oppositional politics is also frequently conceived in terms of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, whereby the worldview of the ruling class frames the status quo as inevitable or natural (Morton, 2007:88-93). The dominance of neoliberal capitalism, naturalised to the point of ubiquity across so much of the world, has therefore prompted the continued development of hegemonic theory by critics such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), or Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). Hegemony should be recognised as a lived process, meaning opposition to it is determined by the particular qualities of the dominant power (Chin and Mittleman, 2000:32). But whatever the nature of the hegemony – whether naturalising the status quo of a quasi-social democratic, capitalist society such as the UK, or the distinct circumstances of a brutally oppressive monarchy such as Saudi Arabia – the substance of resistance remains constant. What changes, depending on the resistive imperative and relative freedom to do so, is the method.

Resistance begins in the mind, whether consciously or unconsciously. In the most oppressive situations, it is often the only place where it can happen and, at first, usually in isolation. There is a natural affinity, in fact, between artistic creation and oppositional politics in that both acts must *imagine* something that does not exist. Despite the establishment of hegemony, the mind is extremely difficult to control –

thought and the individual will always maintain the capacity to oppose (as well as to acquiesce). When resistance is voiced, it becomes much more dangerous in general: for the individual, for those around them, and for the agents or system dedicated to maintaining the status quo. The voice enables the formation of collectivism among likeminded individuals, as well as a form of weak solidarity among others ('I agree with you, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'll stand with you'). Historically, the artist has played an important role in bridging the gap between individuals, and between silence and testimony. Physical resistance is the strongest form of action: the irrefutability of bodies, together in one place, indicates a groundswell of feeling, a willingness to defy, a commitment. Of course, there are degrees of physicality and commitment: will the protest break up when the police charge? Will they fight back? Are they prepared to kill? Will they stand and suffer beatings without backing down? Will they force the state to extreme acts that undermine its authority?

Paulo Freire has been one of the most influential theorists of resistance, articulating its mechanics and founding his theory on collective consciousness-raising through education; teaching the oppressed (and their potential allies) how to interrogate dominant discourses and power relations, allowing them to create alternative discourses based upon their own worldview. Understanding and articulation are the first steps, but must be followed up with action (Freire, 1996: 31).

In practice, resistance tends to respond to the manifestation of oppression. In Palestine, so the argument goes, politics is pointless when Israel is willing to use

force. In the UK, violence is generally eschewed by all parties:[19] battles are fought

through public relations and the rule of law, with environmental groups, for example,

in danger of transgressing into criminality also seeking to hold governments or

corporations to account through legal channels. Both sides attempt to shape

discourse and public opinion via the media. But there is always a place for

imaginative individuals and collectives to alter the nature of the struggle: the passive

defiance of Ghandi's Salt March, or Martin Luther King's civil rights movement, are

examples where force has not been met with force, but with something that proved

ultimately more powerful.[20]

Models of resistance in post-war political theatre

If the 1960s and 1970s were a golden era for radical Leftist playwriting, Thatcherism,

the rise of neoliberalism and the subsequent collapse of communism in the 1980s

necessitated a revision of radical aspirations. Today British political playwriting is

usually organised around individual issues rather than collective experiences, and is

more likely to explore the limits and intricacies of subjectivity than present a coherent

worldview (such as socialism). Political engagement, especially among younger

generations, is relatively low, and state intervention has largely neutralised the

radical political theatre-making of the 1960s and 1970s (McGrath, 1990:31-38;

Peacock, 1999:215; Harvie, 2013:62-3).[21] As playwright Michael Wynne points out,

---

[19] Although ruptures in this democratic entente have occurred in the neoliberal era: the Miner's Strike of 1984-5 saw violent clashes, most notably brutal state suppression of the miners at the Battle of Orgreave in June 1984. Rioting broke out in London in opposition to Margaret Thatcher's Poll Tax in March 1990. Racial tensions between police and ethnic minorities contributed to riots in London in 1981, 1985 and 2011, and in Bradford in 1995 and 2001.

[20] It should be noted that despite the fame of these and other examples, the number is vastly outweighed by instances where force has eviscerated passive resistance or where violence has been met with violence.

[21] See below for a more detailed outline of political interference in the arts.

these developments pose problems for political dramatists, not least because of

today's audience:

> The old certainties of left and right are no longer clear. We live in a time when people read *No Logo* and feel indignant about sweat shop labour in the third world, then go and buy a pair of Nike trainers because they go with their jeans. Maybe that means we don't believe in anything anymore. Maybe we're just a bit more human and fallible, and honest about that. In some ways that makes the job of a playwright harder, but the results should be more interesting. (2003:18)

Yet even at the zenith of Leftist playwriting in the 1960s and 1970s, playwrights

grappled with the problem of disrupting the status quo. This was a time of great hope

tempered by extreme uncertainty – nuclear proliferation, the war in Vietnam, and

Soviet oppression in Eastern Europe – and a powerful establishment that had

survived significant social change in the first half of the 20th century. The frustration

of many of the 1968 wave is evident in much of their work towards the end of the

1970s, such as in two plays from 1979, Monstrous Regiment's production of David

Edgar and Susan Todd's *Teendreams* (1992) and Bond's *The Worlds* (1992).

Political disengagement in the 21st century corresponds to both a lack of radical

politics on stage and backlashes against this lack; most notably the scale of

postdramatic formal experimentation and a flurry of verbatim plays during the 2000s

that sought legitimacy in 'truth' to counter the absence of a coherent Left ideology.

Socialist, feminist and post-imperial writers, frustrated with the political inertia of the

likes of Jimmy Porter and his nostalgia, have often sought to expose the iniquities of

capitalism, imperialism and class through the resistance of sustained protagonists

who held or represented socialist beliefs;[22] such as Beatie Bryant in Wesker's *Roots*,

Gethin Price in Trevor Griffith's 1975 play *Comedians* (1996) or Mill in Zinnie Harris's

Further than the Furthest Thing (2000). The sustained protagonist is identified by

some degree of psychological realism, consistency of character and character arc.

Realist plays are frequently structured by the protagonist's progress, from which the

audience can often infer wider social or political statements. Sustained protagonists

also feature in theatrical forms other than realism, appearing in earlier epic plays by

Brecht such as *Mother Courage and her Children* (1980) and *Life of Galileo* (2001a)*.*

The sustained protagonist has been challenged by postmodern relativism,

multiculturalism, and the diversity of perspectives in contemporary Britain. But it

continues to be a common model of resistance adopted by political playwrights –

perhaps because artists and audiences continue to identify with the particularity of

their 'lives' – just as realism remains the dominant form on British main stages.

These perceived weaknesses, and the implied susceptibility to subjective bias that

problematises realist forms, cannot be dismissed entirely. An acknowledgement of

social, historical or ideological context is essential in ensuring that sustained

protagonists allow dramatists not only to explore complex issues, but crucially to

assert individual agency as a force for change in a world where the individual or

citizen is marginalised by the corporate-state nexus. Removed from their contexts,

sustained protagonists risk being absorbed by neoliberal interpretations of the

individual. To not contest the nature of individuality is, in a time of neoliberal

hegemony, arguably to not contest anything; as forms of solidarity such as trades

unionism and political parties become increasingly marginalised, the individual

---

[22] As the analysis of Jimmy Porter, below, acknowledges, sustained protagonists have the potential to affirm or contest hegemony.

becomes the primary, sole-remaining political agent. Audiences continue to be powerfully engaged by protagonists, as the popularity of increasingly nuanced, character-driven cable television drama attests to.[23] Where the act of voting, the primary mechanism of democratic individual agency, is so distrusted,[24] positive examples of individuals affecting political change are as important as innovation through theatrical form. In the light of conflicting estimations of its political efficacy and neoliberal hegemony, the sustained protagonist in political plays is frequently used to explore the problem of political resistance – from the title character in Edward Bond's *Lear* (2006) to Galactia in Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* (2006). These examples, among others, will be explored in the following chapters.

The collective is an alternative model of oppositional politics that foregoes the sustained protagonist to explore reality through social relations, as in Brecht's *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* (1976), Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1985), Hare's *Fanshen* (1976), and Mike Bartlett's *13* (2011). Underpinned by the suspicion of mimetic realism previously discussed, the collective model has frequently been the preference of Brechtian playwrights attempting to make radical interventions in theatre and politics by encouraging the audience to take a critical attitude towards character and plot. Resistors are represented as dependent upon

---

[23] See Martin (2013) for analysis of the revolution in subscriber- based, high quality television drama pioneered by HBO. For a brief period, a handful of cable channels were released from the shackles of ratings/ advertising and pushed the boundaries of television storytelling, in terms of acceptability, structure and characterisation. These shows were run by largely autonomous writer-showrunners, such as David Chase (*The Sopranos*). Ultimately, *The Sopranos* is highly critical of the neoliberal, consumerist society that shapes protagonist Tony Soprano – his arc across the seven seasons is one of decline and his actions increasingly abhorrent. David Simon's shows *The Wire* and *Treme* are driven as much by events as by characters, placing characters firmly within their social contexts to create a potentially more 'realistic' representation of social drama.
[24] As the voter turnout analysis of recent UK elections above suggests (see note 2). The four lowest turnouts since 1918 occurred between 2001 and 2015, with young voters the least engaged demographics.

the social fabric of which they are a part, and interventions can take many forms –
including the actions of characters but extending to production practices and artistic
decisions. Theatrical techniques such as doubling, gender- and colour-blind casting,
and structural disruptions have empowered playwrights to stage counter-narratives
in powerful new ways that defy easy interpretation by audiences.

Popular in the Workers Theatre Movement of the 1930s, documentary theatre has
experienced a revival since the late 1990s and has become a model among political
playwrights. Verbatim plays such as Richard Norton-Taylor's *Colour of Justice*
(Tricycle, 1999) have dramatised transcripts of tribunals for the stage, while others
such as Hare's *Stuff Happens* (NT, 2004) have (controversially) fused verbatim
material with fictional dialogue. Postdramatic theatre events, most notably Stephen
Emmott and Katie Mitchell's 'theatrical lecture' *Ten Billion* (Royal Court, 2013), have
foregrounded scientific objectivity in departing almost entirely from theatrical
convention to deliver stark warnings about climate change. Documentary models
have responded to a crisis of legitimacy engendered by the triumph of capitalism
over socialism, a powerful corporate media, and neoliberal imperatives subjugating
artistic measures of value to economic ones. The desire for clarity and certainty in an
increasingly complex, uncertain world has seen documentary models become
common vehicles for political issues.

However, documentary forms are highly susceptible to the non-realist playwright's
accusation of only showing what is and not what can be, and of insisting on the
'truth' of the play as an accurate representation of reality. Documentary plays often
claim factual veracity, binding the possibilities of the narrative to an actual sequence

of events; where playwrights (such as Hare in *Stuff Happens*) depart from fact their claim to authenticity – such a powerful aspect of the form – is undermined. Frequently, documentary plays focus on victims of violence or oppression where subjects are deceased; as in *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (Royal Court, 2005) and *Colour of Justice*. In terms of resistance, then, there is a question of agency when subjects are unable to fight any longer, a painful realisation for those living through bleak political times. Antonin Artaud's articulation of the potential and dilemma of documentary forms – that by performing our fears, we can overcome them (Hughes, 2011:12) – seems particularly relevant in terms of political resistance: audiences can be inspired by the courage of the dead or driven to anger by their fate; but they can also be forced to recognise and perhaps be intimidated by their own fear.

One final point to make is that while I will principally explore political resistance as represented through characters or dramatic juxtapositions, the dissenting act in the first instance is committed by the playwright. In choosing to write about challenging subjects, by experimenting with radical forms, and by shaping the worldview that the play and its characters assert, the playwright actively challenges discourses that uphold political hegemony. Thus Caryl Churchill has consistently written against the grain of mainstream theatre throughout her career. In early plays such as *Hospital at the Time of Revolution* her choice of subject matter, colonialism in Algeria, when interpreted from a post-colonial perspective opposes the continuation of imperialism in Algeria and elsewhere. Churchill's portrait of Fanon's deep unease passes judgement on the colonialist patients he treats, as does the voice given to those persecuted by them. Churchill has conducted formal experiments with gender-reversed casting in *Cloud Nine*, challenging hetero-normative attitudes towards

sexuality. But Churchill's response to the situation in Gaza has been one of her most interesting acts of resistance, and it is an act that is also external to the play itself. By offering performance rights to *Seven Jewish Children* (Royal Court, 2009) free of charge, provided that no admission fee is charged and a collection is taken for a Palestinian charity at each performance, she is resisting the commodification of art (if not capitalism itself) and pro-Israeli media bias. Furthermore, she challenges the audience to support the human rights of Palestinians directly (by donating money).

In a time of neoliberal hegemony, artists are challenged to overcome significant barriers to resistance. Political apathy in Britain, particularly among the young, has created an environment where political commitment is frequently met with bemusement. This disengagement cannot be ignored when writing sustained protagonists with whom audiences can identify, the upshot being that they are frequently apolitical. The absence of a coherent worldview to rival the neoliberal project amidst a proliferation of opinions also makes it difficult to model plausible political alternatives on stage,[25] while the sheer complexity of global capitalism makes it ever harder to critique. The intention of the playwright, then, takes on new significance when the effectiveness of political plays is difficult to gauge.

Chapter outlines

This research is structured into five chapters.The first explores the changing strategies and approaches to resistance in post-war British theatre. The second

---

[25] Just as the Left has struggled to articulate a plausible alternative in the political sphere since 1980. The response to the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader provides a timely reminder of this: so low is the status of the left-wing policies Corbyn has campaigned on, Tories have surreptitiously joined the Labour party in order to vote him in, Blairite Labour MPs have threatened to refuse to work with him, and the media has savaged him.

outlines the theoretical framework I have used to analyse political resistance on stage, drawing extensively on the work of established playwrights. The following three chapters focus on a specific area related to each of my three plays: climate change, the Iraq War, and the First World War.

Chapter One is concerned with the main arguments and developments in political playwriting in the post-war period, and also describes alternative strategies to the singly-authored dramatic play. Chapter Two explores imperialism in the neoliberal era and how playwrights have responded to the changing political landscape. It then outlines models of resistance – individual, collective and documentary – that playwrights have adopted to challenge the status quo, setting up a framework with which to analyse oppositional plays in relation to my own work. Chapter Three focuses on anthropogenic climate change as the catalyst of the Green movement, which affirms a growing political rationality capable of challenging neoliberal orthodoxy. It critiques the small canon of climate plays to have appeared on main stages according to the models of political resistance established in Chapter Two, and reflects upon how the strategies, challenges, and creative solutions of these playwrights has informed my own play *The Ends*. Chapter Four focuses on the Iraq War as democratic rupture, through which the nature of neoliberal governance can be glimpsed. Several Iraq War plays are analysed in relation to my second play, *Quicksand*, in particular the problem of defiance for soldiers and the struggle to write about my personal experiences in the Iraq War in a more universal way. Chapter Five considers playwriting approaches to the First World War over the course of the 20th century, how cultural history is shaped by artistic discourse and the efforts of revisionist playwrights to shake the nation out of its complacency regarding the

conflict. It reflects on how my third play, *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*, has in turn been shaped by these earlier plays.

Through this analysis the models of political resistance employed by British playwrights since the First World War, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the challenges that writing figures of resistance poses within each playwrights' specific political context. It will also reflect upon how these insights have influenced my own creative quest in writing plays where resistors remain politically credible. The iterative nature of the project and how my approach has shifted over the course of the three plays is illustrated by moments where I have encountered the same problems and challenges as established playwrights, and my attempt to overcome them.

Chapter One

As an emerging playwright, the only performances of my work to date have been in fringe spaces. *The Ends* was performed in 2013 as part of York Theatre Royal's TakeOver Festival, my short play *Oceans* showed as part of a community theatre project with Riding Lights Youth Theatre. Most recently my work has been performed as part of an evening of alternative political theatre on the day of the European Referendum at Seven Arts in Leeds, and I am developing a play with Leeds-based regional touring company Buglight Theatre after securing ACE funding. As this chapter describes, some of our most celebrated political playwrights have worked in these areas of alternative theatre, and I must state up front that I believe they are valid forums for political resistance on stage. I will continue to work in fringe theatre, but as stated in the introduction I also believe effective opposition to neoliberal hegemony, Britain's imperial role and inaction on climate change must also be pursued through mainstream theatre.

This chapter evaluates some of the strategies and approaches political playwrights have adopted in challenging dominant discourses and power structures in the post-war period up until the 2000s. A full survey is beyond the scope of this project and is not my intention; rather, I have drawn on specific examples that have informed my own creative decisions in writing the three plays presented. This includes strategies such as the move by counter-cultural agitprop groups to main stages, made by David Edgar, Howard Brenton, Howard Barker and David Hare, that has parallels with my own intention to pursue main stage production. It also includes lessons taken from theatre practice and dramaturgical approaches that are outside the single-authored realist mode in which I write. The chapter works through conflicts between mimetic

realist and non-naturalist playwriting, as well as arguments against the political potential of mainstream theatre, in order to clarify my own decision to focus my efforts on writing realist plays for main stages.

Changing strategies of resistance since 1956

Around 1956, realism that brought previously neglected perspectives to the stage challenged the pre-war status quo. During the 1960s and particularly after 1968, this realism (kitchen-sink or otherwise) was being critiqued by a new generation of writers concerned with showing how things come to be as they are – not only what is but what could be. These writers sought to reveal the structures and processes underlying society that had previously been perceived as natural, or as malleable. This split between realist and non-realist writers has continued up to the present day, with D. Keith Peacock arguing that attempts to displace realism as the dominant form in British drama have only been partially successful (2007:25). The presence of increasingly diverse subject-positions on stage was a key strategy in undermining dominant discourses, with the representation of female or homosexual experience (for example) negating versions of reality where women are lesser than men or homosexuality is unnatural, immoral or criminal. As Chris Megson's history of British playwriting in the 1970s describes, there was a general shift from class-based politics to identity politics during the course of the decade which continued in the 1980s (2012:59) and has defined 21st century British theatre to date.

For David Edgar, one consequence of this increased complexity was that the crudity of agitprop, which had become prominent again after 1968 when playwrights sensed a revolutionary turning point, quickly became unsuitable. This prompted an exodus of

major writers such as Edgar, Hare, and Brenton from agitprop companies such as The General Will and Portable Theatre, as they sought to take advantage of the reach and aesthetic potential of main stages. Today, class is much less frequently used to define social struggle than it was during the 1970s.

The era of grand oppositions that the playwrights of the 1968 generation had known eventually petered out with the triumph of capitalism over communism in 1989, leaving an ideological void that caused socialist writers like Brenton and Trevor Griffiths to be 'robbed of their subject' according to Richard Eyre, a director who has produced the work of both (quoted in Megson, 2012:148). As globalisation advanced, the diversity of perspectives grew and the complexity of the world increased to the point where Mark Ravenhill, one of the most prominent of a new generation of playwrights to emerge in the 1990s, has argued that the type of dialectical political play written by Bond or Hare could no longer represent this globalised world (quoted in Rebellato, 2009:29-30). This postdramatic situation, a term coined by Han-Thies Lehmann but also theorised by others scholars such as Dan Rebellato, is typified by plays like Crimp's 1997 play *Attempts on Her Life* (2007) or Kane's 1998 play *Crave* (2001), plays with little trace of dialectical argument, cogent plot, realist characterisation or other formal dramatic conventions.

New Labour's landslide election victory in 1997 ushered in a period of growth for playwriting, fuelled by initiatives such as Labour's £25m fund for new plays produced in regional theatres in 2003.[26] But while this should have freed political playwrights from the shackles of Thatcherite austerity, the politics of Britain was far removed

---

[26] This fund was depleted around 2009, and with the first round of post-financial crisis arts cuts in 2010 new plays (excluding adaptations and translations) in regional theatres have declined (Kennedy, 2013).

from the 1970s. New Labour was an essentially neoliberal, centrist party and retained the subsidy criteria introduced in the 1980s that commodified theatre in terms of social utility and value-for-money. Despite the increase in postdramatic performance, realism continued to be the dominant form at the Royal Court and many other mainstream theatres. The old dichotomy between the efficacy of realism versus non-realistic forms continued.

As in the 1980s, the current playwriting landscape is once again defined by cuts to arts subsidy, following the collapse of the debt-fuelled global economy in 2008, the election of the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition in 2010, and especially since the Conservative majority in 2015. There was a brief, 1968-esque period around 2011 with the Occupy movement, which has led to more significant political change in countries like Spain and Greece, a foothold in Parliament for the Green party and Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader. But signs of a Left revival have been overshadowed by the reactionary politics of UKIP, the vote to leave the European Union, the election of a far-right government in Poland, and the election of Donald Trump as US president. The political situation now is largely seen as a backlash against globalisation and the rampant inequality that it unleashed. These events pose a challenge to playwrights like Ravenhill and his advocate Dan Rebellato, whose concept of cosmopolitanism theorises a globalised world where plurality is accepted and promotes tolerance.

Though explored more fully in subsequent chapters that focus on the subjects of my own plays, it is worth briefly sketching out the broad movements in oppositional theatre since the mid-20th century. The following sections highlight how playwrights

brought oppositional politics to the stage through select examples from individual or 'waves' of writers, specifically those that have posed problems for or been useful in the quest to create positive figures of resistance in my own plays. Though the work of these playwrights is distinct, with marked differences in style and tone that set individual plays apart from those of the writer's contemporaries (and in many cases from a writer's earlier or later work), the 'waves' categorisation is useful in gathering together plays which share some common qualities. Not least is the shared intention to challenge dominant discourses – whether that be capitalism, in the case of Marxists like Davids Hare and Edgar, or patriarchy in the case of Caryl Churchill and Bryony Lavery.

1956: realism

Many accounts of post-war British theatre still begin with Jimmy Porter (Devine, 2006; Eyre and Wright, 2001; Billington, 2007; Lacey, 1995; Taylor, 1969), despite recognition that the revolutionary flashpoint conjured up by influential critics like Kenneth Tynan was largely fictitious (Rebellato, 1999). As Michael Billington has observed, the first performance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956 has 'acquired its own unstoppable historical momentum' by way of repeated misrepresentation (2007:97). Jimmy Porter, a potential figure of political resistance, became the original Angry Young Man: angry at the Establishment, at his perceived lack of opportunity as a newly educated working-class male, and at his upper-class wife. Hailed by Michael Billington as a genuine State of the Nation play, *Look Back in Anger* has become the focus of revisionist perspectives over the years that have criticised Jimmy Porter's misogyny and domestic abuse, his imperial nostalgia, and

his passive political conservatism; questioning the political potential of play and character alike (Spencer, 1996:473; Bhatia, 1999:392; Shellard, 2000:28).

The play's 'State of the Nation' credentials have been undermined by this post-colonial and feminist scholarship, which find it no more representative of its own time than it is of ours; criticism that rejects the veneration of the play by male writers and critics. One may look to Shelagh Delaney's contemporaneous and much more transgressive 1958 debut *A Taste of Honey* (1982), which tackles class alongside race, feminism and homosexuality, to understand how much of British life goes unacknowledged in Osborne's play. But if *Look Back in Anger* has been an easy target for critics of realism, *A Taste of Honey* affirms realism's potential to disrupt dominant discourses. Its characters and situations are less easily dismissed as only showing a surface reality that obscures (and upholds) the lies society tells about itself. Though they would not be considered unusual in Britain today, where racial and sexual equality is far greater and moral institutions like marriage less dominant, they would have remained transgressive well into the 1980s.

The realism of this 'wave' of writers was criticised by many of those who came afterwards, but in dramatising characters and situations previously unseen on mainstream stages – the working-class Jewish communists of Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1960) or the threadbare existence of the young, working-class characters in Bond's 1965 play *Saved* (2009) – these writers were clearly challenging the rose-tinted view of Britain that had dominated up to that point. They put violence into the spotlight, perhaps one of the biggest skeletons in Imperialist Britain's closet, in plays like Arden's 1959 production *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*

(2002) or Charles Wood's 1964 play *Dingo* (1999). Choosing to write about characters and situations that are generally ignored remains a credible approach to undermine dominant discourses, a strategy feminist or gay playwrights pursued in subsequent decades. As Trevor Griffiths points out, 'one of the things about realistic modes is still that you can offer through them demystifying, undistorted, more accurate counter-descriptions of political processes and social reality' (quoted in Edgar, 1988:36). It is the content and worldview being staged, in short, which defines realism's political potential – not the form itself. As Joe Kelleher has argued, 'bringing into appearance' is the primary political act; showing things that otherwise might not be shown (2009:24). To conflate, in terms of political efficacy, the work of Delaney, Griffiths or Bryony Lavery with Terence Rattigan (whose work remains popular in the West End) is reductive at best.

Of course, the argument that realism can uphold dominant discourses is not to be dismissed entirely. My own interest in Jimmy Porter centres on the reasons he was so often (and occasionally still is) upheld as the defining (anti-) hero of post-war British theatre. Porter brings into focus the difficulty in creating credible figures of political resistance; for all his anger, he appears interpolated into Britain's imperial ideology. Realism's potential to support dominant discourses is a danger that I have had to be aware of. A prominent recent example would be Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, protagonist of Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (Royal Court, 2009). Arguably a descendent of Jimmy Porter, Byron defies the society that seeks to discipline him into acceptability. But he also sells drugs to children and is a misogynist who refuses to be a father to his son. The play's link to *Look Back in Anger* persists in proclamations of its State-of-the-Nation credentials: somehow, a play about a

Romany traveller performed by an all-white cast 'speaks about a nation that has almost forgotten it is a nation – England' (Cavendish, 2010); a play that is 'a chronicle of us, now' (Barton, 2011). Such comparisons suggest how little theatre has changed since 1956 in some quarters – worrying not least because Britain is far more diverse today, its imperial past reflected in its demographics, but not always on its stages.

From these examples I can recognise the pitfalls of realism as a dramatic form, especially given that the aim of this project is to resist an ideology as powerful and pervasive as neoliberal capitalism. But as Delaney has shown, if the playwright has a strong awareness of their time and of the history that shaped it, realism remains an accessible, emotive and (consequently) politically powerful form. It also remains the dominant form on British main stages. Given the influence of mimetic drama on film and television, I would argue – as Griffiths has done – that the vast majority of Britons are most familiar and comfortable with realism (from an interview in 1976, quoted in Edgar, 1988:37; Griffiths, 1986:xxxix). As a playwright I could wish for a mass audience less dependent on realist drama, but short of working in Europe (where Bond, Barker and Crimp have all found considerable success) my view is that realism is the most appropriate form for creating positive resistors on stage in Britain. But the point made by Griffiths, and which is the foundation of my own work in the realist mode, is that presenting material in a form with which your audience is familiar does not mean abandoning your critical stance.

After 1968: challenges to realism and adapting to new political realities

For many playwrights and scholars of British theatre, 1968 marks the beginning of two decades of radical political theatre. For Innes, the 'ideologically defined "social realism" of the post-1968 generation' was at once a radical departure from the kitchen-sink realism of Osborne, Wesker and Delaney, as well as a return to the agitprop of the 1930s (2002:8). David Edgar notes that in 1967 there was just one socialist theatre group (CAST), but by 1978 there were at least 18 fully-subsidised socialist companies (1988:44). For Howard Brenton, ever the pessimist, 1968 left his generation adrift; leaving them with no love left for the official culture, but also destroying the idea of personal freedom that the revolutionary moment of 1968 had promised but not delivered (1972:16).

For me, the year 1968 is less important than the subsequent trajectory of the most influential playwrights of the so-called 1968 generation. Edgar, Brenton and Hare were all radicalised by the student protests in Paris and influenced by the French Situationists, who played such an important part in the counter-culture of the time. They believed the time was ripe for socialist revolution and predominantly wrote agitprop plays; Edgar for the General Will, while Brenton and Hare formed Portable Theatre, touring shows to places where working-class people lived and worked. Yet by the mid-seventies, they had all made the transition to main stages to take advantage of the greater resources and reach available.

While more avant-garde theatre-makers delved deeper into the fringe, Megson describes how Hare and Brenton became increasingly alarmed at a preoccupation with style within counter-cultural theatre (2012:36). They also recognised that they had fallen into an antagonistic relationship with the audience, especially working-

class audiences, who did not respond well to their Situationist-inspired attempts to disrupt the spectacle of capitalist consumerism (Edgar, 1988:25-6; Innes, 2002:197). The political situation in Britain also suggested that revolution was not, in fact, rapidly approaching, with a Conservative government elected in 1970 – although a few years later the 1974 Miner's Strike had toppled the Heath government and working-class militancy grew steadily throughout the decade. Even so, in 1975 Hare rejected the tactics of his earlier plays like 1970's *Slag* (1996), arguing that 'consciousness has been raised in this country for a good many years now and we seem further from radical political change than at any time in my life' (2005:115). Contrasting this statement with trade union activity at the time suggests that Hare's idea of radical political change was very different to that of most working-class people.

Hare, Brenton and Edgar's shift to main stages, then, was partially a reaction to the perceived failure of agitprop, performed to small audiences in non-theatre venues, as a way of opposing capitalism. Edgar, in particular, talks about responding to periods of class struggle or class retreat, with the period 1970-74 seen as the latter. But as Innes argues, 'this shift marked a change in means rather than aims. Their political perspective remained the same, Marxist-radical' (2002:198). The other aspect of the transition relates to Brenton's feeling that political theatre should be 'at the centre of public life' and that meant big theatres with large audiences (Itzin, 1980:192). As well as the profile, reach and resources available in mainstream theatres, there was a desire to occupy 'official' public spaces.

Not all of the major playwrights of this period followed the same trajectory, however. A contemporary of Osborne, John Arden began at the Royal Court in the 1950s with

The Waters of Babylon in 1957, *Live Like Pigs* in 1958 and *Serjeant Musgrave's*

Dance in 1959, fusing naturalistic 'social problem' plotlines with music hall elements

(including songs and verse) in a style influenced by Brecht (Innes, 2002:132-33)

These early plays are reluctant to propose easy answers to the problems portrayed.

But by 1968, Arden had formed an artistic partnership with his wife Margaretta

D'Arcy, producing their first 'openly propagandistic play' for CAST, *Harold Muggins is*

a Martyr in 1968. It was the only play they created with the company due to tensions

during production, with Arden and D'Arcy becoming increasingly militant in their

politics. A brief association with the major national theatres ended in them picketing

the opening night of their 1972 RSC-commissioned play *The Island of the Mighty*,

allegedly due to disagreements over the director's interpretation of the play (Innes,

2002:148-9). They had more success at the Edinburgh Fringe with *The*

Ballygombeen Bequest (also in 1972), centring on the eviction of Irish peasants by

an English landlord, until performances were halted by a writ of libel – after the

name, address and phone number of Commander Burges, a real landlord involved in

evicting a tenant family, were given to the audience (Wroe, 2004). The 1975

production *The Non-Stop Connolly Show*, a cycle of six agitprop plays about the life

and death of James Connolly, a key figure in the Irish Republican Movement, was

first performed in Dublin over 24 hours. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Arden and D'Arcy's

commitment to confronting the injustice of English rule in Ireland (an extremely

radical cause in England) and combative relationship with theatres and companies

(from CAST to the RSC) meant an abrupt end to Arden's career as a playwright in

Britain.[27] For me, Arden is an interesting case in point concerning compromise:

because he rejected society he rejected its (predominantly realist) theatre; but in

---

[27] He has enjoyed success as a novelist, however; in particular the Booker-nominated *Silence Among the Weapons* (1982) (Wroe, 2004).

doing so consigned himself into exile and insignificance. Arguably, he could have achieved more with the epic, nuanced plays of his early career than with the black-and-white agitprop style of his later work.

Howard Barker is another major writer of this period whose career diverges from his contemporaries Edgar, Hare and Brenton, and in hindsight has more in common with Bond. After beginning writing agitprop, Barker's plays attracted the interest of both the Royal Court (*Stripwell* and *Fair Slaughter*, both 1977) and RSC (*That Good Between Us* in 1977 and *The Hang of the Gaol* in 1978), mainly because, as Charles Lamb argues, the work was seen to be politically committed and represented political figures and questions (2005:6). Very quickly Barker's writing increased in both complexity and its rejection of convention, and by the 1980s his work was frequently ignored by the national theatres (Lamb, 2005:14). Barker founded theatre company *The Wrestling School* to stage his own work, finding British theatres not only unwilling but dramaturgically unfit to stage his work, and like Bond has enjoyed more success in France than in Britain. But Barker is also distinguished by his playwriting philosophy, which is dismissive of the realism, social discourse and rationality of writers such as Edgar; instead favouring poetry, emotion, raw subjectivity and metaphor (Innes, 2002:510). Barker has argued that theatre should seek to 'engage with conscience at the deepest level' in order to resist authoritarian government, where ambiguity and complexity form a 'political posture of profound strength' (1989:48). Barker's plays are also inherently pessimistic, a quality he has argued for against the supposed 'positivity' of the Left, and his view of the audience and how it can be influenced confirms this viewpoint, where 'knowledge' or political awareness

is 'a private acquisition of an audience thinking individually and not collectively, an audience isolated in darkness and stretched to the limits of tolerance' (1989:50).

Edgar later reflected that agitprop was limited because it could not achieve the artist's task of showing how and why people behave as they do (1988:34), the defining tenet of politically-engaged realist playwriting whether practiced by Brecht, Wesker or Churchill. Edgar also argued that Brecht's work depended on a culturally-mature working class, one that produced 'nearly 200 Social-Democratic and nearly twenty Communist *daily* newspapers.' By contrast, Britain in the mid-seventies had no such mass revolutionary culture (1988:35). Observing that this lack forces theatre-makers into the arms of institutions and to adopt reactionary forms, there is inconsistency in Edgar's criticism of Griffith's work in television on the one hand, and on the other his advocacy for the power of mainstream theatre (citing the ending of Bond's *Lear*) and his own transition onto main stages.

Edgar's 1976 play *Destiny* (1987) is an interesting example of how these writers' formative years in agitprop influenced their version of realism. Elements of agitprop, such as the layering in of dense fascist theory into the dialogue and the use of verse to introduce each character's backstory, are fused with psychologically-realistic characterisation and a plot that includes traditional dramatic conventions such as reversals and suspense. In one scene Turner, a veteran of British military rule in India, is forced out of his antiques business by property speculator Monty – who uses his superior capital to bribe the council, buy the building and finally threaten to pay Caribbean immigrants to vandalise Turner's shop if he doesn't cooperate. Here Edgar is trying to engage the largely middle-class theatre audience with Turner's

plight, simultaneously slipping in hard facts about capitalist speculation methods. Radicalised by his dispossession, in later scenes Turner becomes the election candidate for the hard-right Nation Forward party, only to find out at the end of the play that the party is financed by the same investment company responsible for taking away his business. The intended effect on the audience is firstly to challenge their sympathy for Turner (who as an agent of the British Empire once made a living dispossessing Indians), secondly to warn them about seeking to cure the ills of capitalism with nationalism.

The association of these writers with the national theatres was rarely exclusive, with many of them producing work for a variety of outlets and Edgar himself continued to experiment, most notably in community theatre with plays such as his 1985 play *Entertaining Strangers* (1990). Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems and Bryony Lavery produced plays for main stages and fringe groups such as feminist company Monstrous Regiment. The 1970s was a period of great activity and diversity, and by the middle of the decade the distinctions between mainstream and fringe were less clear (Megson, 2012:62).

In my own work, I have worked on community theatre projects (Armed Forces project, Riding Lights Youth Theatre, 2013) and today this seems a standard approach given the range of opportunities to pursue. But the move by writers such as Edgar to oppose capitalism by bringing Marxist dialectic to main stages has been useful in contextualising my own intention to target mainstream theatres. Now as in the mid-seventies, there is a belief in many circles that realist playwriting has little resistive potential and that mainstream theatres are unreceptive to challenging work

– with a strong counter-culture in the form of postdramatic theatre comparable to the fringe theatre of the post-1968 period, whose approach to challenging hegemony differs from my own.

1980s: the neoliberal counter-revolution and a theatre of identity

Radical British theatre had thrived in the period since 1968. Despite Edgar's concerns over a period of class retreat in the early 1970s, as the decade progressed class conflict grew in intensity, reaching a climax with the Winter of Discontent in 1978-79. But the consequences of such widespread strike action ultimately proved damaging to working-class interests, with unions falling into an antagonistic relationship with successive Labour governments and failing to comprehend the effect of global economic instability on the British economy. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher was elected on a manifesto that included a promise to rein in the unions (Martin, 2009:50). The post-war consensus effectively ended with Thatcher's victory, and the 1980s truly would be a period of class retreat – so much so that today 'class' has been superseded in oppositional discourse by the myriad individual causes of identity politics. The collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989 left neoliberal capitalism as the dominant ideology, ushering in a period of rapid globalisation.

Perhaps the greatest problem for politically radical playwrights during the 1980s was the increasing interference of government in arts subsidy. Described in more detail below ('Writing resistance in the neoliberal age'), the relatively brief period where socialist theatre-makers could use public subsidy to attack the government and Britain itself as a capitalist country were drawing to an end. As D. Keith Peacock

explains, Thatcherite arts policy was to 'provide enough money to keep theatre viable but not to encourage any activity which had socio-political intent' (1999:215). As a result, many theatre-makers sought sanctuary in 'safe' theatre such as Shakespeare (Milling, 2012:32). In dramatic content, 'there was a general shift away from the public forum to private settings and a tendency towards less overtly political subject matters' (Adiseshiah, 2009:32).

The fate of companies that remained overtly oppositional is made clear by the number that did not survive the decade: 7:84 England, Belt and Braces, CAST, Joint Stock, Foco Novo, Broadside Mobile Workers' Theatre and North West Spanner were all killed off by funding cuts during the 1980s (Peacock, 1999:133). Others were fundamentally changed by the insistence, usually by the Arts Council, that bureaucratic management structures be put in place. Red Ladder and 7:84 Scotland went from being organised around counter-cultural collectivist principles to resembling a commercial West End theatre or a business (Peacock, 1999:139-40; Milling, 2012:40). Despite this environment, the big socialist writers of the 1968 generation continued to have work produced during the 1980s, perhaps because as established main stage names their work attracted large enough audiences to withstand financial pressure. This makes an interesting argument for attempting to gain the relative security that mainstream profile brings – you are less easily silenced. Hare and Brenton's *Pravda* (1985), a satirical attack on corporate media, was as robust a response to Thatcher's rise as any 1980s play. Their momentum slowed as the decade progressed, however, with the effect of neoliberal intervention in theatre managements evident in the fact that Bond exiled himself to continental Europe after problems producing 1985's *The War Plays* at the RSC. Bond

complained that 'theatre [in Britain] has become restricted. Its methods are increasingly derived from film and television and Broadway' (quoted in Saunders, 2004:265). At a time when Bond was seeking to push the boundaries of his playwriting, political pressure was being applied to make theatre more commercial. Howard Barker's experience was very similar to Bond's.

Much of the radical political theatre in the 1980s was made by women's or other specific demographic theatre groups. It is worth noting that, alongside more experimental non-realist forms, realism has been a valuable form for many feminist playwrights and remains so today, from Delaney to Sarah Daniels to Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti (Solga, 2016:40). In the 1980s, it is possible feminist theatre thrived because it flew under the radar of Tory arts policy – not only did much of it occur on small stages or touring circuits, but it was a form of political opposition very different to the socialism of the 1970s. Bryony Lavery's 1987 play *Origin of the Species* (1998), for example, challenges 'man-made' history where all human progress is attributable to men. While the content is highly political, it is not overtly recognisable as such; Peacock observes that the play's approach is to first draw the audience in and then to '*share* its concerns and conclusions' rather than deliver political polemic (1999:162). For Jane Milling, theatre was responding to a rapidly changing world:

> If one examines the rich actuality of playwriting and playwrights in practice during the decade, it is clear that in both form and subject matter playwrights were facing square-on the challenge of a politics fragmenting beyond class into the complexities of identity politics, as national identities were hollowed out from within by a government 'rolling back the state', and from without by global economic forces. (2012:59)

As with contemporaneous black theatre and gay theatre groups, feminist theatre distinguished itself by a narrowed political focus on issues specific to a particular demographic rather than society as a whole – although companies such as Monstrous Regiment, as well as writers like Churchill and Lavery also held socialist worldviews. This struggle for representation continues today, with the fight for gender equality far from over, and a growing number of subject-positions undermining dominant discourses that fail to acknowledge them – for example, people identifying as transgender.

However, it is important to acknowledge that this diversity of participation, content and practice was built on precarity. Of the 119 groups that could be described as feminist in 1987, most were funded by single-project grants; with companies like Monstrous Regiment exceptional in their longevity and profile (Peacock, 1999:147). It is unlikely that successive Thatcher governments recognised and actively took advantage of the difficulty identity politics would have in forming cogent and sustained resistance to neoliberalism, and its parallels with neoliberal individualism. But the way socialist theatre was dismantled through economic pressure suggests they were well aware of the disciplinary effect of the introduction of market forces. The diversity of 1980s theatre was in one respect its weakness, with more organisations competing for fewer resources. The effect on new plays for main stages was to reduce their share of total productions from 12% in 1980-85 to 7% in 1985-90 (Sierz, 2011:20).

Though New Labour injected huge amounts of money into theatre after 1997, it retained the system of funding criteria and did little to reverse the emphasis on economic value over artistic value. Neoliberal interventions in the arts continue to define the present cultural landscape, which as the remainder of this thesis shows, has been one of my main preoccupations during the writing of the three plays presented. Though sobering for the ambition for my work to reach main stages, my situation is analogous to the position of women playwrights during the 1980s: what they wanted to say, major theatres did not want to hear. But many of those writers had become 'canonical' by the end of the decade: in Milling's estimation, this includes Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels, Bryony Lavery, Pam Gems, Charlotte Keatley and Sharman Macdonald (2012:77).These writers had to fight to have their plays produced on main stages, and despite the problems of a system of production still dominated by men and besieged by free market forces, like the male socialist playwrights of the 1970s, many still thought the attempt worth making.

After 1990: globalisation and new forms of playwriting

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 has come to represent the collapse of communism in Europe, which finally ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its significance has been heightened by the rapid spread of capitalism in the 1990s, which engendered massive changes in Britain as in much of the world. Communist collapse has been seen as significant for socialist playwrights such as Bond, who Billingham argues 'may have come to view Marx's vision as essentially utopian' by 1990. Brenton's 1992 comedy *Berlin Bertie* is set just after the wall came down, and critiques the ideal of a socialist society that in reality required secret

police and authoritarianism to maintain it; a play which Innes sees also as a critique of Brecht and his methods (2002:217).

After the slump in new plays in the late 1980s, the triumph of capitalism was arguably the final blow for socialist playwrights. The new globalised world redrew the lines of oppositional politics, with a new wave of playwrights responding to its complexity with 'a retreat into private concerns, a dismissive cynicism or a renewed criticism of consumer capitalism' (Sierz, 2012: 31). The flagship plays of the 'In-Yer-Face' playwrights (both produced at the Royal Court in 1996), Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1997) and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (2001), arguably contain elements of all three responses. Some of the work of these playwrights, particularly Kane's later plays, as well as that of later playwrights such as Tim Crouch, have contributed to styles and forms of playwriting that are distinct from the agitprop and social realism approaches to political playwriting that dominated in previous decades. The political efficacy of these forms is often difficult to assess, a situation prompting Shirin Rai and Janelle Reinelt's observation that 'in the new millennium, it is only too possible to recognise a realm of aesthetic analysis that considers itself political but does not engage in the collective concrete struggles of pragmatic politics' (2015:10).

Dan Rebellato has been one of the most vocal advocates of the playwrights who emerged in the 1990s and the need for new forms, a doctrine prominent in theatre scholarship of the period that has posed questions for realism and for my own playwriting. Rebellato has more recently proposed cosmopolitanism as a theoretical basis for new dramatic forms that 'exist on the edge between resistance and

acceptance' of new political rationalities (2009:30). But the postmodern relativism of this idea, where we are encouraged to recognise the validity of any and all subject positions, has failed to match the simplicity and cohesion of neoliberal orthodoxy. I can agree with Ravenhill when he points out the increased difficulty in dramatising 'the conflict between capital and labour as a basic motor of human experience' in a globalised world (quoted in Rebellato, 2009:29-30). But I also feel that the accessibility of his plays are highly dependent upon the audience's level of 'cosmopolitanism' – their awareness of how global capitalism works and their recognition of the critique of it in the forms Ravenhill creates, and even their familiarity with these very forms themselves. I would also argue that, with a vast number of new plays representing a myriad of subject-positions being produced since the mid-1990s, single realist plays contribute to recognition of diverse perspectives because they exist in such a rich theatre ecology. Cosmopolitanism is not dependent solely upon experimental plays that actively explore the nature of subjectivity. Indeed, one of the contradictions of Rebellato's theory of inclusion is its stance towards realism and by extension audiences of realism – echoing the trend in other areas of public life where (particularly white) working-class people feel marginalised both culturally and economically, which has been attributed as partially behind the vote to leave the European Union (Chu, 2016; Williams, 2016). Globalisation is the key factor in both cases, but Rebellato's response to it and the response of many working-class Britons has been very different (if not diametrically opposed). As Joe Kelleher points out, theatre is unpredictable in its effects, which 'reside largely not in the theatrical spectacle itself but in the spectators and what they are capable of making of it' (2009:24). This unstable and potentially disruptive quality can be its true political value: as Kelleher describes, the most carefully planned

political messages may be understood 'wrongly' or not at all, but a play must connect with an audience in some way if they are to be understood at all.

Though formally experimental playwriting has been particularly prominent since the mid-1990s, realism has maintained its position as the dominant form on British main stages during the boom in new plays that New Labour arts funding sustained well into the 2000s. New writing (whether capitalised or not) became something of a theatre genre in its own right. Aleks Sierz distinguishes between New Writing Lite – which includes theatre-in-education, circus, physical, devised, and children's theatre – and New Writing Pure: 'work which is often difficult, sometimes intractable, but […] usually has something to say about Britain today' (2011:5). The legacy of the 1960s counter-culture and alternative women's or black theatre of the 1980s is apparent in the range of topics covered in British plays: psychotic breakdown in Anthony Neilson's *Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2007), colonialist female sex-tourism in Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies* (2006), the AIDS epidemic in South Africa in debbie tucker green's *Generations* (2005), British Muslim terrorism in Simon Stephens' *Pornography* (2009), or right-wing extremism in Philip Ridley's *Moonfleece* (2010).

Despite this proliferation of playwriting, New Labour showed its neoliberal colours in continuing trends in arts funding begun by the Conservatives. Corporate sponsorship was increasingly common (and necessary) and theatres or companies became thoroughly commercial enterprises. As Sierz describes, 'audiences became customers, and shows became product. The box office was king' (2012:34).

The dramaturgy of resistance

As a playwright I am situated within a tradition of singly-authored, realist playwriting that has been dominant in Britain throughout the 20th century. It is a tradition whose history is closely affiliated with the Royal Court theatre, and my own formal training in the discipline has been mainly with playwrights who have come through the Royal Court Young Writers programme. When I imagine characters and situations, they tend to appear on stages and to behave or unfold according to a logic that is recognisably that of the world in which I live.

At the beginning of this doctoral programme, I was aware of a challenge to the singly-authored realist play (and even the idea of the playwright itself) from various alternative theatre-making practices and dramaturgical approaches. The political efficacy of realism to challenge hegemony, in particular, is contested, as is its relevance in a postmodern, globalised world. The exploration of the plays and playwrights in this dissertation has informed reflexive analysis of my own work, posing problems but also solutions to creative challenges and informing the choices I have made. In particular, the disillusion of many political playwrights and theatre-makers with realism and singly-authored plays has informed my thinking – as has the decision in many cases to move away from large theatres.

Perhaps the greatest of these challenges has been the diversification and increasing concern with distinct subject-positions in British theatre in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st. This has led to serious challenges to the single author, who is seen variously as elitist, domineering, easily interpolated into ideology, unrepresentative of the 'real', or undemocratic. Theatre-makers have proposed

dramaturgical solutions to these perceived weaknesses to develop more effective oppositional practices. In the following sections, I will consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of some of these approaches in exploring the dramaturgy of resistance, making a case for the single-authored realist play as an effective oppositional form.

Singly-authored realism: Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*

First performed in 1958, two years after Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* has undeservedly been overshadowed by Osborne's play in histories of British theatre. Nevertheless, the play is a strong example of how the New Wave realist playwrights disrupted the status quo of British theatre in the 1950s, where the upper classes in their drawing rooms remained a common dramatic topos – reflecting the impatience of young people like Delaney (who wrote the play at the age of eighteen) with a society still dominated by the pre-war Establishment. Delaney attributes the writing of the play to her experience of seeing Terrence Rattigan's *Variations on a Theme*, and complained that the staid action was unrealistic and unrepresentative of the majority of people's lives:

> I had strong ideas about what I wanted to see in the theatre. We used to object to plays where factory workers come cap in hand and call the boss 'sir'. Usually North Country people are shown as gormless whereas in actual fact they are very alive and cynical. (1982, xx)

With its abrasive dialogue and themes of prostitution, interracial sex, single-parenting and homosexuality, *A Taste of Honey* rebuked the sterility and elitism of British theatre. In doing so, the play contributed to a wider social critique of Britain itself,

where the working class were pushing back against upper class dominance and younger generations were challenging prevailing morals. Osborne's portrait of the working-class, university-educated Jimmy Porter pursues the same dramaturgical strategy (though less radically).

Looking back, Delaney and her contemporaries – including Wesker, Arden and Pinter, as well as Osborne – lived in a time where it was relatively easy to employ this dramaturgical approach to challenge dominant discourses. The absence of working class voices on stage and in many spheres (such as higher education) up to that point provided ample opportunities to represent what had previously been ignored. The huge diversity of subject positions today makes this approach less straightforward, with most substantial positions – feminist or British Asian, for example – represented whether on stage, online or otherwise. Of course, there remain more marginal subject positions which can claim to be underrepresented in mainstream culture, my point in the Introduction about Romany theatre being a case in point. Drawing on my military experience, I am also aware that frequently dramatised subject positions such as 'soldier' are often distorted by convention, nostalgia or patriotism.

Despite today's more diverse theatrical culture, main stages still have well-documented problems with a lack of diversity and there is a sense that equality of opportunity is being reversed (Gardner, 2015; Long, 2016). In recent years, famous theatre-makers with working-class roots, such as Sir Ian McKellen and playwright Roy Williams, have spoken out about declining opportunities for those who cannot afford to work for free in the increasingly precarious arts sector, which is dominated

by a largely white middle-class who can rely on financial support early on in their careers (Thorpe, 2016). Karena Johnson, former artistic director of the Broadway Barking Theatre, makes a crucial argument when she points out that class remains the common denominator in underrepresented demographics, encompassing the more frequently discussed areas of race, age or disability. Today, I am in the dubious position of being a white working-class male: taking class out of the equation, I am at risk of being pigeon-holed into the dominant 'white male' category that is (rightly, in some cases) criticised, despite my working-class roots.

Johnson goes on to argue that working-class audiences do not go to the theatre because it does not speak to their experience; and this does not mean all they look for is 'soapy simplicity' (2014). I would add that, in my experience and echoing John McGrath's idea of a 'good night out', what working class audiences are not necessarily looking for is a postdramatic exploration of consumerism and subjectivity (among other things), as in Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* – much as I as a playwright and scholar admire it. In the same way, Edgar, Hare and Brenton came to acknowledge that the direct political content of agitprop as delivered by highly-educated middle-class performers disengaged most working-class people (Megson, 2012:60-61). If, as Sierz argues, British culture values 'familiar naturalistic and social-realist work' over more experimental work, at some point the writer must decide whether to engage with or ignore that audience and its cultural frame of reference (2013:11).

In the three plays I have written here, realism is about connecting with a wide audience and remains a valid strategy for challenging dominant discourses. Taking

representations of the Iraq War on stage as an example, my perspective is unusual in that I am a veteran of that war; though not as formally ambitious as Ravenhill's *Shoot / Get Treasure / Repeat*, my play *Quicksand* says things about Iraq that need to be said in a way that can be interpreted clearly by a wide audience.[28] Speaking to audience members after each show, most told me of the emotional response they had to the injustices shown. It is this emotional reaction that has such a powerful role to play in engaging people with oppositional politics.

Community theatre: John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*

By the time he formed 7:84 in 1971, the career of dramatist John McGrath had already brought him considerable success in mainstream theatre and in television. *Events while Guarding the Bofors Gun*, a 1966 play centred on the absurdity of British soldiers guarding an outdated weapon, was an early success and whose story confirms that nothing much had changed between McGrath's time as a British soldier stationed in Germany and my own four decades later. He had a brief stint in Hollywood (including an adaptation of his play, renamed *The Bofors Gun,* in 1968) and had already written for BBC police drama *Z Cars* (1962) and *Diary of a Young Man* (1964). He would continue to work in film and television into the 1990s (IMDb, 2016).

Despite this continued association with screen formats, in 1970 McGrath was disillusioned with the mass media that he referred to as 'the functions of squalid capitalist enterprises' in a letter to Wesker (quoted in Itzin, 1980:119). Like many of

---

[28] Produced cheaply for a fringe festival and staged in the basement of a gallery, the audience was diverse; comprising students, theatre-makers, local people of various ages and backgrounds.

his contemporaries, he was strongly influenced by the events of 1968 and visited Paris to see them first-hand (Itzin,1980:120). But unlike Hare and Brenton, McGrath was working-class and found an audience for socialist playwriting at Liverpool's Everyman theatre, where 1971's *Soft or a Girl?* played to 'packed houses, 80 per cent working-class' (quoted in Itzin, 1980:121). 7:84 was slowly formed in the early 1970s, later splitting into 7:84 England, 7:84 Scotland and the company Belt and Braces following a failed experiment with a cooperative structure.

McGrath's success in connecting with audiences on their own terms to present radical political content would be a key element in the success of 7:84 Scotland's first play, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1981a), which premiered in 1973. It has also been a useful example of an oppositional approach that rejects main stages in terms of my own project: one of the critical problems for political playwrights – then and especially now in an increasingly fragmented, complex world – has been finding forms of cultural expression that resonate strongly with the audience and that can present political content persuasively. The strength of the collective is an important idea here: like similar companies emerging from the 1960s counter-culture, hierarchies were passed over in favour of collective structures; and McGrath clearly saw the shared experience of an audience as vital for effective political theatre. McGrath's solution was to tour shows to rural communities in Scotland, an example of what is now known as community theatre,[29] in 'an attempt to make theatre of and for the working class in a socialist way' (McGrath, 1981:118).

---

[29] Community theatre can mean presentation of performances to the community, as 7:84 Scotland did, but can also describe work that is made with the community. Boal's Forum Theatre, for example, is founded on the idea that only through active involvement in production can the community acquire the political knowledge and solutions necessary to resist hegemony.

The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil takes the form of the Scottish *ceilidh*, a Gaelic social gathering involving dance, music and storytelling. It was a form that still played an important role in the rural Highland communities that 7:84 performed to. The story of the play and its main political message revolves around capitalist exploitation of the Highlands: firstly by landowners during the Highland Clearances, who drove crofters from their land to make way for more profitable sheep farming (the Cheviot is a breed of sheep); secondly by the upper-class passion for deer-hunting, which also led to dispossession of tenants; and thirdly by the oil industry, the profits of which largely went to investors and where capitalist speculation around the North Sea coast led to rocketing house prices that forced locals out. This fusion of *ceilidh* and socialist analysis of current and historical events incorporated songs, monologues, sketches, and recital of facts, with roughly one third of the play consisting of drama involving characters and dialogue. The play provokes anger but also inspires hope in its contrasting accounts of official brutality and heroic resistance, presenting positive examples of the times when opposition to capitalist exploitation has been successful. Alongside the list of women's names beaten by police and their injuries (12), is the example of the women of Knockan, Elphin and Coigeach who passively resist and disarm the police (13). The men of Braes fight off the large police force sent in to clear them out, as told in the song 'The Battle of the Braes', but the men of Glendale are subdued by 'two gunboats, a transport ship and a hundred marines' (37).

In McGrath's estimation, the play was a considerable success:

> One hundred shows, over 30,000 people, and 17,000 miles later, we feel even more strongly that the strength of the show is in the expression of what people all over Scotland want to say. Many have come for the entertainment

> […] but nearly all go away heightened in their awareness of what has been, and is being done to the people of the Highlands, in the savage progress of capitalism. And they want to hear it. (1981a, vi)

Further to the considerable community audiences, a BBC television adaptation also brought the play to an even wider audience – although presumably its effect would be lessened when broadcast on a more passive medium and to audiences for whom the *ceilidh* has little or no cultural significance.

The play is a strong example of the potential for community theatre to reach new audiences that mainstream theatres cannot, building on the collective power of the community as a social unit and drawing on shared grievances to inspire political engagement. The 7:84 approach is also oppositional in terms of its organisation and mode of production, based as it was at the time around a collective model that downplayed hierarchy and involved – in fact, expected – that everyone contribute to the show's creation. As McGrath describes:

> We could work together as equal human beings, no skill being elevated over another, no personal power or superiority being assumed because of the nature of the individual contribution […] And no recourse to the 'I'm an artist' pose to camouflage either power-seeking or avoidance of responsibility to the collective. (1981a:ix)

Importantly from my perspective, unlike some companies who devise performances, 7:84 retained a position for the writer. McGrath had final say on the script and clear ideas about what it should say (1981a:viii) – although there is obvious tension between McGrath's status and the situation described in the quotation above, a factor in the split between 7:84 England and 7:84 Scotland. But this collective approach, like many alternative theatre companies such as Joint Stock or Monstrous

Regiment, was clearly intended to challenge the hierarchies of mainstream theatre and Britain's class system.

Several challenges to the 7:84 approach emerged from the time of *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil,* however. These intensified in the 1980s and would present considerable problems to a contemporary company. In theatre terms, an audience of 30,000 is significant, but the relentless touring needed to reach such numbers through small-scale performance took its toll on the company, with punishing schedules, low wages, the (perceived) uneven division of labour, and artistic or political disagreements all cropping up at various times (DiCenzo,1996:98-9). These factors remain in 2016, with austerity set to continue until at least 2020 and concomitant decreases in arts funding. Maria Di Cenzo also describes how 7:84 became victims of their own success, with increased scale and resources requiring permanent administrative roles but also contracted actors (1996:103). Like other alternative companies such as Theatre Workshop, 7:84 became part of the alternative theatre 'Establishment' and the collective operational model so important to McGrath's socialist worldview was fundamentally changed. Eventually, Conservative arts policy in the 1980s forced companies like 7:84 to adopt a more hierarchical structure to retain funding, with McGrath resigning after the company was forced to appoint a highly paid general manager (Milling, 2012:40).

The community theatre model continues to be employed today, and I have written for such projects myself, working with Riding Lights Youth Theatre in 2013 on the Armed Forces Project. Designed to forge links between transitory armed forces families and more permanent residents, after collecting the testimonies of armed

forces families several writers created short plays that represented that experience. The plays were rehearsed with members of the youth theatre and young people from armed forces families, and performed both in the theatre and in barracks around York. While this achieved the aim of involving new audiences in theatre, representing relatively unheard voices and creating closer ties between two separate communities, the scope of the project was narrow with minimal political content. Being based on the experiences of those who took part, there was little license to take a more critical stance to issues like the Iraq War which had affected these families (no such stance was in evidence in the testimonies). While I see the value in community theatre and would consider adopting its dramaturgical strategies elsewhere, finding the same level of cultural resonance that McGrath did with *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* seems the greatest challenge in adopting this approach today. Many of McGrath's contemporaries struggled to find such resonance, and that was before the erosion of cultural identity brought about by globalisation and the displacement of class as the cornerstone of oppositional politics.

Theatre-in-Education: Edward Bond's plays for young people

In his long and varied career, Edward Bond has written and produced plays in more diverse contexts than perhaps any of the major British post-war playwrights. Having begun at the preeminent writer's theatre, the Royal Court, in the 1960s, he went on to work at all the national theatres and many regional ones. He wrote plays for universities and for alternative companies such as Gay Sweatshop, before abandoning not just main stages, but Britain altogether. He is the most performed playwright in France after Molière, with the play that precipitated his self-imposed

exile, *The War Plays*, being performed widely across Europe (Billingham, 2013:15).

Though he returned to British theatre in the 1990s, much of his activity since then

has been through a long-standing association with Theatre-in-Education (TiE)

company Big Brum.

Tony Coult compares Bond's commitment to TiE to Wesker's Centre 42 experiment[30]

and Ann Jellicoe's devotion to community drama, arguing that exile from the

mainstream allowed them to pursue the characteristic elements of their work. Bond,

Coult argues, has since early in his career had a preoccupation with 'the rhythms of

learning, and the effect on young people of the inhibiting and corrupting culture […]

lurking at the heart of modern capitalist-individualist society' (2005:10). Bond's own

words affirm this view, saying in a letter to protesting students at Rose Bruford

College that:

> The truth is that young people are increasingly being educated to fit into an
> economic structure and not to question it, though it destroys communities and
> devastates the earth. Young people are being educated to be powerless.
> (quoted in Davis, 2005:22)

Far from being a spent force retreating into a bit of light TiE work, Bond's socialist

commitment appears as serious as ever. If mainstream theatre is dead, as Bond has

argued, the strategy of helping to educate and arm young people against the

capitalist world which will shape who they are seems a justified one. Bond has

worked with Birmingham TiE company Big Brum since 1995. The company tours

schools and provides drama workshops, with its stated aim of 'focusing artistically on

---

[30] Wesker's project aimed to bring the best of culture to the masses, attracting support from the Trades Union Congress in 1960 and Harold Wilson's Labour government. The Centre took over London's Roundhouse in 1966 and saw performances by some of the biggest music and theatre acts of the day, including gigs by Jimi Hendrix and The Who, Steven Berkoff's *Metamorphosis* and shows by The Living Theatre. Financial struggles forced it to close in 1970 (Roundhouse, 2016).

the power of theatre images and dramatic action to create resonances and challenge us to new ways of thinking; while being educationally grounded in active learning and problem solving' (Big Brum, 2016).

TiE as a discipline resists certain practices that Bond and many of his contemporaries, as we have seen with McGrath, see as iniquitous. Chris Cooper, artistic director of Big Brum since 1999, sees participation as a key element of TiE practice, inviting young people to create a deeper understanding of social and human interaction (2005:50). This approach contrasts with the top-down hierarchies that still dominate many mainstream theatres. Freedom from commercial pressures and the openness of young people to new ideas perhaps affords greater radical potential in TiE, if we accept Bond's argument that we are taught throughout our lives to be powerless. However, this did not prevent a new National Youth Theatre (NYT) play about the radicalisation of young Muslims, *Homegrown,* being cancelled in 2015 because playwright Omar El-Khairy and director Nadia Latif were perceived – by the NYT, who had proposed the original idea for the show – as pursuing an 'extremist agenda' (Ellis-Peterson, 2015).

Bond's Big Brum plays include1995's *At the Inland Sea* (2014), a play about imagination set against the backdrop of genocide, exploring how children learn to map the world; *Eleven Vests* (1997), about the influence of oppressive social institutions on a boy, aimed at developing awareness of how violence comes about; and 2003's *The Balancing Act* (2011), a complex farce featuring 'the balancing point of the world' which various characters try to protect. What can be seen even from these short descriptions is a mature and intellectually rigorous playwright at work,

creating plays for young people unlikely to be produced at most mainstream theatres.

The oppositional potential of Bond's TiE work is in many ways the ideal of what I aspire to in my own. Several of the child characters in these plays face up to and overcome daunting, inexplicable and often horrific challenges (though not all; in *Eleven Vests*, the protagonist is wholly assimilated into a violent system). The charge I have made against the lack of specific context in plays mentioned in other chapters, a lack which often does no more than side-step concrete political struggles, cannot be made here; in attempting to help the next generation to think for themselves and resist the normalising effect of social institutions and the media, Bond is taking a considered and perhaps necessary approach to the problem facing political playwrights in the neoliberal era.

I have worked once in a similar situation, the short play for Riding Lights Youth Theatre's Armed Forces Project, described in the previous section. I am also currently in discussion with City of Sanctuary, a York-based charity, about doing a similar project with Syrian refugees who have recently been relocated in Middlesbrough, where the aim will be to bring together locals and refugees to build trust and a sense of community through sharing of stories. My commitment to pursuing main stage production notwithstanding, I agree that this approach can have a real impact in terms of resisting popular misconceptions and the increasingly intolerant rhetoric issuing from political parties and the media, whether of the military life or the plight of refugees.

Postdramatic theatre: Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*

Though a contemporary of both, the work of Martin Crimp is less well-known than Kane's or Ravenhill's despite a career stretching back to 1980. Both Angelaki (2012:6) and Sierz (2013:2) have made the argument that Crimp's plays are not perceived as British (i.e. realist), pointing out that like Bond, Barker and Kane, Crimp enjoys much higher popularity on continental European stages. Despite this reputation, Crimp is a highly versatile writer. This versatility can be seen in the difference between his 1997 play *Attempts on Her Life* (2007), one of the most formally and stylistically ambitious plays to appear on a British main stage, and his much more traditional follow-up, the domestically-centred *The Country* (2000). But it is for the former style that Crimp is best known, with *Attempts on Her Life* a prominent example of playwriting that has attracted the definition 'postdramatic'.

A key element of postdramatic theatre is the relegation of the play text to one of several sign systems in a performance, whereas in traditional dramatic theatre it is the master sign system (Lehmann, 2006:17). Postdramatic theatre tends to disturb the unity of traditional drama, where a single author produces a text structured according to well-established conventions, with any number of alternative techniques or modes of production. Frequently, the performance is devised by a company rather than written by an individual, as in the work of Complicite, and may or may not be recorded as a script by a writer afterwards. It may involve the audience taking part in the performance, creating performance 'text' with the company in real-time. In Ontroerend Goed's *Audience* (2011), which explored the dynamics of a public gathering, audience members were cajoled, or in one case paid, to do certain things – at one point in the performance I attended (or took part in), £20 was offered to the

first person to tell a particular female audience member to spread her legs.[31]

Certainly, character and linear plot are dispensed with almost entirely, and it is these things that are most noticeable in *Attempts on Her Life*.

Though a published play text, the production notes make clear that it remains open and by no means holds mastery over the performance:

> This is a piece for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world beyond the theatre […] in performance, the first scenario […] may be cut. (Crimp, 2007)

This unfinishedness leaves ample space for those producing the play to co-create meaning and shape the audience's experience. In the 17 'scenarios for theatre' that form the play, the only hint of character is Anne; but Anne is described (among other things) as a car, an international terrorist, a character in a film and an advert, a young suicidal woman, an artwork and a post-apocalyptic survivor. Dialogue is separated into lines only by a '–' with no indication of the number of speakers. Scenes echo one another without ever forming a linear narrative. There is, however, a wealth of political content in the plays and a definite oppositional tone across the various scenarios, though Sierz's description of Crimp's work as 'difficult' is accurate here (2013:2).

The postdramatic qualities of the play can be observed in the second scene, entitled 'A Tragedy of Love and Ideology'. The scene is narrated by speakers who appear to be deciding on the 'basic ingredients' of a film. The unnamed 'he' is called away by

---

[31] The show proved too challenging for most, not least the woman told to 'spread your legs': only the first few shows picked on a real audience member, who was replaced by an actor 'plant' in later performances.

'political masters', juxtaposed with Anne as a once idealistic woman who has compromised her ideals by her presence in the luxurious room. The imagery of the scene is that of a luxury product advertisement, with an allusion to the complicity of commercial filmmaking in fetishizing such luxury. The style of the storytelling is sensual and decadent.

The Louis Quatorze clock in the room reminds us that capitalism has survived 'two revolutions and three centuries', but is then smashed (15). The image is complex and encourages us to make sense of it – perhaps symbolising the futility of this small attack on capitalism. The title informs the end of the scene, where 'he' tells Anne that one day she will understand that everything must be paid for (ideology) before 'she presses him back down onto the bed such is her emotional confusion such is her sexual appetite, such is her inability to distinguish between right and wrong in this great consuming passion in the high-ceilinged apartment' (16). The scene seems to refer to compromise: because of how we feel, because of our drives, we can want people or things that betray our ideals. If the scene is a critique of consumerism and the neoliberal ideology that 'he' asserts, its opposition is veiled in metaphor and symbolism.

Similarly complex images appear in most scenes. In 'Mum and Dad' Anne is a backpacker living the high life while travelling the world, but also attempts suicide several times. Mixing images of pleasure with horror creates an inherent critique of our relationship, as wealthy global citizens, to those crushed by the economic system: 'in the refugee camps where she posed at their request next to the stick-like dying just as she posed apparently without a murmur beside the Olympic swimming

pools of paunchy billionaires' (34). When Anne kills herself it is with the 'big red bag' that she has travelled the world with, which she fills with stones and ties to her ankles to drown herself. The narrators are 'tempted to imagine that maybe the bag was always full of stones' (34). The metaphor is of consumerism, choice, all the things that drag us down; the stones are the emptiness, the uselessness of all this stuff that we are told to want, do not need and which fails to make us happy.

Crimp's representation of the fractured, disparate nature of experience in a world shaped in every way by global capitalism is formally stunning. Unlike many postdramatic plays, the content of *Attempts on Her Life* is clearly political and sophisticated in its critique. Dramaturgically, the play is a challenge to notions of truth or unity that can uphold hegemony – which in a time of capitalist realism, where the major political parties are essentially neoliberal and no credible alternative has been proposed, is important. My concern would be that many audience members wouldn't necessarily make the link between their own life and the structure of the play, a contention supported by the description of Crimp as overlooked by British audiences and critics at the beginning of the section. Sierz has said of this neglect that 'the blame lies less with individuals and more with Britain's culture, which values familiar naturalistic and social-realist work rather than modernistic experiments or innovations' (2013:11). I would argue that if this is the case, playwrights seeking to disrupt dominant discourses might stand more chance of doing so by presenting oppositional content in a more popular form – a contention that lies at the heart of my own approach to writing oppositional plays.

Writing resistance in the neoliberal age: the current context and its implications for theatre

Neoliberalism began as a response to the perceived threat of socialism, both at home and abroad, primarily in the United States. Influenced by prominent thinkers such as Ludwig von Mises and F.A. Hayek, who had experienced the terror of European totalitarianism first-hand, the political rationality distinguished by ultra-laissez-faire governance slowly gained traction through the work of sympathetic individuals and institutions, notably Milton Friedman and the University of Chicago (Klein, 2007; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009). Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (2005), published in 1944, was a key ideological text for many libertarian thinkers in the Chicago school and beyond. Although economists like Friedman would surpass Hayek's economic theories, ideologically his ideas influenced or anticipated their own (Ebenstein, 2001:174). Both men were members of the Mont Pelerin Society, a secretive 'thought collective' assembled to develop new libertarian theories (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009:428) capable of neutralising socialist 'perversions' of the market such as the welfare state.[32]

If the defining moment for political playwrights in the post-war period was the collapse of grand oppositions in 1989, the development of neoliberalism should be recognised as the catalyst of capitalist ideological triumph. Hayek's myopic view of history in *Road to Serfdom*, where 'the rule of freedom which had been achieved in England seemed destined to spread throughout the world' (2005:21) before the intervention of German thought (presumably Marxism, primarily), reveals a worldview as ideological as the notion of a benevolent British Empire. This worldview is easily

---

[32] A common misconception of neoliberalism is that laissez-faire means small government. While this is true in the sense of provision of public services, very early on the Mont Pelerins recognised the need for a strong state to prevent the 'pathologies of democracy' intervening in free markets (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2001:443).

discerned in contemporary neoliberalism's insistence on the benefits to society of a wealthy elite whose gains trickle down to the rest of us.[33] The political status quo in Britain today, then, is the result of an *ideological* war comprehensively won, and coordinated resistance to the neoliberal orthodoxy that has been established remains limited. Neoliberalism can be seen as a revolution or counter-revolution, reacting as it did against the social democratic changes that defined the post-war era up to 1980, many of which it has reversed – including reductions in the availability of social housing, scrapping of legal aid, and the incursion of privatisation into the NHS.

A key distinction between the period of radical playwriting in the 1960-1970s and the present is the weakened, disparate position held by the Left and its playwrights. Describing how Brecht's dramaturgical legacy influenced a robust political theatre in Britain (largely absent in the US), Janelle Reinelt identifies the British 'post-war consensus' maintained between 1945 and 1979 as allowing the country to function as a 'social democracy with a mixed economy'.[34] The frequent alternation between Labour and Conservative governments created space for discourse (both radical and conservative) through the party political system and through culture (Reinelt, 1994:3). But Thatcherism and the rise of the New Right disrupted this period of relative equilibrium, as Stuart Hall quickly realised:

> 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 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 and the journals, and policy circles, but in the thought and language of everyday calculation. (1988a, 40)

[33] Despite the *Financial Times* proclaiming that 'trickle-down theory is dead' (Timmins, 2011), neither Labour nor the Conservatives show signs of reforming income tax for high earners, corporation tax or tax avoidance.
[34] That is, having aspects of socialist government such as public ownership and welfare combined with private enterprise.

The discourses Hall describes have so consistently shaped policy in subsequent Tory and New Labour[35] governments that the arts, healthcare, and higher education have been effectively 'neoliberalised' (Harvie, 2013; Leys,2001; Pritchard, 2011; Warner, 2014).

Particular challenges face 21st century playwrights as a result, not least because the discursive space afforded by the post-war consensus has been steadily constricted. The political intervention in the arts has been conducted largely via the Arts Council by successive governments since 1980, which have sought to foster private sponsorship to replace diminishing public subsidy and influence artistic production through funding qualification criteria, in accordance with the neoliberal discourses Hall describes.[36] Reliance on private sector corporations like Barclays Bank for funding, for example, made Churchill uncomfortable enough to resign from the Royal Court council in 1990 (Adiseshiah, 2009:35), and led critics such as Baz Kershaw to condemn theatre as hopelessly commodified[37] into political impotency (1999:38-40). The Royal Court's sponsors today include financial data and media giant Bloomberg, wealth management firm Coutts, and several other financial services companies (Royal Court, 2015). The National Theatre includes nine banks and financial institutions among its fourteen partners (NT, 2015). Both John Arden and Edward Bond gave up on British main stages for reasons that revolved around the way subsidy had impacted the type of plays that could get produced. Arden's increasing

---

[35] The adoption by New Labour of neoliberal political economy has homogenised British party politics, depriving the electorate of a Left party capable of counteracting the most damaging Right policies.

[36] The fullest realisation of which may be New Labour's advocacy of the creative economy and the creative worker, which recast artists as economic actors primarily, coterminous with which was the increasingly precarious conditions created by flexible working (Harvie, 2013:62; Szeman, 2010:22-27; Sholette, 2011).

[37] Commodification being, for Reinelt, the key factor in the lack of a robust political theatre in the US (1994:2).

militancy and expression through agitprop after 1968, as many accounts have it, gradually estranged him from mainstream stages and even from radical groups such as CAST (Innes, 2002:149); though McDonnell argues that Arden's move from 'a generalised and liberal concern with social injustices, state violence and war, to a radical commitment to revolutionary change' was the maturation of a radical political and artistic commitment (2013:109). As previously described, Bond had come to believe by 1985 that he could no longer produce his plays the way he wanted to in Britain (Billingham, 2013:15).

It would be hard not to be uncomfortable as a political playwright, as Churchill was, with the most prominent new writing theatre in the UK being sponsored by agents of the global financial markets that play such a prominent role in Empire. As Mark Ravenhill describes, 'there's been a pressure on arts organisations in the last 30 years to go after big philanthropic donations. The trouble is what is ethical and what is not. Once you get into sponsorship by big oil companies, ethical questions are raised and big arts organisations have fought shy of those questions' (Mason, 2014).

That fiscal pressure has disciplinary applications finds a theoretical basis in Foucault's understanding of the interaction between knowledge, power and the threat of punishment (1977); which combine in this case to encourage artists to produce art according to criteria set by government proxies, currently Arts Council England (ACE). These criteria, highly influenced by New Labour culture minister Chris Smith's *Creative Britain* (1998) and creative economy discourse, promote market integration of artistic production, essentially commodifying the arts. The most

obvious risk to artists within this system is loss of subsidy, but the consequences are far-reaching (see Sholette, 2011; Harvie, 2014).

The agendas currently pursued by ACE purport to ensure value for money and increased participation, in similar ways to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in UK Higher Education or NHS efficiency targets, effectively instrumentalising the arts and subordinating the professions to economic measures of value and populist necessity – not only must art serve social functions, it must also generate profits (Peacock, 1999:7; Yudice, 2003:10-12; Harvie, 2013: 60-63). Clearly, the combination of depoliticised content, precarious working conditions, and assessment mechanisms founded on economic or functional principles hardly encourages resistant, challenging artworks. Or, for reasons political or aesthetic, any work that doesn't sell or have predictable 'outcomes': Caryl Churchill and David Lan's *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), a physical theatre interpretation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, baffled many critics and audience members. Shortly after the production, the dance company Second Strike with whom Churchill had worked on the play had its funding removed by the Arts Council (Peacock, 2007:271-2).

Although no theatre-maker in Britain is likely to be killed or imprisoned for creating work that openly opposes the centre of power, as they might be in Palestine or Brazil, their career and livelihood can certainly be at risk. Playwrights intent on challenging audiences – by implicating them in ecological destruction, for example, as I do in *The Ends* – must consider the possibility that their work might be unpopular, and that in the current theatre environment this deters theatres from

producing it.[38] Most Britons belong to an imperial aristocracy, enjoying living standards many times higher than most global citizens; as such, they are complicit in neoliberal capitalism's excesses, whether they support them or not. Confronting the audience with their own complicity in prevailing political and social arrangements frequently produces an adverse reaction: the question for the playwright is how to raise consciousness without alienating; there is a fine line between saying too much and saying nothing at all.

Censorship, too, has evolved along Foucauldian lines: there is no longer an official with the power to ban a play from being performed, but numerous cases of censorship have occurred recently; and self-censorship, where playwrights choose not to tackle challenging subjects, is almost impossible to fully appreciate.[39] Arden described the situation well when he said that a playwright will almost never be told 'your play is *subversive*: we are imposing a political restriction on its performance' – but reasons will be found not to produce a play in its original form (Arden and D'Arcy, 1977:157).

It is an uncomfortable truth that despite the many victories won by identity politics since the collapse of stable political oppositions in the 1980s, party politics in Britain has drifted steadily to the Right. The multitude of perspectives, complexity of causation and capitalist orthodoxy by which Ravenhill describes our world have, for

---

[38] In a 2013 meeting with Damien Cruden, artistic director of York Theatre Royal, I asked if he would consider producing challenging theatre. His reply, that he would not do anything that might jeopardise the theatre's future, indicated reluctance to stage work that might be unpopular. Insight into the fiscal planning of theatres was gained in an interview with Suzanne Bell, new writing associate at the Royal Exchange: to gain production, new work must have a reasonable chance of selling at least 30% of available seats (Bell, 2013).

[39] Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's *Behzti* (2004) was cancelled by Birmingham Rep after violent protests and threats to the author's life. Philp Ridley's *Moonfleece* (2010), a play challenging the far-right and homophobia, was banned by Dudley council. In 2015 Omar El-Khairy's *Homegrown*, a National Youth Theatre play about radicalisation and Islamic State, was cancelled (Ellis-Petersen, 2015).

thinkers such as Frederic Jameson (1991) and Slavoj Žižek (1999), diluted the power of the Left to confront globalisation, neoliberalism and, ultimately, climate change. Furthermore, many of these victories have won concessions from the state but failed (or not even attempted to) challenge the broader problem of neoliberal capitalism itself. If this poses a challenge to the voice of knowledgeable, politically astute playwrights, it poses an even greater challenge to members of the public whose job is something other than to analyse and critique our increasingly complex socio-political realities.

The new forms with which to dramatise contemporary social and political realities created by playwrights like Ravenhill or Sarah Kane during the 1990s have arguably failed to match the power of less progressive, corporate-owned mediums such as television or the press. Ravenhill's epic cycle of plays *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (2008), for example, is an ambitious response to the mediatised frenzy of the wars on terror, 'a big piece that would capture our urge to bring our model of freedom and democracy to the world' (Ravenhill, 2008a). The cycles' postmodern political representations are complex, each play referencing a classic literary text, and being performed on different days at the Edinburgh Fringe or in different venues on different days in London. Ravenhill has said 'I didn't want this to have a grand narrative with linking plot and characters. I wanted this global theme to be glimpsed through 16 fragments, individual moments that could be watched singly but that would resonate and grow the more fragments each audience member saw. I felt this would be an honest reflection of the world we live in' (Ravenhill, 2008a). But this form also makes the work too inaccessible to a wide audience, both physically and intellectually, to destabilise the Western ideology of freedom that it imposes on other

nations. The problem for political theatre in the neoliberal age, then, is one of visibility as well as understanding.

It has been observed of pre-war Left theatre that it lacked a persistent presence but rather emerged as a series of moments (Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, 1985), with the 1960-1970s resembling another such moment from which contemporary playwrights are separated. The hope is that they may yet experience their own period of resurgence – already begun for some critics[40] – in the emergent Green movement and public backlash against the inequality, austerity and increasingly precarious existence engendered by three decades of neoliberal political economy. But any such resurgence must take place within a theatre system where overt political resistance is still thought of as unpopular and so, within the context of diminishing financial resources and populist agendas, inherently risky. The return of the far right as a credible political force in many European countries, including the vote to leave the EU in Britain, and Donald Trump's election as US president, also threaten a resurgence of an altogether different nature. By increasing inequality, neoliberalism has created conditions that are pushing the world towards the totalitarianism that Hayek hoped to prevent.

Conclusion

A popular aphorism describes the neoliberal era as one where a class war is raging, but only one side is fighting it.[41] This idea describes the retreat of social democracy

---

[40] See Billington, 2014a; Hemming, 2015.

[41] To be found in numerous internet posts and blogs, the aphorism has been linked by author and *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones to George Bernard Shaw's phrase in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah*: '"It is not easy to make the best of both worlds when one of the worlds [Socialist] is preaching a Class War, and the other [Capitalist] vigorously practising it' (Shaw, 2010:76).

from the onslaught of neoliberal political economy, but using language – class division, a war being fought – that has been largely purged from public discourse, rather than the language of economics that dominates neoliberal Britain. The idea that the upper and middle-classes are actively clawing back ground lost to the working-class during the post-war consensus, that the working-class have largely given up trying to defend these gains, is one that resonates with my choices as a playwright. The war being waged in theatre can be conceived along the same lines: after a period when radical playwrights could use public money to attack the state (and the state of things), since 1979 neoliberal governments have mounted ideological attacks on the arts, subduing oppositional culture through marketisation. But there has been no coordinated response from Left artists, many of whom have been more concerned with the intricacies of subjectivity. While they pursue a more accurate truth about who we are or explore new forms of representation better suited to a globalised world, neoliberals have dominated public discourse with simple economic 'truths' and established a state of capitalist realism. An ideological war is being fought, but only one side is fighting it.

This idea lies at the centre of my approach to creating figures of political resistance on stage. In the face of neoliberal orthodoxy, a degree of pragmatism is needed by those who would oppose it. A concept of realism that means uncovering the processes and structures that shape political realities has long been the motivation for political playwrights – even for those not associated with mimetic realism, as Ravenhill's comment about wanting *Shoot/Get Treasure/ Repeat* to be an 'honest reflection of the world' affirms. But this drive to accurately represent our world, this drive for truth, has been ineffective in resisting neoliberalism. Neoliberals are not

concerned with objective truth: their view of it is postmodern in the sense that it is seen as malleable, and this malleability combined with an age of media-saturation serves as a smokescreen for frequently blatant dishonesty. Selective deployment of statistics, arguments and evidence is intended to achieve ideological ends rather than shape equitable policy in service of the greater good – as the analysis of the Iraq War in Chapter Three describes, or the more recent example of false financial statistics being widely used in the campaign to leave the EU (Kirk and Dunford, 2016). The term 'post-truth' has increasingly been used to describe this form of politics in recent years.[42] While postdramatic playwrights like Ravenhill deconstruct society, neoliberals shape it through policy and a public relations campaign that frequently descends into outright propaganda.

For me, this situation undermines arguments against the political efficacy of mimetic realism and mainstream theatre described in this chapter. Rebecca Hillman has also recently argued that agitprop forms and the contribution of playwrights like Bond, Brenton, and Churchill played an important part in maintaining political balance during the post-war consensus, and the absence of new plays like theirs corresponds to the current imbalance in British politics. Their work, often described in terms of failure, was in fact highly successful; at least in creating a fairer society, if not in creating socialist revolution (Hillman, 2015). If my approach harks back to resistive strategies that more recent playwrights have moved away from, it is because these strategies are needed once again. If neoliberals rely on propaganda, perhaps it is time to reclaim the spirit of agitprop – to agitate and to propagandise – and bring this spirit to main stage plays. If politics has become a PR battle, it is time

---

[42] Oxford Dictionaries declared the term 'post-truth' its international word of the year 2016, and attributes its first usage to Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich, who used it an essay in 1992 (Flood, 2016).

for political playwrights to take the field: presenting accessible, emotive plays on our most high-profile stages that challenge neoliberal orthodoxy, climate change or war. This is not to deny the very real difficulties in gaining production at theatres which, under intense financial pressure, tend to conservatism. But the attempt must surely be made. Not to do so is to concede too much.

Having considered the dramaturgy of resistance in this chapter, the remainder of this thesis will mainly consider single-authored plays that have appeared on British main stages. They resemble the form in which I work and the practices that underpin it, and have had the greatest influence on my playwriting. Plays and playwrights adopting alternative strategies are discussed only where they have influenced my own work.

Chapter Two

Empire's new clothes

Despite the rapidly changing social and political context in Britain during the 20th century and into the 21st, the essential challenge for political playwrights remains the same: to expose the power relations and injustices of a world built on fundamental inequalities. But to achieve this, it is necessary to confront discourses that deny our complicity in creating these inequalities. This places the playwright in opposition to the power of ideology, nationalism and self-interest that typically manifest as self-evident or common sense – Britain's 'benevolence' in freeing Iraq from Saddam Hussein, for example – but which masks our role in imperialism. The task of the playwright is rendered much more difficult by the fact that this new empire is incredibly complex: global in reach, discrete in the sense that it is not owned by one nation or imposed by military force, and is sustained by state and non-state actors both public and private. In developed countries, this empire is one founded on a myth of economic freedom, the lie being that this freedom only extends to relatively few at the expense of the many – the majority are 'free' only to consume. The right-wing media in the UK, the US and elsewhere have helped neoliberals to monopolise the idea of freedom to the extent that no alternative seems possible (Fisher, 2009).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) has been hugely influential in theorising this new imperial world order,[43] and credited with reviving 'revolution on a global scale against capital and on behalf of labour' within academic discourse and beyond (Passavant and Dean, 2004:4). Speculating on the end of imperialism as the power of the nation-state declines in the globalised world, their work imagines

---

[43] When capitalised, Empire will refer to Hardt and Negri's term.

another: a new form of transnational sovereignty,[44] founded on a network comprised

of international formations such as the G8 countries, the IMF and the World Bank, an

oligarchy of international corporations, and institutions such as the UN. Despite its

altered hierarchy and methodology, the outcomes of Empire resemble those of the

British Empire: the rationale of bringing progress to its inferiors – or, in the parlance

of our times, spreading the wealth – masking the exploitation of resources and the

opening of new markets. Empire is enforced not by redcoats, but by the imposition of

economic policies that favour capital over the interests of nations and citizens;

namely, the brand of late capitalism most frequently termed neoliberal (Brown, 2006;

Harvey 2005; Klein, 2007; Steger and Roy, 2010).

One of the key ideas behind Empire is Hardt and Negri's concept of 'multitude', an

emergent political force comprised of an increasingly networked global citizenship

whose solidarity is founded on the precarity created by gross inequality (2000: 60-

66). This concept, expanded upon in the authors' subsequent *Multitude* (2004), is

upheld as the subversion of Empire and is especially relevant to the individual and

collective models of resistance outlined below. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude

transcends the dangers of nationalism and tribalism by accommodating the diverse

subject positions and identities of the post-colonial world, utilising the fluidity of the

global networks developed by neoliberal capitalism in order to resist it (2004:xiv).

Since 2004, the political potential of these networks has been evident during the

Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, but the limits of decentralised political

---

[44] They jettison the term imperialism, seen as the expansion of sovereignty by a central power, entirely; arguing that in this decentralised Empire no power, not even the US, can play the role Britain or France once did in earlier empires (2000: xiv).

networks have also been swiftly highlighted by governmental mass surveillance[45]

and reclamations of power via traditional means (the military and police) in Arab

states such as Egypt and Tunisia. The relationship between the multitude and the

individual, then, and the relative efficacy of both in terms of the challenge to the

dominance of political and economic elites, are key questions for political playwrights

interested in the persistence of empire and its inequalities.

Individual resistance

Models of resistance that centre on the individual or sustained protagonist occupy

contested ground in a time of neoliberal capitalism. The individual or individualism is

a key aspect of late capitalism for critics and proponents alike; although, naturally,

they disagree on the consequences and benefits of structuring society around

individual responsibility and opportunity (Weber, 2002; Adorno, 2001; Harvie, 2013).

The Thatcherite worldview – that there's no such thing as society and everyone must

look out for themselves[46] – is the antithesis of the post-war British social democracy

founded on collectivist principles like progressive taxation and universal healthcare.

Even more problematic is the manner in which late capitalism utilises the individual

as consumer; evidenced by, as Naomi Klein's investigations document so clearly,

the way in which corporate branding repeatedly identifies and absorbs alternative

sub-cultures into its marketing in order to sell kids new, 'individual' identities (2010).

In a competitive world, the need to be different, to be free, to be an individual, has

been comprehensively marketised. Under neoliberalism individual freedom has been

---

[45] Mass surveillance of digital communications by the US and UK was exposed by CIA whistle-blower Edward Snowden, transgressing national and legal sovereignty at home and abroad. For a summary of technical, political and social implications of the PRISM and Tempora systems, see Bauman et al (2014).

[46] Although arguing for greater personal responsibility to be taken in looking after one's basic needs, Thatcher's oft-misused phrase was nevertheless naïve or ideologically blind to the complexity of social structures and equality of opportunity in Britain at the time (as now). See McSmith, 2010.

replaced by economic freedom, with individuals – or even collective entities such as independent businesses and democratic bodies up to and including nation-states – increasingly unable to compete with multi-national corporations and the tendency of capital to accumulate into ever fewer hands.

Yet in recent years several high-profile examples of individual resistance have exposed un-democratic, legally suspect practices in the US, UK and beyond. In 2010, whistleblowing website Wikileaks published classified material implicating the US government and military in espionage against its allies, torture, and war crimes.[47] Two individuals, Wikileaks editor Julian Assange and particularly whistleblower Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning, risked their own liberty to expose state corruption of the worst kind.[48] In 2013, National Security Agency (NSA) analyst Edward Snowden exposed the secret mass surveillance of the global communications by the US, UK and several other allies. The actions of these dissidents have provided journalists, activists and democrats with vital evidence to confront governments and attempt to hold them to account, inspiring and empowering others to resist. Manning in particular, perhaps because of the price she has paid for her actions, has inspired dissenters such as playwright Tim Price, whose play *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (2012) linked the US soldier's resistance with the history of radical protest in Wales (where she spent some of her

---

[47] Of the thousands of documents and other media leaked, the video of two US Apache helicopter gunships killing twelve Iraqi civilians and injuring many others epitomised the nature of the US-led War on Terror. Wikileaks' exposure of extraordinary rendition, torture and illegal imprisonment by the US implicated 54 other countries and has led to Poland being found guilty by the European Court of Human Rights (Open Society, 2013; BBC 2014c).

[48] Manning was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment by a military court in 2013. Assange confined himself to the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he was granted political asylum. He is suspected of sexual crimes in Sweden and would be extradited there if arrested; Assange maintains that the Swedish claims are false and have been fabricated to expedite his rendition to the US on espionage charges.

childhood). The play toured Welsh high schools, including the one Manning attended.[49]

Extreme circumstances and insurmountable odds can empower the individual who, in the absence of collective power, becomes the sole agent of opposition. It could also be argued that any collective resistance depends upon the initial decision to act in the individual. Slavoj Žižek, in a letter to Manning, ventures that the power of individual action is vital: 'we often hear that today's radical left is unable to propose a feasible alternative. What you did simply was the alternative […] you were the change you wanted to see' (2014). One of the enduring problems facing political playwrights and activists in Britain, in fact, is weak political engagement and commitment in a country generally comfortable enough to avoid disturbing the status quo. Paradoxically, the greater the oppression the stronger resistance to it often becomes.

The individual model of resistance encompasses a wide array of perspectives on the political events that have shaped our present. Since 1980 these models have had to negotiate neoliberal hegemony, its appropriation of individualism, and consumerist utilisation of individual identities. But earlier representations were not without their doubts as to the political potential of the individual or socialist politics. In the following sections I will analyse some of these representations in the work of established political playwrights, in order to address the creative challenges in creating figures of political resistance for the stage. Where applicable I will also reflect upon my own

---

[49] Manning moved with her mother, who is Welsh, back to Wales between 2001 and 2005 following her parents' divorce.

creative journey, describing the insights gained from these writers and how they have contributed to my development as a playwright.

The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution

One of Caryl Churchill's earliest plays, *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* (1990a) is based on the work of anti-colonial theorist, psychiatrist and freedom fighter Frantz Fanon. Described as an inspiration to Churchill and her radical 1960s contemporaries (Luckhurst, 2015:43), in real life Fanon was undoubtedly a strong, credible, and highly influential figure of resistance; indeed, Churchill's decision to dramatise his experiences was a defiant act in itself.[50] He joined the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in 1954 and shortly after his death his book *Wretched of the Earth* (1963) became a classic text for revolutionaries and post-colonial revisionists worldwide. But as Luckhurst argues, complicity has been an obsession for Churchill throughout her career (2015:43). In *Hospital*, we join Fanon prior to his commitment to the revolutionary cause, at a time when his dissent is unvoiced. Instead, Churchill explores the complex ironies of an individual struggling to negotiate his position as healer of both torturer and tortured, as coerced enabler of the imperial regime and protector of its enemies.

Fanon's consistent response to the atrocities relayed to him by his patients is silence. This silence is referred to in the real Fanon's resignation letter prior to joining the FLN: 'there comes a time when silence becomes dishonesty [...] I cannot continue to bear a responsibility at no matter what cost, on the false pretext that

---

[50] Although written in 1972, it remained unperformed until 2013, when it premiered at the Finborough Theatre in London. Luckhurst argues that *Hospital* was 'too politically incendiary for its time' (2015:50).

there is nothing else to be done' (1963: 52-54). The seeming impossibility of resistance, expressed through silence, is a recurring motif in Churchill's plays, including *Mad Forest* (1998) and *Far Away* (2008). Fanon cannot be doctor and revolutionary simultaneously – at least not openly. But there is tension between the Fanon of the play and the man himself; Fanon did resist, but Churchill chose not to dramatise this stage of his life. It would be interesting to see how the play might have been different if Fanon's decision to resist – the moment that he says 'no' – rather than the damaged patient Francoise's articulation of the pain of complicity was the final image of the play. Churchill's choice of dramatic scenario also triggers the question: why dramatise complicity rather than resistance? But as I have found in my own work, particularly when struggling to strike a balance between preaching the ills of global capitalism and proposing solutions in *The Ends* (described in Chapter Three), the answer is far from simple. Completed plays do not necessarily align with the playwright's intentions.

Roots

A final image of resistance is provided elsewhere by Beatie Bryant, protagonist of Arnold Wesker's *Roots* (1960). Beatie, a rural working-class woman, parrots things that her romantic, idealistic boyfriend Ronnie has said in the absence of her own thoughts, but finally finds her voice in the final moments of the play. Challenged to think and speak by her mother, Mrs Bryant, as Beatie has been berating her family to do throughout the play, she finally does so:

> Do you think we really count? You don' wanna take any notice of what them ole papers say about the workers bein' all-important these days - that's all squit! 'Cos we aren't. Do you think when the really talented people in the

country get to work they get to work for us? Hell if they do? Do you think they don't know we 'ont make the effort? The writers don't write thinkin' we can understand, nor the painters don't paint expectin' us to be interested - that they don't, nor don't the composers give out music thinkin' we can appreciate it. 'Blust,' they say, 'the masses is too stupid for us to come down to them. Blust,' they say, 'if they don't make no effort why should we bother?'' So you know who come along? The slop singers and the pop writers and the film makers and the women's magazines and the tabloid papers and the picture-strip love stories - thaas who come along, and you don't hev to make no effort for them, it come easy… The whole stinkin' commercial world insults us and we don't care a damn. Well Ronnie's right - it's our own bloody fault. We want the third-rate - we got it! (Wesker, 1960:147-48)

Her emancipation from Ronnie's ideas contrasts with Ronnie's political loss of faith at the end of the first play in the trilogy, *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1960); her new-found voice consistent in a way that the received ideas of the politically compromised Ronnie, struggling to forge a new socialism from the ruins of communism, are not. Though Beatie, as an individual and without the support of Ronnie or her family, has succeeded in articulating a progressive politics ingrained within her identity and experience, this final moment is really just a beginning. Her fledgling opposition is all potential.

Wesker's strategy here is an interesting one. It appears in Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, where Galileo's knowledge transcends the man himself; in Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*; in *Top Girls,* as discussed below; and is a strategy I have experimented with in *The Ends*. Its power lies in its hope for the future: especially in oppressive political contexts, where the playwright's careful analysis of the world often concludes in characters being overwhelmed by the agents dedicated to preserving the status quo. By ending on a high note, the playwright keeps alive the possibility of resistance, if only within the world of the play.

Lear

Edward Bond is one of the foremost political playwrights of the post-war period and remains one of Britain's most prolific, with the latest of his sixty plays, *Dea,* being performed in 2016. An inherently political playwright, throughout his career Bond has been concerned with the individual's perception of their historical moment and 'the ways in which that perception affects their capacity for political action' (Spencer, 1992:7). This sense of purpose is shared by Bond with other male playwrights of the 1960s, including Edgar and Barker, as well as later feminist contemporaries such as Churchill.

First performed in 1971, Bond's reimagining of Shakespeare's King Lear maintains both a close connection to its source and a clear distinction to it. While Bond, unusually for him, retains Lear as a lone sustained protagonist, the figure of Lear is very different to Shakespeare's. Shakespeare's tragedy is conventional in its inevitability, where its protagonist finally sees the injustice of society but does not recognise his own role in it, and where the dominant system of governance survives – as in many classic texts, social conflict is reduced to personal conflict, with that conflict resolved by the punishment of the guilty individuals. Bond's Lear shows us a character who – though equally tragic in the end – not only gains insight into his own culpability and that of those who have replaced him in power, but briefly manages to change the unjust world in which he lives. Bond noted in the original performance program that the moral of Shakespeare's Lear was to endure hardship until over time the world gets better, before going on to say 'that's a dangerous moral for us. We have less time than Shakespeare. Time is running out' (quoted in Spencer, 1992:81).

In the beginning of the play, Lear is a violent despot who is (metaphorically) blind to his historical situation. As with Shakespeare's King Lear, he is betrayed by his ruthless daughters and descends into madness, and emerges from this madness blinded but having gained some insight into his situation. The key moment in Bond's Lear is when, having found sanctuary living a peaceful life in the woods with Susan and Thomas, Lear chooses to confront the violence and injustices of the new government led by Cordelia – who, though she initially opposed the wall that Lear had begun to build, continues to build it now she is in power. When two deserters from the wall arrive at the house, Lear insists that they be given shelter. Lear speaks out to the growing crowd for whom he has become a leader-prophet, continuing to do so despite being threatened by Cordelia. In the final scene of the play, Lear begins to destroy the wall that symbolises the cycle of violence in which his world is trapped. Though he is shot and killed, Lear has influenced the workers and soldiers who witness his act of resistance, with the implication that the seed of political consciousness has been planted. At the close of the play, one-time revolutionary Cordelia's regime is under threat from the new movement that has been inspired by Lear's example.

Though Bond's Lear is undoubtedly a strong example of credible resistance, the status quo at the close of the play mirrors that at the beginning of it. As Jenny Spencer points out, though successive governments come to power during the play, the oppressive realities of the situation remain, suggesting a 'society trapped in a pattern of increasingly aggressive behaviour' (1992:82). In this respect, Bond has encountered the same problem as contemporaries like Churchill, Wesker and Hare, in that to write accurately about history and the present requires this cycle of

violence to continue. The desire for real change is tempered by the playwright's observations of the world.

Top Girls

Churchill's 1982 play *Top Girls* (1990) interrogates individualism through its protagonist, Marlene. She is the model Thatcherite woman; career-minded to the detriment of her family, self-reliant and intolerant towards those who, like her daughter, cannot support themselves. Marlene's dependence on the domestic support of her sister, Joyce, and the women she sells on the casual labour market, demonstrates her interpolation into neoliberal ideology where – just as British patriotism masked the reality of its empire – successful individuals are unable to recognise their exploitative dependence on others. Marlene becomes something of a tragic figure, seduced by a worldview that is rotten within and who cannot survive Churchill's critique of the Thatcherite individual.[51] Unlike the political context of *Hospital* – where violently oppressive colonial rule has ultimately provoked armed rebellion – *Top Girls* represents a situation where citizens have political freedom (they can vote, are protected by the rule of law, and so on) and yet resistance appears futile. Adiseshiah argues that only Kit – the teenage friend of Marlene's daughter, Angie, who we learn Marlene gave away in order to focus on her career – appears equipped to challenge social and political conditions, representing 'the possibility of a progressive negotiation in the future of class and gender solidarity' that Marlene's trajectory rules out (2009:153). As in *Hospital* and *Roots,* resistance is implicit rather than explicit – its potential stored for the future.

---

[51] Although the cast of the 2011-12 revival were more sympathetic to Marlene's dilemma (Luckhurst, 2015:95), suggesting how normal certain choices – such as prioritising career over childcare – have become for women.

Playwrights influenced by Churchill, such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, have frequently employed postmodern theories of subjectivity to critique the individual as a way of resisting the dominant Thatcherite legacy (Kritzer,2008:130). This strategy often produces fragmented, disempowered characters whose ability to resist the forces shaping their lives is limited. Such anti-mimetic, interventionist approaches were a common response to politically uncertain times by Left playwrights during the 1990s and 2000s. But it is very seldom that protagonists manage to form a credible or effective opposition within the bounds of the play itself.

Further than the Furthest Thing

Mill in Zinnie Harris's *Further than the Furthest Thing* (2000) is one of these rare figures. Loosely based upon a true story, the play follows residents of a remote Atlantic volcanic island who are evacuated to Britain when the volcano erupts. In the second act of the play, the islanders have been relocated to Southampton, working in one of businessman Mr Hansen's factories. The full opportunity of life in a developed capitalist country contrasts with the simple, closed life they led back home. Struggling to adjust, many of them wish to return to the island only for Hansen to falsely claim that it has been destroyed by the volcano. Mill, who on the island led a simple, unremarkable life, begins an initiative to raise money for one final trip home. She becomes a leader – 'some of the women been saying I should be the one is organising it' (123). Mill quickly begins to recognise that Hansen, despite saying so, does not wish them to return. She refuses the material bribes suddenly offered:

> MR HANSEN
>> Prime sites
>> All over the city, if it goes through. New houses Mill,
>> that is what we are talking
>> New houses Mill
>> Built for you
>
> MILL
>> Why?
>
> MR HANSEN
>> Isn't that what you wanted?
>> You said the houses were no good
>> Rain was coming through the floor
>
> MILL
>> Why?
>
> MR HANSEN
>> What do you mean why?
>
> MILL
>> Why now?
>> We is been living in them already for is nearly a year. (131)

She repeatedly questions Hansen about the true price of this gift, telling him the

return to the island will not be postponed. Despite the refusal of Mill's nephew

Francis (who she has raised as a son) to make the long voyage and Hansen's

coercion of Mill's husband Bill to dissuade her, Mill hatches a plan to raise the money

by selling the islanders' secret to the newspaper. This, too, is an obstacle; during

World War II, when no supplies came to the island, the community drew lots to

choose who would starve and who would survive. Horrified, Hansen intervenes,

revealing that the Ministry of Defence has paid him to keep the islanders here in

order to use the island as a military base. All the islanders, except Francis, return.

Mill refuses to be coerced by those in power, is determined to overcome the

obstacles in her way, and does the right thing for her people. She rejects the

supposedly superior life in materialist Britain for the egalitarianism and simplicity of her homeland. Her stance challenges the British attitude to competition and wealth: that we should be horrified by the method of choosing who should starve, despite the inherent fairness of a system where all have an equal chance regardless of status, reflects poorly on our own society where death and prosperity are so often apportioned according to material wealth.

Conclusion

Playwrights adopting an individual model represent a spectrum of resistance that is successful or effective by varying degrees. Mill, at the positive end of the spectrum, resists the overtures of the powerful to successfully bring the islanders home. Brecht's Galileo can be viewed as a positive example despite his recantation, because ultimately he manages to disseminate his research through other individuals. Fanon, at least within the bounds of the play, is complicit in his silence and gravitates towards the negative end of the spectrum. Frequently the effectiveness of characters' resistance is not easily assessed: Gethin Price in Trevor Griffiths' *Comedians* does not sell out but ruins his career; Brecht's Mother Courage survives but loses her children; John in Mike Bartlett's *13* unites the people but is coerced into giving up at the critical moment; Galactia in Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* finally has her radical painting – meant as a revisionist, defiant artefact – displayed, but only because it has been assimilated into respectability by the State (and thus politically sterilised). Resistance is always difficult, occasionally impossible, and dissidents invariably suffer loss, pain or humiliation as a result of their defiance.

As a realist writer, I am drawn to sustained protagonists, as is evident in the three plays presented here. I still see them as a highly effective vehicle for dramatising resistance, after careful consideration of the critiques of realism outlined in Chapter One. In *The Ends* and *Zeppelins*, the struggle to oppose hegemony shapes the protagonist's dramatic arc. But whereas many of the playwrights mentioned in this section question the resistive potential of the individual, particularly those writing in the neoliberal era, I believe close examination of sustained protagonists can reveal the germ of dissent: at its most fundamental level, a rejection of the status quo, the act of saying no. The absence of a coherent, credible Left movement or ideology necessitates clearly defiant acts that any individual is capable of performing, and which require no specific political language (such as Marxist theory) or reliance on neoliberal terminology. The act of refusal negates the immediate need for a long-term political strategy whose absence has too frequently paralysed opponents of neoliberal capitalism. Of course, individual resistance must eventually become collective opposition to effect change; but until a political rationality, such as the Green movement, is strong enough to challenge neoliberal hegemony, positive examples of individual resistance can show the way forward where there does not appear to be one.

Collective resistance

The collective (or the practice of solidarity) has been the traditional strength of the Left in Britain as it has been elsewhere. Its foundations lie in 19th century trades unionism and Marxist political philosophy. But after over a century of change, it stands radically altered in the 21st century: the solidarity of unionised, predominantly working-class men during the National Railway Strike of 1911, for example, contrasts

starkly with Hardt and Negri's diverse, networked global multitude. Resistors are no longer known to one another necessarily: their aims may be as disparate as the colours of their skin, their religious beliefs, cultural values or material status; and this may be the case in a country such as Britain or equally among global citizens connected digitally rather than physically. The collapse of socialism as a governmental system and as a discourse, and the advent of postmodern relativism, neoliberal labour patterns and discursive individualism have challenged the very idea of the collective, leading to new forms of organisation such as social movements and activism. These forms have gradually replaced trades unionism and party politics as the primary foci of collective oppositional politics, whose decline is frequently referred to as the fragmentation of the Left (Adiseshiah, 2009: 195-98).[52]

As Sidney Tarrow describes, there are many forms of collective action but social movements are defined by opposition. Collective resistance occurs when 'ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents' to contest the status quo (1998:2). Today, the Green movement is emerging as the nexus of the collective challenge to neoliberal capitalism and the environmental destruction it creates; able to incorporate social movements as diverse as feminism, anti-capitalism, and anti-imperialism into its environmental discourse, because the route to sustainability depends on equality and the consequences of inaction are universal (Klein, 2014; Tilly and Wood, 2013:156). This philosophical worldview is the foundation of Judith Butler's notion of precarity, where recognition of the precariousness of all lives leads to the insight that

---

[52] Although, in truth, the Left has a historical pedigree for damaging fragmentation: Bevanites versus Gaitskellites, Bennites versus Owenites, Blairites versus Brownites in the British Labour party; class and racial antagonism within and between the waves of feminism; or the competing Left factions that failed to prevent fascist victory in the Spanish civil war are just a few examples.

respecting all lives is essential in safeguarding our own (2004). Equality is at the heart of Pickett and Wilkinson's *The Spirit Level* (2009) as well as Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013). In Greece, the election of the anti-austerity far-Left Syriza to power on one hand suggests party politics may yet prove capable of challenging neoliberal hegemony. In Spain, too, the grassroots political movement Podemos has changed the political landscape, despite only polling third in the elections of December 2015 and June 2016, while the radical left-wing people's movement Barcelona en Comú ended 35 years of centrist rule when they won the city's mayoral 2015 election (Hancox, 2016). But on the other hand, Syriza quickly acquiesced to further austerity in return for IMF and EU bailout money – as many other states have done, usually under duress, since the 1980s.[53] In a globalised world, collective resistance at the national level is not necessarily enough; Syriza's powerlessness against Greece's creditors demonstrating the limits of democratic sovereignty when in conflict with neoliberal hegemony. Even Nelson Mandela, an inspirational political leader backed by overwhelming majority support, was powerless to implement the radical socio-economic agenda the ANC had promised in the face of neoliberal pressure – South Africa now suffers some of the worst inequality in the world (Winter, 2013).

Playwriting engaging with forms of collective resistance has reflected the changing status of collective action outlined above, once again representing a spectrum of resistance. As Janelle Reinelt points out, epic theatre – with its large casts and links to social movements – was popular in the 1970s and 1980s but declined thereafter for a number of reasons (2006:81). Reduction in funding necessitated smaller casts,

---

[53] For a summary of countries forced to adopt neoliberal reforms in exchange for bailouts, see Harvey (2005: Chapter 4; Klein, 2007).

and the changing public discourse undermined the political imperatives of such work. Several plays relocate the oppositional imperative from the characters to the audience (a form of collectivism). Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1998), written in early 1941 but unperformed until 1957, portrays the consequences of not standing up to corruption in the form of a Chicago mob story.[54] The absence of opposition to the (resistible) Arturo and his gang indicts the townsfolk and warns the audience to stand firm against future threats. Churchill's 1987 play *Serious Money* (1990) presents the grotesque, utterly corrupt world of finance unopposed in order to elicit the audience's rejection of free-market values (Adisesiah, 2009:190).

In the following sections I will explore several plays that adopt a collective model in more detail.

Fanshen

David Hare's *Fanshen* (1976) is a very direct example of Marxist discourse expressed through collective resistance; in fact, as Janelle Reinelt points out, it is Hare's only play featuring a collective rather than individual protagonist (1994: 122). The collective is also prominent in the politics of production, with the Joint Stock method relying on co-creation of dramatic text by the whole company through processes of research and devising before the playwright goes off to produce a script. Staged at the ICA and Hampstead theatres, the influence of alternative theatre practice is clear to see.

---

[54] The play also makes direct comparisons between the Third Reich and the scenes themselves.

The play documents the struggle of rural peasants in China to 'fanshen' (to throw off the yoke of oppression, to enter a new world) during the land reforms of the Communist revolution. Hare has said that he wanted to dramatise a historical moment in which 'people's lives were being materially and spiritually improved' (1975:108) – although history has shown the success of land reform to be highly questionable, a fact Hare could not have been aware of at the time.[55] The three cycles of redistribution in the play highlight the need to produce practical solutions from abstract ideas. Resistance is an evolving process: before they can combat landlord oppression, the peasants must challenge the conventional wisdom which dictates that they rely on the landlords (21-25), an idea reminiscent of Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Political resistance is personal as well as communal. But, far from being a communist utopia, individuals in *Fanshen* are prone to regression; status, property and violent reprisal threaten the new social order being established. Only collective responsibility can sustain progressive reform. During each stage of redistribution, individuals abuse their power or make mistakes, and are made to take responsibility for them before the village. The collective, then, is instrumental in achieving the transformation from a feudal to an egalitarian society; where feudal could easily be replaced with capitalist in the context of the UK. *Fanshen* is interesting in its strategic use of the political success of a historical moment to achieve the playwright's aim – a strategy I have made use of in *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*.

---

[55] By 1960, 30 million Chinese had died of starvation. While production fell, fear of reprisal led officials to declare ever higher yields.

Mad Forest

Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1998) documents the individual actions that contributed (or not) to the collective action culminating in the Romanian revolution of 1989. Dissent in Part One is shadowy and secretive, if not entirely silent: the characters recognise the impossibility of open resistance while they maintain their position within Ceaușescu's socio-political system. Churchill, in representing the small defiant acts that eventually burst into open defiance, examines the complex ecology of individuals upon which collective action is founded.

Art student Radu resists state oppression throughout the play, continuing to even after the revolution has apparently succeeded. In Part One, he whispers a subversive slogan in a queue : 'Down with Ceaușescu':

> *The woman in front of him starts to look round, then pretends she hasn't heard. The man behind pretends he hasn't heard and casually steps slightly away from* RADU.
>
> *Two people towards the head of the queue look round and* RADU *looks round as if wondering who spoke. They go on queueing.* (1998:111)

Despite their presumed agreement with them, the people distance themselves from such dangerous spoken words, and Radu is compelled to do the same. This flicker of dissent foreshadows Radu's outspokenness in Part III, but not the unforeseen difficulties that regime change and freedom of speech will bring. He is unable to forget the suspicious events during the revolution, suspecting a faction within the old regime (the Front) of staging a coup in order to retain power, but nobody believes him (nor wants to). Neither can he reconcile the actions of his mother, a teacher, in teaching state propaganda to children:

> RADU: Do you remember once I came home from school and asked if you loved Elena Ceaușescu?
>
> FLAVIA: I don't remember, no. When was that?
>
> RADU: And you said yes. I was seven.
>
> FLAVIA: No, I don't remember.
>
> *Pause*
>
> But you can see now why somebody would say what they had to say to protect you? (159)

The difficulty of resistance is prominent in Radu's dilemma. His outspokenness may be the cause of his mother losing her teaching position: 'no one who's opposed to the Front will get anywhere' (158). But he is unwilling to follow his parents' example, to remain silent or to tow the party line, to protect them as they had done for him.

While Radu remains a credible figure of resistance in his personal choices, it is nevertheless at great cost to his family and is unlikely to bring about real change. The cacophony of voices and opinions in the final scene, as the characters dance at Radu and Florina's wedding, suggests the impossibility of reaching the utopia the downfall of Ceaușescu would supposedly bring. Radu's father Mihai supports the Front, his mother Flavia is a Liberal, Radu distrusts the Front, electrician Bogdan distrusts capitalism and the privatised public services brought with it, and an ethnic rivalry simmers between Hungarian Ianos and Romanian Gabriel. Following on from Bogdan's daughter Lucia's dissatisfaction with American life, there is a discrete critique of capitalism in this divisive abundance of choice, and the ethnic tension that increased competition and inevitable economic crises will bring. In *Mad Forest* true

revolution appears unattainable, the characters populating a dichotomy between the ineffectiveness of resistance and the unending need for it.

For Sian Adiseshiah, the resumption of dancing at the end of the play suggests that even though the revolution is short-lived, the 'potential for future collective resistance and upheaval' remains (2009:192-93). As with her earlier plays discussed above, there is a forensic diligence in Churchill's exploration of political opposition that precludes simplistic characterisation or heroic examples of individuals or collectives. As with much of Churchill's work, *Mad Forest* seems to downplay the possibility of challenging power; I would argue in a realistic rather than pessimistic way. For me, the idea that she repeatedly proposes is that resistance is all but futile, which is a dilemma I've wrestled with in my own playwriting; searching, hopefully, for dramatic ways to affirm the possibility of political action and change.

Who Killed Mr Drum?

Fraser Grace and Sylvester Stein's *Who Killed Mr Drum?* (2005) is a play with this same question of resistance at its heart. Grace's narrative frame affords more positive conclusions to be taken than might be from *Mad Forest*, with the deceased Mr Drum of the title (Henry Nxumalo) speaking from a future time where 'Apartheid's swept clean away now […] we even got a black President' (128). Unlike most deceased protagonists, Henry's Mr Drum identity – a moniker for an investigative journalism column in Drum Magazine[56] – allows him to transcend his death and ultimately the apartheid status quo. While South Africa today is firmly interpolated

---

[56] The publication was the first magazine for black South Africans. As the play documents, it walked a tight line between speaking truth to power and avoiding being shut down. Drum had a white owner, white editor (Stein) and black staff.

into the neoliberal global economy and suffers gross inequality, the play

nevertheless identifies the role of individuals like Henry in destroying apartheid. The

magazine's staff, after internal tensions that threaten to divide them, end the play as

a tight-knit collective actively opposing white power.

The narrative takes place in the 1950s around the time of the ANC's Freedom

Charter, when black oppositional politics grew into a movement. Initially, the two

most gifted journalists are very different:

> CAN: This bein' Mr Drum's dangerous, Bru. Bust ribs one day, knifewound at the office. Attacked when you go out. You sure you want to live with this aggravation all the time?
>
> HENRY: If you are applying for the job, Mr Themba, I'll be happy to move over. Could be it's work to suit a younger man.
>
> CAN: No, no, I'm happy to leave all the hard news to you Henry. I just thought…
>
> HENRY: What? What did you think?
>
> *Beat. This is more confrontational than CAN planned. He shakes his head.*
>
> CAN: Jeez, man. You've changed, you know that?
>
> HENRY: Like the man said, a man changes the world, or the world changes him. (43)

While Henry sees the need to confront injustice and is prepared to suffer in doing so,

sublimating himself to an ideology where 'a man must fight injustice to be a man'

(44), Can attempts to do so by living the way 'people should be free to live' (115).

But after Henry's death, perhaps at the hands of gangsters or the state, Can's arc

brings him round to Henry's more radical way of thinking. At the end of the play, he

rejects the option of escaping to England with his white lover, Lizzie, instead becoming the new Mr Drum.

What is particularly interesting is the play's exploration of the limits of political resistance and its ingenuity in representing them in a way that does not preclude change. For the characters, resistance is 'easy when you don't have a choice'; it is when you do that things become messy (108). Lizzie eventually runs home to London, whereas for the black characters exile is a much harder choice. Before his brave decision to stay, Can experiences crushing doubt – 'there is no choice! You can be a child, or you can be a punchbag, that's it!' – but in recognising that the only alternative is childish passivity, he finally realises his potential and strengthens the collective.

Who Killed Mr Drum? is an intriguing reminder of how collectives can form and challenge the dominant political order*,* even when faced with extreme oppression. As I shall discuss below, I adopted a similar strategy in *Zeppelins* by dramatising a moment of genuine political change through action.

13

Recent representations of collective resistance have expressed the uncertainty inherent in a time of political disengagement. Mike Bartlett's *13* (2011), set in modern day London, begins with twelve characters experiencing the same disturbing dream. Amidst economic depression, ineffective protest, and an imminent 'preventative' war, messianic figure John returns to lead the people to a new political reality. John is revealed to be the link between 'the twelve', which includes activists Amir and

Rachel, as well as Prime Minister Ruth and her atheist, academic advisor Stephen. No elaboration is given for his sudden disappearance, but John's return draws 'the twelve' together.

John begins by speaking – a bucket serving as a soap-box – in the park about religion and politics. Holly videos his daily sermons and posts them online, and soon John's presence has drawn together a vast collective reminiscent of Hardt and Negri's networked multitude. His speeches neatly summarise neoliberal hegemony and the inequalities it generates:

> John: There are things we want. We want the very best healthcare and education, free at the point of use, for all. We want to narrow the gap between rich and poor, both here, and across the world. But with these things we are told – this is just not how the world works anymore. You are naïve if you think any of it is possible.
>
> So we shrug and walk away, and learn instead the comfort of irony and pessimism. We sleepwalk from weekend to weekend, looking forward to the simple comforts. We earn we buy, we live we die, we earn we buy, this we are told, is enough. (63)

John penetrates the ironic detachment and political disengagement of the times by exalting belief – whether religious, scientific, or moral. When the US-led war against Iran becomes increasingly likely, moderate Prime Minister Ruth must decide whether the UK will take part. The play's central question is whether John's multitude can influence her decision. The climax of the play sees John debate the war with Stephen – who is intent on invading Iran – and Ruth. But just when it appears he may have influenced her, Ruth shows John a video of Sarah – the lonely wife of the American diplomat, Dennis, who has been sent to win British support for the impending war. As the play progresses, Sarah has become increasingly mentally

unstable and obsessed with John's speeches. The video shows Sarah explaining to the police why she has killed her daughter, talking about his influence upon her to 'do what you believe to be right' (124). Ruth, revealed not to be the bold leader but the pragmatic manager, dictates how things will unfold once this footage is released to the public:

> Ruth: In twenty minutes your friends will find out. They'll see what she has to say and they'll all have the same thought.
>
> They'll realise they've been conned.
>
> And the singing will get quieter.
>
> John: They're stronger than that.
>
> Ruth: The singing will get quieter.
>
> And the singing will stop and become individual voices again. Have a million different opinions. They'll all go back, and get on with their lives. (126)

Ruth's neoliberal orthodoxy casts the idealism of the collective as childish and irrational, confident that there is no such thing as society, only individuals. Bartlett's play tantalises us with the latent power of the multitude before obliterating it with the institutional power of government and press, casting doubt upon the efficacy of contemporary forms of collective oppositional politics. If John can utilise network technologies to bring individuals together for a common cause, Ruth can just as easily utilise those same networks to disperse them – the final image of the crowd is of them collectively receiving a message and taking out their smartphones, implicitly to learn of John's role in Sarah's crime (128). By Act Five, the characters address the audience but not each other – each has their own story to tell.

Conclusion

Collective forms of resistance today appear to be increasingly viable after a period of decline during the 1990s and 2000s. The absence of a mainstream Left political party since the advent of New Labour has neutralised party political forms of collective action for many voters, whose gradual awareness of this fact has led recently to the growth of alternative parties such as the Greens, UKIP[57] and the SNP in Scotland (Labour's traditional stronghold). It is an oft-overlooked fact that UK citizens, unlike the citizens of Palestine or Russia for example, have the power to disrupt the status quo through democratic means. This may entail, of course, publically demonstrating our desire for change to political parties focussed on winning power in order to influence policy. Movements like Occupy have demonstrated the power of activism when conducted through traditional (marches, demonstrations, occupations) and digital (online petitions and social networks) forms of collective action. Their impermanence nevertheless suggests that this power requires support from democratic institutions – a realisation that is particularly pertinent to the politics of climate change discussed below.

From my perspective, models of collective resistance in plays aspire to the power that Occupy briefly held but, in art as in life, are inevitably compromised by the absence of durable solidarities. With traditional Left power bases eroded and scant hope of further socialist reform, and state surveillance of the digital multitude

---

[57] Although a right-wing party, voters have turned from both Labour and the Conservatives to a party that addresses genuine problems – migration, welfare, and jobs – that have left many working- and middle-class voters disenfranchised. UKIP's solution to these problems, however, focuses on effects rather than causes; targeting not the neoliberal capitalism which has destabilised sovereignty, but on nationalistic arguments around immigration.

ubiquitous, there is at present no collective with the strength or resources to challenge neoliberal hegemony.

Rather than invent this collective, my playwriting has tended to explore its genesis in the individual – although, as described in Chapter Three, I have drawn on Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude for the climax of *The Ends*.

Documentary resistance

Models of resistance that utilise documentary forms have roots in the radical socialist documentary theatre of the 20th century (Hammond and Steward, 2008:11; Favorini, 1995; Innes, 1972). The legacy of this theatre in Britain is most prominently associated with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in the 1950s and 1960s, but documentary theatre has never enjoyed such mainstream attention as it has in the last two decades (Hammond and Steward, 2008; Reinelt, 2006). Its popularity has been linked, in the case of the political plays that form a significant part of the growing verbatim canon, to the struggle to comprehend complex political events (Hammond and Steward, 2011:11); to an upsurge in political engagement post 9/11 (Reinelt, 2006:81) ;and, in a theatre drifting into inconsequentiality, to audiences seeking serious theatre (Hare, 2005:77). Richard Norton-Taylor, editor of several influential verbatim plays, cites the aim of his work as exposing the truth, and it is this aspect of documentary theatre – in the decades that saw wars fought on the basis of fabricated evidence, the rise of the political spin-doctor and the increasing obfuscation of truth through selective (or overwhelming) use of statistics – that perhaps best describes its appeal and its mode of opposition.

The play widely acknowledged to have propelled documentary theatre to prominence was Richard Norton-Taylor's *The Colour of Justice* (1999) (Luckhurst, 2008:209; Reinelt, 2006: 81; Kritzer, 1999:155).[58] The Tricycle was one of the few theatres in the 1990s and 2000s with a clear commitment to political theatre, and perhaps the only one tailoring its repertoire to the ethnic diversity of its community (Griffin, 2006:200; Sierz, 2012: 49).[59] Tackling the subject of institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police, *Colour of Justice* is an edited version of the Macpherson Inquiry into the handling of the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Resistance in the play is not enacted by any individual or group of 'characters', rather the play challenges injustice with the sustained, clear presentation of facts. Questions of complicity, the possibility of resistance and complex characterisation – so central to representations of resistance in literary plays – are somewhat redundant,[60] although the play retains dramatic interest because, as Norton-Taylor says, there is 'inbuilt conflict to the proceedings' (Hammond and Steward, 2008:122). With the audience cast as jury members, the power of the play lies in bringing wide attention to an inevitable conclusion: that despite the intricacies of the case and the subjectivity of the individuals involved, racism exists within the Metropolitan Police. This attention, ultimately, led to improvements in race relations and policing.[61]

---

[58] The play has been performed in schools, used as a police training resource, and aired to millions as a TV adaptation; (Sierz, 2012: 49). The Race Relations Act 2000 was brought in to address some of the issues explored in the play.

[59] Although fewer than half of Londoners are white British, the diversity of programming and theatre professionals does not reflect the diversity of communities (BBC, 2012). Current Tricycle Artistic Director, Indhu Rubasingham, is one of only three non-white ADs in England (as at 2014).

[60] In other documentary plays, particularly those which blend verbatim and fictional dialogue such as David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2006), the enigma of reality as a concept is reflexively explored (Forsyth and Megson, 2009:2-3).

[61] Although the killing of Mark Duggan by police, sparking the 2011 London riots, and subsequent acquittal of the officers involved despite huge inconsistencies in their account of the killing (BBC, 2014d), has prompted Stephen Lawrence's mother, Baroness Doreen Lawrence, to question the extent of progress (BBC, 2014e).

Despite its political impact, *Colour of Justice* invites criticisms that are directed at many verbatim plays. A lack of theatricality is a recurring allegation; Sierz summarises the theatrical inertia of the play as 'consisting mainly of men in suits asking and answering questions' (2012:48). Another problem echoes the interventionist playwright's critique of his reflectionist counterpart: that by merely recreating what *is* precludes the ability to represent what *might be*. Documentary theatre also foregoes many of the most powerful techniques available to the dramatist: metaphor, allegory, the Everyman, non-naturalistic forms and characterisation, and the potential to imagine scenarios or endings that will never occur in real life. In certain ways, documentary models of resistance concede ground to neoliberal individualism, presenting subjective experience as fact and thus contesting truth: we might say that yes, the investigation into Stephen Lawrence's murder was mishandled, but it was only one case. How can we conclude that racism is institutional? In an era when everything must be justified by statistics and subjected to the scrutiny of value-for-money principles, documentary theatre's truth claim might appear to be the internalisation of commodification. The implication being, of course, that art no longer matters because it is not real or measurable, and this is particularly pertinent to political material.

These questions notwithstanding, documentary plays have reinvigorated political playwriting after a period of decline. For the realist playwright, the directness of documentary theatre and its success is an invitation to be bold; suggesting as it does that there remains an appetite for political theatre. The treatment of complex issues also holds lessons for the political playwright attempting to reach audiences without alienating them. But as a realist playwright, the imaginative restrictions placed on

documentary forms discourage me from using them as a model. Where I have based

a play on historical sources, I have used these sources as a foundation upon which

to invent rather than as the entire substance of the play – such as the memoirs and

letters of conscientious objectors collected at the Brotherton Library in Leeds, which

were important sources in the creation of *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*.

Chapter Three

Changing climate?

As I commenced my doctoral research in late 2011, the Occupy protest movement was making headlines. What began as Occupy Wall Street in New York quickly spread to 900 cities across the globe, thrusting slogans like 'we are the ninety-nine per cent' into the mainstream (Adam, 2011). Occupy London responded to the injustices of the financial crisis and the austerity measures introduced by the Conservative-led Coalition government, elected the previous year, by occupying sites at St Paul's Cathedral, a vacant office complex owned by UBS, Finsbury Square, and the disused Old Street Magistrates Court.[62] The movement captured the feelings of a nation angry at the brazenness with which the public were made to foot the bill for the excesses of a corrupt financial system, bringing issues of corporate lobbying, corruption, and social justice to the fore. Occupiers demanded a 'true' democracy, a democracy that since the 1980s had been steadily eroded. Occupy was more than just a protest; it sought to model alternative social and political structures as a rebuke to the 'no alternative' attitude of politicians and economists.[63] I travelled down to London to spend some time at the site and find out more about the global phenomenon that, briefly, suggested genuine change was imminent. The movement was short-lived, but highlighted the potential of such occupations for popular protest and the disruption of dominant discourses.[64]

---

[62] The UBS building became known as the Bank of Ideas, where ideas were 'traded' to address social and environmental issues. Most sites existed from October 2011 to February 2012. Finsbury Square was the last to be cleared in June 2012.

[63] Frequently used by Thatcher in the 1980s, 'there is no alternative' (TINA) refers chiefly to economic (neo)liberalism. It was revived by David Cameron in 2013 (Robinson, 2013).

[64] Most recently, student protesters in Hong Kong occupied roads in the Mong Kok business district for several months, to demand a free vote in elections. The pool of candidates that can stand for election are effectively chosen by Beijing (BBC, 2014b).

My research made me aware that Occupy had wider implications beyond a few sites in London, wider still than the 900 cities that were for a time Occupied. Inequality, de-democritisation, social and ecological destruction are all linked to the neoliberal brand of capitalism that has been implemented in developed and developing nations worldwide. Subsequently, Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* (2014) has brought terrifying clarity to the inherent antagonism between the environment and the global economy in its current form.[65] In 2011, the climate movement was still recovering from the disappointment of UN Climate Change Conferences (UNCCC) in Copenhagen (2009) and Cancun (2010) where the catastrophic threat of climate change was simultaneously recognised by all parties and, in terms of action, ignored – at least in part because of the global recession sparked by the credit crunch in 2008. The message was clear: leading nations were willing to tackle climate change, but not at the expense of economic growth. This came as no surprise to some but devastated those who, like the character of Phoebe in *Greenland* (National Theatre, 2011), still believed in the ability of our current political system to solve the crisis.

In 2014, Barack Obama's call for a legally-binding carbon-reduction deal at the 2015 UNCCC – following a historic carbon-reduction pledge by China and the USA, the world's two largest polluters – was in one sense encouraging (Davenport, 2014). But there was no indication that the global economy would be realigned towards carbon-neutral pathways and, in truth, the targets agreed are simply not ambitious enough to prevent the two degrees Celsius temperature rise beyond which disaster lies. Equivalent European Union (EU) pledges were more ambitious, but disappointingly

---

[65] Although Klein was by no means the first to do so (e.g. Harvey, 2005), she has certainly provided the most accessible, in-depth account so far; utilising her status as an international best-selling author.

were also considered too conservative (Neslen, 2014). The accord reached in Paris in December 2015 became the first legally-binding universal agreement to tackle climate change, with the aim of restricting global warming to 1.5C (a more ambitious target than the expected 2C) and transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy by the mid-21st century. However, little action has been taken so far and the election of reactionary and far-right governments in the US and Poland (also a possibility in France), as well as the UK's exit from the EU, threaten to undermine the accord before any substantial progress has been made.

In the neoliberal age, the fight against ecological degradation has primarily sprung from the environmental movement – encompassing international activist organisations like Greenpeace, conservation charities such as the RSPB, as well as grassroots movements like Occupy – and the EU (Van der Heijden, 2010:1-5). The UK has benefitted from EU environment directives, such as the banning of neonicotinoid pesticides linked to the collapse of bee populations, which the UK government opposed (McDonald-Gibson, 2013). High awareness of climate change is reflected in a strong desire to tackle it among EU citizens, with over half citing it as one of the single most serious problems we face. But while eight in ten recognise the economic benefits of tackling climate change, the economy consistently trumps ecology as the most important problem we face (European Commission, 2013).[66] This cognitive dissonance highlights the difficulty of the fight against climate change: despite ecology being undeniably vital to food, water, economic and social security, people are unable to act accordingly. The consequences of climate change are

---

[66] The UK trails the EU average noticeably across all metrics contained within the report: whereas 39% of Swedish citizens view climate change as the single most important problem we face, only 12% of UK citizens hold the same belief.

remote while the consequences of economic decline are immediate. The danger, as Duncan Green has pointed out, is that by the time environmental degradation becomes immediately concerning in the way job losses or poverty are, crucial tipping points will already have been surpassed (2012:349). For this reason alone, it is acknowledged that strong political leadership and legislative action are fundamental to our attempts to tackle climate change (Giddens, 2011; Klein 2014). This dynamic influences the effectiveness of models of resistance, both in the real world and in theatrical representations of climate change – suggesting that individual and collective action outside of government cannot solve the crisis.

Humanity has thus entered into a race against time to establish a political, economic and moral consensus regarding climate change. The urgency of the issue, however, is matched by the inability or unwillingness of neoliberal governments to intervene in the global economy to the extent required.[67] While individual companies or governments occasionally make green interventions – Margaret Thatcher, in fact, was instrumental in the banning of ozone-depleting CFC gases – the overwhelming attitude of business and pro-business governments is antithetical to effective climate action (Harvey, 2005: 172). As David Cameron's Conservative government pursues fracked shale gas in the UK, as China continues to build coal-fired power plants at the rate of one per week, and with the election of climate change-denier Donald Trump as US president, there is growing recognition that there is already enough fossil fuel above ground that, if burned, will surpass the crucial two degree tipping

---

[67] One of numerous departures from neoliberal theory, countries like the UK subsidise fossil fuel extraction even though state intervention is supposedly undesirable. Yet subsidisation of carbon-neutral technologies such as wind and solar power has been piecemeal and is soon to be scrapped (Wintour, 2014). Intervention, then, is certainly not unusual – but is clearly aligned towards entrenched vested interests.

point.[68] Against such odds, resistance to climate change and its underlying causes is as difficult as it is urgent.

Climate plays and resistance

There is no strong tradition of engagement with climate change on stage – which has only been a mainstream political issue since the ozone crisis of the late 1980s – but in recent years several plays focussed on climate have been performed at our most prestigious theatres.[69] The first was Steve Waters' double bill *The Contingency Plan* (Bush Theatre, 2009), which introduces the scientific, activist and party-political strands that typify all of the plays in this somewhat limited sub-genre. Mike Bartlett's epic *Earthquakes in London* (NT, 2010) has state-of-the-nation aspirations, with climate, science, politics and subjectivity central to its examination of contemporary attitudes towards the future. Playwrights Moira Buffini, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner and Jack Thorne collaborated on *Greenland* (NT, 2011), a direct and somewhat schematic play focussed closely on contemporary climate issues. Richard Bean's *The Heretic* (Royal Court, 2011) offers an alternative perspective by placing a climate change-denier centre-stage. These four plays represent the entirety of literary playwriting focussing on environmental issues on British main stages, all appearing 2009-11. Since then, these plays have been supplemented by two documentary plays at the Royal Court: the 2012 production of *Ten Billion,* followed by *2071* two years later. Together, these plays feature figures of resistance and

---

[68] *The Guardian*'s 'Keep It In the Ground' campaign urges investors to divest their share in fossil fuels. So far, the Church of England and several universities have divested, with many others expected to do so soon. The Wellcome Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are the main targets (Howard, 2015).
[69] I do not include plays that tangentially engage with ecological destruction, such as Churchill's *Far Away* or Beckett's *Endgame* (1957), in this grouping. My focus is on direct representations of the issue.

examine individual, collective and truth models of resistance in the context of ecological decline.

Appearing shortly after Lucy Prebble's *Enron* (2009) and Laura Wade's *Posh* (2010) – both politically engaged with the wider problem of corporate power and political nepotism – these six plays briefly suggested a turning toward challenging political theatre; but, like Occupy, this new movement appears to have been short-lived. This paucity is surprising given the implications of climate change for our future prosperity and the discourses around food, energy, water, poverty, imperialism, inequality and politics that climate encompasses. Why, given that 73% of the UK wants an immediate global deal to address climate change (GOV.UK, 2014), is it largely absent from theatres? And especially given that rich dramatic material is going unused? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that while climate change is increasingly widely accepted, the tough decisions and harsh realities of (in)action are extremely challenging. For any citizen of a developed nation complicity is all but unavoidable, and in a carbon-driven economy the level of individual complicity is proportionate to wealth – how much one consumes, travels, and so forth. Largely middle-class theatre audiences are acutely complicit.

All of the plays that I will analyse below attempt to penetrate the cognitive dissonance preventing us from taking action on climate change. Their success in doing so, or lack thereof, has been instrumental in my understanding of the peculiar difficulties in writing credible figures of political resistance in the neoliberal age, which I shall cover in detail in my reflection upon writing *The Ends*.

The Contingency Plan

Steve Waters' double-bill *The Contingency Plan* (individually titled *On the Beach* and *Resilience*) concentrates on an extreme weather event in the near future and critiques parliamentary politics as a collective model of resistance. Waters' pessimistic scenario takes place at the moment when climate change becomes real for the UK, the structure of the play proposing that not even imminent disaster will be enough to induce political change. In a scenario repeated in *Greenland* and very literally in *Ten Billion* and *2071*, civil servant Sarika attempts to invigorate the government's climate change response by bringing the radical research of glaciologist Will into the political process. Will's father, Robin, turns out to have quit his job after his own ground-breaking research in the 1970s was appropriated and fabricated by his partner Jenks, now the government's chief climate scientist. As sea levels rise and extreme weather events become more common, Will replaces Jenks as government adviser but begins to understand his father's warning. With government ministers Chris and Tessa backstabbing each other and jostling for position, each with their own agenda, Will is powerless to prevent catastrophe. At the climax of *Resilience*, a huge tidal surge overwhelms much of the east coast and London, with Will's parents feared lost in the flood.

Individual responsibility is at the heart of resistance in the plays, which in turn impacts on the collective as a viable model. The rupture between Robin and Jenks in the 1970s contests the scientific community's empirical status. Robin's radical empiricism is trumped by Jenks's pragmatic hypothesis, the audience unclear which man's conclusion is the truth. Will is something of a synthesis of these two men, recognising the need to achieve a consensus in order to effect change – even if this

means presenting unproven data as fact – and his presence as government adviser offers some hope that the individual (in the right place) can influence the battle against ecological degradation. Both Tessa and Chris are individuals with the power to oppose the political self-interest that undermines effective climate action – each flirting with making radical decisions – but ultimately revert to inaction and, somewhat ironically given the impending catastrophe, (political) self-preservation:

> SARIKA: What are we going to do about London?
>
> CHRIS: Do you know what, I have a plan! We do nothing.
>
> SARIKA: Nothing? No… evacuation.
>
> TESSA: Think about this, Chris.
>
> CHRIS: I have, thanks, Tessa.
>
>> It's Saturday night out there in one of the greatest cities in the world. Theatres are full of audiences, clubs, clubbers, lapdancers are making oligarchs cream in lapbars, kebabs being gobbled by the dozen, smokers in huddles outside riverside pubs; everyone's enjoying a moderately breezy night in September. The Met Office predict choppy seas and high winds. Life's going about its business. And in here we have Nostradamus telling us the sky's falling in.
>
> WILL: You really have absorbed nothing. (162-63)

Ultimately, science is ignored by politicians seduced by the thrill of economic prosperity who are incapable of acting in our long-term interests. Robin's warning that politicians cannot be trusted proves to be true. But this does not resolve the difficult question of individual agency in the context of climate change: Robin may be right, but in exiling himself has had no influence on government; Jenks's scientific concessions to the unpreparedness of politicians to heed stark warnings, for all his years attempting to shape policy, have likewise achieved nothing. Will arrives too

late, into a political culture unprepared to listen, to prevent catastrophe. The conclusion is that whatever actions resourceful, passionate individuals put up, while those in power – the leaders of our national collective – are complicit with capitalist exploitation of the environment, effective climate action is impossible.

By writing about an issue theatres had hitherto steered clear of, Waters' contribution to the (at the time) emerging consensus on climate change was an important act in itself. His exploration of the dilemma for individuals and collectives is comprehensive, and in Will and Sarika he has attempted to role-model positive resistance within our current socio-political context. But he encounters the familiar problem, the absence of a collective political will to challenge the status quo that earlier playwrights like Churchill encountered. His decision to then fast-forward to the moment of catastrophe is interesting, as it effectively denies the possibility of forming the necessary collective power – a decision presumably informed by our urgent need for immediate climate action. As in many climate plays, the balance between frightening the audience into action and modelling positive individual action is difficult to achieve.

Earthquakes in London

Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* received positive reviews from across the political spectrum. *The Independent* admired its balanced approach to serious issues: 'what's impressive about the piece is its mix of zeitgeist-capturing ambition and irreverent refusal to lapse into tidy-minded preaching' (Taylor, 2010). Surprisingly, the conservative *Telegraph* responded warmly to the political content:

'the show's mood of febrile anxiety about global warming at times succeeded in niggling even a crusty climate-change sceptic like myself' (Spencer, 2010).

The play spans past, present and future, the earliest scenes set in 1968 and the latest in 2026, as it follows three generations of one family. The head of the family, Robert, is one of the first to recognise the danger of carbon emissions, but sells out to an airline and suppresses his research. In the present he has become a reclusive prophet of doom, telling his son-in-law Steve that the planet 'knows what it wants. It wants to be rid of us' (97); representing Earth as Gaia, capable of culling humanity to a sustainable one billion through rapid climate change. Robert's three daughters each bear the scars of his disastrous parenting: Sarah is an emotionally cold Lib-Dem MP, overwhelmed Freya is pregnant with Steve's baby, and nineteen-year-old Jasmine's hedonistic lifestyle masks her extreme cynicism and anxiety. The play primarily examines an individual model of resistance: several of the characters confront certain aspects of their own situation that are tangentially linked to ecological decline, though most are not motivated by climate change *per se*. One example would be Sarah's husband Colin's inability to improve his life by leaving her, which mirrors our own inability to act in our best interests by living more sustainably – even if that only means reducing our carbon footprint by not buying food produced on the other side of the planet, for instance. The absence of a coherent, collective political consciousness leaves most of these individuals adrift.

Robert had the potential to oppose, but is defined by his decision to fabricate research outcomes that supported (rather than annihilated) the airline's business model in the 1960s, identifying him as a failure, or worse, a traitor. Robert

presumably represents the complicity of a generation seduced by material gain, although he, as one who abused his knowledge and power, is particularly culpable. In his withdrawal from society he continues to be complicit: he could have turned whistle-blower and combatted the problem he helped to create, but chooses not to. His nihilistic, ultra-empirical worldview of humanity as aberrant cosmic blip, soon to be returned to atoms, is challenged by Steve. But Steve, as author of trivial Christmas books like 'Fifty Shit Things About Britain' that 'sell very well' (83), appears juvenile in comparison. While Robert has clearly failed to combat ecological degradation, he has at least confronted the enormity of our situation, however pessimistic his conclusions; gaining a second chance to effect change by warning the audience to heed his mistakes.

Jasmine represents ironically detached youth. She attacks her baby-boomer lecturer for the resources squandered by his generation, positing an unfunded, minimum-wage lifestyle as the source of her disenfranchisement. She performs an environmental burlesque show, but tells Tom that she only 'got *political*' because she thought Sarah was coming (32). This moment supports a reading of Jasmine as anxious (she does not want to admit to her peer that she is politically engaged) or detached (she genuinely only did it to win praise from her elder sister). There is radicalism in Jasmine, as when she frankly tells her brother-in-law Colin to leave Sarah if he's not happy: 'Colin! What's gonna change? Come on!!! What's *happening!?* (98). But her anger, her concept of change, finds no effective political cause to bind to – her words may recall a political or ecological battle cry, but that is not what they are. Rather, she turns to drink, drugs, clothes and music to dissipate

her oppositional energy, unable to escape spectacle, consumerism and interpersonal drama.

Sarah is a more effective resistor than her father and sisters, although her status as Coalition politician is discordant with the track record of the Lib-Dems in power. At the beginning of her arc she is set up as one of the cynical politicians – a familiar trope in contemporary British politics – who place self-interest above public interest. Colin strikes a nerve when she asks if he likes her:

> COLIN: You live in a million pound house with two cars. You're a Liberal Democrat minister in a Tory government. Then you tell me you want to join the board of a multinational airline. It's not that I don't like you Sarah. I hardly know you.

Crucially, however, Sarah avoids the failure of her father by refusing the airline job and proposing a bill to halt airport expansion. She represents a politician who makes a moral decision, rejecting personal profit in favour of society and the environment. As an individual she has stood up for climate action, but from a position of power: seeming to support the idea that climate action must be top-down. Whether Bartlett's choices regarding Sarah's credibility were sincere or merely hopeful, her courage and selflessness is rare among contemporary UK politicians.[70]

Freya tends to question what she is told, but her status is low; she suffers from delusions, imagining her foetus is speaking to her. The whole message of the play –

---

[70] Sarah's real-life contemporary, Lib-Dem MP Chris Huhne, was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when, after receiving a call from BP's managing director the night before, he cancelled a meeting with renewable energy industry representatives on the Isle of Wight in order to ratify a £10bn deal between BP and Rosneft to exploit oil resources in the Russian arctic. Huhne had recently met with BP to discuss one of the world's worst environmental disasters, the Deepwater Horizon fiasco, and was fully aware of the risky and carbon-intensive nature of the Arctic deal (Lawrence and Davies, 2015).

that our lifestyle is leading to disaster – is undermined by these unreal episodes; particularly in Act Five, when Freya is in a coma after falling from Waterloo Bridge during the earthquake. These scenes are intercut with scenes from the future, when Freya is with her deceased mother in an afterlife/futuristic liminal space. She is told of a legend, a young woman named Solomon who emerged at the time of her fall, and whose message instigated widespread political change. In the epilogue we see Freya's daughter Emily at sixteen, preparing to leave home on her presumably prophetic, world-changing mission to London. This metaphysical proposition – that change rests in the hands of a (mystical) young woman – jars against the representation of young people explored throughout the play via Jasmine. It is also reminiscent of John's messianic status in Bartlett's *13*.

To insert a revolutionary leader, almost as an afterthought and with no exploration of the character's dilemma, is a problematic solution to the personal and political challenge climate change poses. One wonders, having delved so deeply into the conundrum of individual agency in contemporary Britain, why Bartlett made this creative decision. Did he feel the absence of a genuine solution was too pessimistic? I can certainly empathise with this possibility, and *Earthquakes in London* has informed my own creative process in the writing of *The Ends*, pushing me to rewrite the ending several times in search of a plausible, hopeful conclusion*.*

But whatever Bartlett's intentions, this ending combined with his characterisation of a corrupt scientist and a noble politician unfortunately aligns with some of the most propagandistic untruths around climate change in the UK. Science is not to be trusted, but politicians should be; don't worry about climate change because some

future leader, movement or technology will save the day – when in reality, there is a growing consensus that we are sleepwalking into disaster.

Greenland

A very different approach to *Earthquakes* is taken in *Greenland*, where climate change and its intersection with our political and economic system is unabashedly explored by a group of playwrights comprised of Moira Buffini, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner and Jack Throne. Reviewers found the earnestness of the play frustrating. Michael Billington conceded that 'you could argue that the play accurately reflects society's fractured uncertainty over how to tackle climate change' but laments the issues taking precedence over the characters and story (2011). Paul Taylor's problem was that 'I care about the issues. But I couldn't give a damn about any of the multiply-authored characters' (2011). By placing political issues ahead of an enjoyable theatrical experience, *Greenland* becomes a theatrical pariah: a too-earnest political play.

Both collective and individual models of resistance are explored across the play's multiple plot strands. There are credible figures of resistance in the play, most notably Lisa, an individual seeking the power of collective action. Abandoning a safe career as a teacher after reading a book on climate, she makes a decision to do something about it. The beginnings of her dissent are inauspicious, a lone-wolf supermarket protest:

> LISA: These beans are from Peru. Lamb from New Zealand. Strawberries from Spain. How many planes – just to bring us our shopping? How much CO2? These roses are so perfect –

> *Lisa starts to tear the heads off them.*
>
> But this is what they're doing to the atmosphere.
>
> PAULA: Is this your protest?
>
> LISA: Yes.
>
> PAULA: I don't think people understand. (2011:6)

Lisa joins an activist group at an eco-festival, where she meets the charismatic Dav. Asking how she becomes an activist, he tells her 'you act' (31). They become romantically involved. Soon they are invading an office used by 'environmental planners' who are 'greenwashing': quasi-scientific PR firms promoting green arguments for fossil fuel extraction. Their invasion triggers Celia, one of the planners, to defect, giving them documents to expose corruption (46). On Celia's information these Blockadians travel to Papua New Guinea to prevent construction of a pipeline,[71] but Dav's credibility is undermined at this point when he beds Celia – despite her support of market-based solutions to climate change with which he strongly disagrees. Rather than a committed activist, he appears to be an ecological hedonist, using idealism and hope to seduce women who harbour genuine environmental fears. This getting into bed with your enemies has echoes of the frequently insidious relationship between Big Green and Big Oil (Klein, 2014).

Lisa is last seen abseiling from an oil rig in the Arctic night: despite having 'never ever felt so tiny and so ordinary', she is sacrificing her safety, and potentially her life, to combat the extractive industry that is destroying the planet (88). Lisa's arc marks

---

[71] A term coined by Naomi Klein to describe citizens of Blockadia, an abstract nation that appears wherever needed to oppose the extractive industry by physical and legal blockade. A prominent example is First Nations resistance to the Keystone XL pipeline in North America, still not built as a result of Blockadian efforts (Klein, 2014).

her as a highly credible resistor and is persuasive, effective, and sincere. Far from a mere idealistic fiction, the Blockadian is a model for change that is proving successful in the real world (Klein, 2014).

Phoebe is another example of a figure of resistance who becomes politically neutralised by the end of the play. A ministerial aide from the Department of Energy and Climate Change, she believes politics can save the planet. Set amidst the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, Phoebe is certain of a deal and manages to persuade scientist Ray, who has developed a game-changing but unpublished theoretical climate model, to show his research to politicians. Despite no opportunity to present the research and pessimistic reports from the negotiations, Phoebe remains convinced that a deal will be reached:

> PHOEBE: I could hang off a fucking oil rig, screaming my lungs out. I could be that person. So easily. But this, here, is how you change things.
>
> RAY: You hope.
>
> PHOEBE: Right now there's a room downstairs. One room and there's no other place, no other room where anything more important is happening.
>
> RAY: Then why are you here, with me? (70)

When the summit achieves nothing, she is devastated. At the end of the play Ray persuades her to settle down with him and have children:

> RAY: We shouldn't be the ones who don't have them.
>
> PHOEBE: Then who should? (86)

This decision, while understandable given the disappointment of Copenhagen, marks a complete U-turn on her previous stance to not bring children into the world and effectively brings her political career to an end. The decision of a strong and resourceful young woman to choose motherhood over the fight for her belief in progressive politics contrasts with the commitment of Lisa: both women are failed by a form of collective, but Phoebe's reversal suggests the impossibility of climate action without political will.

In *Greenland* the playwrights seem to suggest that while collective models of resistance are necessary, it is the commitment of the individual to oppose and endure that is most badly needed to confront climate change. While Lisa is presumably part of a group, the audience has only seen collectives disintegrate in *Greenland*; a factor that risks being interpreted along neoliberal lines, where the frailty of collectivism leaves the individual as the sole agent of change. In the neoliberal era the positioning of realist playwrights' representations of resistance along this individual-collective dichotomy poses problems that are not easily resolved. Who would argue that solidarity is greater today than it was in the 1970s? Or, as further anti-union laws[72] are passed and individualist discourse embeds, that solidarity is greater even than the 2000s? The weakened state of collectivisation demands – as a matter of fidelity to the world as it appears to the writer – that the individual be foregrounded. The accusation of blue-sky thinking hovers around representations of strong collectives, somewhat supported by the dissipation of Occupy, the reversal of the Arab Spring, and the political castration of Syriza by

---

[72] New proposals will criminalise picketing, allow employers to bring in agency staff to cover strikes, implement new auditory regulations carrying huge financial penalties for breaches, and increase the threshold for strike vote (Wintour, 2015).

Greece's creditors. But the importance of continuing to insist on the possibility of collective resistance cannot be underestimated: new alliances and movements will form. The question for the playwright is how to do so within the scope of the current political context, a question I will return to in reflecting on my own difficulties in writing *The Ends*.

The Heretic

The Heretic deserves a brief mention as the antithesis to the oppositional characters that I am seeking to create. Richard Bean's black comedy centres around Dr Diane Cassell, an earth scientist whose experiment concludes that sea levels in the Maldives are not rising; a pure sceptic who, like Bean himself, believes in nothing until it is proven. In many ways, Cassell is a strong figure of resistance: she refuses to blindly follow the growing consensus among her colleagues, being disciplined by her institution, receiving death threats from a radical environmental group, and suffering the disapprobation of her daughter Phoebe for denying anthropogenic climate change. In one sense she resembles real whistle-blowers like Chelsea Manning or Edward Snowden: at great personal and professional cost, she refuses to be forced into a position that she thinks contradicts the values of society.

Rather than glibly going against the grain of his contemporaries, Bean appears sincere in his representation of Cassell's heroic defence of truth, and has questioned the imperfect climate models that have, over the years, been superseded by newer research (Cathcart, 2012). Bean underestimates, however, how useful these models have proved to neoliberal think-tanks and organisations, funded by petro-dollars, whose ideological objective is to disrupt the formation of a consensus on

anthropogenic climate change (Klein, 2014:38-44). Responding to premature and exaggerated claims regarding climate science, Bean's scepticism, but also his personal opinions, set the agenda of the play:

> The main topic on the table in the second half is this human need for catastrophe, and I call it catastrophilia […] we have I think replaced religion, faith, spirituality, a belief in God, in the last 30, 40 years with this desire for catastrophe. And the Earth is always the centre of it. So that's what the second half is about, and it's good fun, and I think it's something that we've got to look in the mirror and face up to. We're obsessed with the end, with catastrophe. (Cathcart, 2012)

Bean is certainly not the only libertarian who has kicked back against being told what to do by authority figures or experts whose credibility they question, and there are parallels to freedom of speech, privacy, and lifestyle legislation (such as the smoking ban) in the play.[73] But *The Heretic*'s quasi-scientific arguments, primarily that sea level rises in the Maldives are untrue, prove nothing. They have, in fact, been effectively disproved since 2011.[74] The global consensus on anthropogenic climate change is beyond dispute, and in increasingly diverse sectors.[75] In terms of resistance, *The Heretic* effectively champions the status quo by adopting the same arguments neoliberals and neoconservatives have employed to fortify the fossil fuel dependent politico-economic system currently in place. When urgent action is required to tackle climate change to prevent massive loss of life and biodiversity, Bean's play reaffirms the beliefs of people like Charles Spencer, whose delight in

---

[73] After being pressured into removing references to Mohammed from his play *Up on the Roof*, Bean called a writers' meeting at the Royal Court. Caryl Churchill pointedly told him he should be writing about how Muslims are oppressed across the globe and walked out. Bean vowed never to speak to her again (Nathan, 2010). Throughout his career, Bean has reacted adversely to censure; valuing his own right to speak, seemingly, above all else.

[74] Regarding sea level rise in the Indian Ocean, which is comparable to (but not greater than) the global rise, see H. Palanisamy et al, 2013, and Jevrejeva et al, 2014.

[75] In 2014, even the Pentagon made statements on the need to address climate change.

seeing a play 'absolutely resolute in its refusal to lapse into the apocalyptic gloom that usually attends this subject' is superseded only by his delight in seeing 'the Court putting on a play which will vastly offend a large section of its audience' (2011). For the supposedly most radical theatre in Britain to stage such a conservative play is, at best, cynical irony gone wrong.

2071 and *Ten Billion*

Two climate change plays staged at the Royal Court have utilised a documentary model of resistance: *Ten Billion* by Katie Mitchell and complex-systems scientist Stephen Emmott; and *2071* by Mitchell, playwright Duncan Macmillan and climate scientist Chris Rapley.[76] Although the science underpinning the shows is collated by the scientists involved (and thus open to challenge), it draws upon the consensus in the field of climate science and claims a scientific legitimacy that fiction or individual testimony cannot. These 'dramatic lectures' take documentary theatre techniques to an empirical extreme: in *Ten Billion*, Emmott uses scientific data to explain the complex network that sustains life on Earth and how growth-capitalism is rapidly destroying this network. There is little subjective commentary or stage business: stood in a replication of his office, his assertions are visualised by simple animations on his 'whiteboard'. Yet, as I describe below, the form delivers a powerful theatrical experience.

---

[76] Stephen Emmott holds a swathe of appointments, including several in UK government, at the University of Oxford, as well as head of Microsoft's Computational Science research. Chris Rapley was head of the British Antarctic Survey between 1998-2007 before joining University College London and chairing the European Space Agency.

The two plays differ considerably in their message, despite the common ground and, presumably, common goal of accelerating public response to the threat of climate change. *Ten Billion* received fair reviews but was attacked by critics and audience members alike for its extremely negative conclusions, best summarised in a couple of Emmott's closing lines: 'I think we're all fucked' and 'learn how to use a gun'. For Billington, Emmott's frankness was the response of a 'quiet, humane and deeply concerned' (2012a) human being to what should be an unignorable problem (being generally ignored). Dominic Cavandish chose to poke fun: 'I realise time is of the essence but couldn't the Royal Court have lent his doomy expertise to a few playwrights before they vanish along with the rest of their species?' (2012). Sarah Hemming craved dramatic conflict and a twist, nevertheless admitting the shows 'immensely, distressingly powerful' effect (2012). I, personally, felt stunned not just after the curtain fell but for hours afterwards, and like Emmott, angry at the carelessness of our species. The person with whom I went to see the show was furious at the show itself; for her, such negativity reduced the chances of collective action, because Emmott essentially told us that it was already too late. We debated, quite heatedly, for several hours after the show. It was, in short, political theatre at its best: stimulating strong, diverse emotional and intellectual reactions, and bringing the seriousness of our greatest challenge to public attention.

The play stimulated strong, highly emotional reactions from the audience, disturbing them, angering them, or perhaps most telling of all, provoking the misplaced nervous laughter of an individual unable to respond appropriately to such serious material. The play also appealed to our desire to find out what happens next, although the proposed solutions to the climate crisis explored by Emmott provided little

reassurance. *Ten Billion* at least provided a necessarily blunt overview of climate change, was unequivocal on the need to take radical action to prevent catastrophe, and crucially it implicated our economic system in the crisis facing us all, a fact too often overlooked. As Klein has argued, 'gentle tweaks to the status quo stopped being a climate option when we supersized the American Dream in the 1990s, and then proceeded to take it global' (2014:22). And yet few representations of climate change, even scientific ones, take such a hard line; as follow-up performance *2071* demonstrates.

Director Mitchell clearly took responses to *Ten Billion* into account in preparing *2071*. Playwright Duncan Macmillan was drafted in and his influence shows, perhaps, in the framing device that gives the play its title (in 2071, Rapley's granddaughter will be the age that he is at the time of performance). The temporal symmetry of this link to future generations is both incentive and warning to those of us who are in a position to act now, when it matters. The message of the play is also much more optimistic than Emmott's. Human ingenuity, for Emmott the cause of the climate crisis,[77] is seen as boundless in *2071*. Rapley identifies renewable energy use in India and China as progress, but as Billington notes, stops short of criticising the UK's 'blinkered resistance to such an obvious, economically viable source of energy' (2014). Rapley agrees with Emmott in the impossibility of changing our global economy, although not because we are all ignorant capitalists but because innovation will not necessitate such measures; a much more palatable message for many of us who are uncomfortable about the need to radically restructure society.

---

[77] In the Green Revolution of the 20th century, we not only created the food to solve a shortage, but also allowed our population to expand rapidly. And the methods, from pesticides to mass expansion, together with the fossil-fuel powered, globalised system of production, have proved catastrophic. For Emmott, the solution became an even greater problem, raising serious doubts about the unknown consequences of inventing ourselves out of the climate crisis.

Solutions are an important part of the efforts to tackle climate change, but othering those solutions by discussing only China and India lets us off the hook.[78] It is more important that the developed world reduces its emissions, and the responsibility to do so is greater. The lack of a strong message neutralises the political power of *2071* considerably, edging the play towards complicity in ecological catastrophe by downplaying the need for all nations, especially the wealthiest, to take robust and immediate action.

It is also interesting to note that reviews were generally less favourable for *2071* than for *Ten Billion*, the reliance on less emotive, fact-based evidence somewhat dulling the theatrical experience (Donn, 2014). This approach is perhaps down to the individual scientists' personalities or views, but it may also stem from criticism of the science behind Emmott's monologue, which has been called 'unscientific' (Goodall, 2013) and misleading in claims such as 'it takes around 27,000 litres of water to make one kilogram of chocolate' because it does not specify how much of this water is natural rainfall (Howell, 2013). As with verbatim theatre, it seems legitimacy is more complex than presenting the facts or the truth, particularly if a theatrical experience is also demanded (and rightly so). In trying to assuage criticism of *Ten Billion*, it may be that *2071* has mimicked the dangerous course of the climate movement itself, firstly by making bold claims that were open to attack, and secondly by softening its message in response to these attacks, leaving dangerous inaction as a viable option for too long. Despite the strong (but not decisive) evidence that Emmott's message is the right one, minor criticisms have perhaps precipitated Rapley's more politically centrist message.

---

[78] In fact, Indians have a carbon footprint of 1.9 metric tons per capita, compared to 9.8 in the EU, and 22.2 in the US (National Geographic, 2014).

The direct, 'factual' forms, above, have been useful weapons for political playwrights during a period of neoliberal orthodoxy; when the need for truth has grown stronger the weaker the Left has become, and has become more urgent as the public has grown less politically engaged. As a form of opposition to the global capitalist economy that has expedited climate change, however, 'truth' is not always enough. A powerful corporate lobby and media have managed to cast doubt upon climate change despite the findings of a wealth of scientific research for over twenty years, and only in the mid-2010s has consensus been established. Without a persuasive ideology, playwrights like Hare have struggled to penetrate the orthodoxy of market economy and growth sustained by neoliberalism; hopefully now the broad environmental movement can provide that discursive foundation. For me, the lecture format is unsuitable: the expert is the key practitioner, the dramatist secondary or absent altogether. But most importantly, the single subject-position of the lecture form is easier to dismiss than a literary play where characters represent diverse viewpoints; which, through the writer's craft, can engage on an individual level while simultaneously holding more universal significance.

The Ends

The models of resistance analysed in the political and climate plays so far suggest that the collective may be the ideal form for an effective oppositional politics, but that from a weak position – which typifies the Left and the climate movement in the neoliberal age – political playwrights tend to rely on examples of individual resistance and documentary methods to challenge the status quo. While the opportunity for collective resistance exists sporadically, in plays like Buffini, Charman, Skinner and

Thorne's *Greenland* and events like Occupy, since the 1980s it has become problematic as a systematic approach to the big political questions. While individuals often appear compromised or ineffectual, they are the building blocks of any future collective, and as Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden have shown, their resistive potential can be immense – especially when tapped in to global communication networks.

Initially *The Ends* was a very different play to the tightly structured, unified four-hander it has become. *The Chain*, as the first few drafts were known, was a global play whose form mirrored its content: the activist-terror story that is *The Ends* was the central strand of *The Chain*, interlinked with other plot-lines set in the Congo, Venezuela, China and the USA. These links attempted to highlight the consequences of an imperial global system of production and consumption on our environment, with its reliance on fossil fuels and perpetual growth, and on Others whose lives are subordinated to our own. But the difficulty in staging this complex global reality was evident in early feedback from readers, which suggested that the structure was confusing, the story too diffuse to signify clearly. It had taken extensive research to comprehend our system of production, the neoliberal revolution and the ecological consequences of unrestrained capitalism, and dramatising it proved to be equally complex.

Given the absence of a coherent Left ideology or political party, the playwright must also negotiate compromised political language in addition to complex material. This was the first of my three plays and very quickly I realised how difficult it would be to create the positive figures of resistance I was aiming for. When the Left has been

overwhelmed by the Right, when neoliberal capitalism is destroying social-democratic gains, and when the desire for change is without strategy or ideology for achieving it, the question 'how do we go forward?' remains unanswered – and in almost every field, from politics to the arts. In these circumstances, how plays seeking to influence political change *end* presents a significant challenge to playwrights – any outcome too far removed from reality risks becoming a fairy-tale ending, a charge Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* arguably deserves. Bond's Lear seems to me a more effective example – though killed, his attack on the wall sows the seeds of the next rebellion.

The movement of *The Ends* draws out the grand opposition between ideologies of Left and Right, embodied by the characters of Mark and Helena, smashing them against each other and, in the process, splintering Fierce's political convictions from those of Mark. At its heart, the play is about the possibility of change. It gradually emerges that Fierce has been manipulated into taking Helena and John hostage by Mark in the hope of broadcasting a renunciation of Helena's political beliefs. But as the situation is prolonged, Fierce realises the intractability of Helena and Mark's perspectives, and despairs at her inability to convince Helena of anything she says.

The dialectic of the play having reached stalemate, Fierce's arc is at its lowest point at this moment. Her willpower failing, she attempts to salvage something from the situation by preventing John's death. At the climax of the play, Fierce protects John from Mark, who intends to kill him. No longer sure of his affection for her, she risks her life by standing in his way:

> **Mark** *walks towards her.* **Fierce** *blocks his path. He tries to go round her and she blocks him again. He pushes her aside.*
>
> **Mark**   We're finishing it.
>
> **Fierce**   No we're not.
>
> **Fierce** *grabs the long IV needle and brandishes it at* **Mark***. He laughs.*
>
> **Mark**   What are you going to do with that?
>
> **Fierce**   You're not going to get some sort of confession. You've got what you needed.
>
> **Mark**   What we needed.
>
> **Fierce**   *You.* I didn't agree to this. He was never supposed to die.
>
> **Mark** *tries to move closer, but she lunges towards him. She is scared but determined. He raises his knife, ready to use it.* (53)

Writing the complexity of characters whose resistance must take place under extreme duress, as Caryl Churchill's work illustrates, is to strike a fine balance between breaking from existing power relations and remaining within the bounds of socio-political credibility. At this point in *The Ends*, Fierce could be seen to be defending – via John as living metaphor – growth capitalism. At the same time she is refusing to adopt a discredited Leftist politics and its tendency towards violent oppression. As for political activists today, there is no clear path to follow, no easy solution. Fierce's final act in the play, I hoped, would suggest a way forward where there is none: to refuse to perpetuate what you know to be wrong. When Helena and Mark lie dead and she alone must choose whether to feed John – and so possibly save his life – Fierce chooses not to:

> *She remains, holding* **John***. She slowly kneels up. She listens to his heartbeat and feels for his breath. She shakes him gently.*

> **Fierce**   Can you hear me?
>
> *She takes one of the half-empty jars and takes a spoonful of honey. She is unsure what to do. She is about to feed him, but she doesn't. She puts the spoon down.*

This imperfect act of dissent represents the rejection of both Mark and Helena's worldviews. In refusing to (symbolically) sustain a global economic system that is unsustainable, she rejects the neoliberal 'no alternative' discourse. She stops, secure in the knowledge that *something* will take its place – despite not fully understanding what this alternative may be.

On reflection, the disparity between my intention and the play's outcome – before questions of reception are considered – is wider than I hoped it would be. The problem mirrors that faced by Bartlett in *Earthquakes in London*: having accurately explored the dilemma of his characters (and to some extent of present day London/ Britain), there is no obvious resolution. Bartlett's fairy-tale ending does offer hope for future political change and a positive figure of resistance but, as discussed above, is problematic. It is at least unambiguous; whereas the final image of *The Ends* would not necessarily signify to an audience as it does to me.

Greenland has been useful in reflecting upon this problem. Lisa ends the play more politically active than she began it, undiminished by the reversals she has faced. Like Fierce, she is isolated, exposed to the neoliberal interpolation of the individual into hegemonic discourse, and without collective power. As for so many characters I have considered, from Beatie Bryant to Fanon, resistant potential is stored for the future. We understand that Lisa will continue to fight, whatever her chances of success. Redrafting *The Ends*, I considered how I could adopt this same strategy to

clarify the significance of Fierce's refusal to feed John, strengthening its symbolism by making her resistant potential more immediate. I imagined what would happen to the video images that had been broadcast and hit upon the idea that I could represent the spread of her symbolic gesture across the multitude – something akin to the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi that sparked revolution in Tunisia during the Arab Spring. I tried to avoid incredulity by including diverse perspectives on Fierce's actions: the idea is celebrated, misinterpreted, hijacked, used to justify further violence, and parodied. She is condemned as a terrorist and upheld as a heroine. But crucially she has influenced public discourse – criticism of her nevertheless furthering awareness of inequalities and ecological destruction – and inspired others to take action.

Chapter Four

The Iraq War

If any place can testify to the replacement of old empires with new, and of the replacement of one imperial centre with another, it is Iraq – formerly known as Mesopotamia. A territory of the Ottoman Empire, the provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul were hastily amalgamated into Iraq by the British after the First World War and remained a part of the British Empire until 1932. For David Harvey, it was imperial nostalgia that made the UK so eager to partake in the US-led Iraq War in 2003; a nostalgia that allowed those in power to believe that the mission was a benevolent one on behalf of an oppressed people (2003:4). Except that this time, the British sense of imperial realism had ceased to extend to direct military intervention. While most citizens could ignore the fact that their cheap, disposable clothing was made by slave labour in Bangladeshi sweatshops, it was much more difficult to ignore two of the world's strongest militaries, without an international mandate, invading a weaker nation. Public opposition, as will be described below, was significant.

In the second of the plays submitted here, *Quicksand*, I have attempted to make connections between the Iraq War, the financial crisis of 2008 and the long period of austerity that the UK is now experiencing – the common theme being neoliberalism.[79] The war, including its build-up and aftermath, epitomises the political and social changes experienced in 21st century Britain: mass protest met with political inaction, nationalism rallied to the defence of dubious foreign and domestic policy, and increasing corporate control over people's lives. The irony of this

---

[79] A recent play at the Edinburgh Fringe, Dumbshow's *Electric Dreams (*2015), has attempted a similar feat.

combination of political factors is that most citizens who speak out so vehemently

against working migrants are oblivious to international trade agreements that pose a

far greater threat to national sovereignty and working conditions.[80]

While the constantly mutating official rationale for the invasion of Iraq initially focused

on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and the regime of Saddam Hussein,

numerous alternative interpretations have since emerged. For many commentators,

the war was less about removing a brutal regime or destroying WMDs than

neoliberal capitalist imperialism (Harvey, 2003:26). US intervention in Iraq – by which

I mean the narrow US-led coalition that included the UK – resembles US intervention

in Chile during the 1970s, the key differentiator being military invasion rather than

sponsorship of paramilitaries to achieve the goal of regime change.[81] In being rebuilt,

Iraq was neoliberalised: some of the first actions of the Coalition Provisional

Authority (CPA), for example, were to privatise state-owned companies and reduce

corporation tax from 45% to 15%; securing oil supplies for the US and its allies; and

opening up new markets to US companies. Big business – especially Halliburton, a

company with close ties to then US vice-president Dick Cheney – reaped $138bn

from the war via federal contracts. The Iraq War is reported to have cost the US over

$2 trillion (Trotta, 2013); and while this debt appears self-defeating as an economic

boost, it is important to remember that one of the hallmarks of the neoliberal state is

transfer of public funds into private hands. The politicians who initiated the Iraq War

---

[80] Free trade agreements contain rules that prioritise private rights over public ones. In 2013, extractive company Lone Pine Resources sued Canada for $230m after the province of Quebec outlawed fracking, using provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to do so (Klein, 2014:358). Perhaps the gravest concern is that these agreements, signed up to by one government, cannot be nullified by subsequent democratic actions such as Quebec's fracking ban. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is currently under attack by democratic rights groups.

[81] For a detailed analysis, see Harvey, 2003; Taylor, 2006; Klein, 2008.

have largely moved on to lucrative appointments.[82] Businesses and individuals have

profited at the public's expense through the destruction of a sovereign country – a

situation best described by the label disaster capitalism (Gunewardena and Schuller,

2008; Klein, 2008).

In the UK, the consequences of Iraq have been far-reaching. The 7/7 London

bombings in 2005 were perhaps the most shocking, alongside the hundreds of killed

and thousands of wounded soldiers returning from operations.[83] Subtler changes

have also altered society considerably, with states of exception becoming the rule.

Civil rights have been repeatedly curtailed by the abuse of broadly-worded security

legislation such as the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ACTSA), which

allows for detention-without-trial; and the Terrorism Act 2000, which has been used

to obstruct peaceful protest (Rehman, 2010:916). Illegal mass surveillance has

become routine, as Edward Snowden has revealed. Despite official attempts to

justify these infringements by citing the threat of terrorism, these laws were being

abused before the 2005 London bombings, including to prevent Iraq War protests in

2003 (BBC, 2006). Such tactics have become common in response to all forms of

peaceful protest. Furthermore, domestic human rights abuses pale in comparison to

infringements upon Iraqi rights, as highlighted in several high-profile torture and

abuse cases (Morris, 2007; Milmo, 2014).

---

[82] Including Tony Blair, now reported to be worth over £70m. He owns two companies: one specialising in advising nations on how to make neoliberal reforms, the other advising businesses and sovereign wealth funds (Mendick, 2014). One wonders how much of that business has been granted as reward for favourable decisions made while in power.

[83] It should be noted, however, that these consequences are partly attributable to the war in Afghanistan, united with the Iraq War under the moniker 'War on Terror'.

These incursions into the rights of citizens have occurred in parallel with the apparent invulnerability of political and business elites, epitomised by the Iraq dossier scandal – a document which took the UK to war but for which nobody has been held accountable – and latterly the bankers responsible for the 2008 financial crisis who escaped without sanction.[84] The Iraq War has further limited the ability of citizens to challenge governments and corporations, highlighting the unaccountability of elected representatives. It is important to point out, however, that once the invasion of Iraq began, public opinion realigned in support of our troops – rising from 24% on 28 February to 56% a month later (Ipsos MORI, 2003; 2003a). While this pattern is familiar from earlier conflicts, from the First World War to the Falklands, never has the UK's involvement in conflict been so publicly questioned; raising questions of complicity and the potential for public opinion to influence political decisions (Ipsos MORI, 2003).

Many figures of resistance explored in Iraq War plays are not citizens, however, but soldiers. As I am all too well aware from my own involvement in Iraq, the ability of soldiers to challenge political decisions is constrained by the terms of military service, where saying 'no' is a criminal offence punishable by harsh treatment and imprisonment – in addition to loss of livelihood, housing and social circle upon discharge. The Iraq War differs from previous conflicts, such as UN peace-keeping missions in the Balkans and Kosovo, because of its questionable legality and purpose. As a result, all soldiers deployed to Iraq were somewhat complicit in neoliberal imperialism.

---

[84] The dossier contained fabricated evidence about Iraq's chemical warfare capabilities that were used to persuade MPs of the case for war. The long-delayed publication of the Chilcot report into the Iraq War prompted families of soldiers killed in action to threaten legal action if the inquiry's findings were not published by the end of 2015 (Weaver, 2015).

The Iraq War, protest and theatre

The build-up to and prosecution of the Iraq War typifies British politics after the collapse of grand oppositions and the post-war consensus, serving as the starkest example of the imbalance of power in the neoliberal era: a majority Labour government prosecuting an unpopular war on behalf of the world's sole remaining superpower. Popular opposition to the war was greater than anything seen since the 1980s, but the public outcry was ignored. When popular protest translated into dissent among elected representatives, the government manipulated parliament to win crucial votes – relying on right-wing Conservatives to do so.[85] British democracy, our formal system of collective governance, was exposed as unfit for purpose. The failure of popular collective protest to influence parliamentary action highlights the weakness of collective models of resistance at that time.

Truth itself was also revealed to be malleable and corruptible. The government's commitment to war regardless of international consensus, evidence of WMDs, or public opinion has since been revealed, most directly in the fabrication of the Iraq dossier and the death of Dr David Kelly. That all 175 of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers worldwide were pro-war rather shatters the illusion of a free press (Harvey, 2003:12). The manufacture of consent poses serious questions about the nature of truth, with implications for the playwrights who tackled the Iraq War through documentary theatre. As has been argued in previous chapters, the failure of collectives to resist displaces the oppositional imperative onto the individual. Implicitly, the individual begins from an inferior position – if individual resistance is

---

[85] On 26 February 2003, 121 Labour MPs (198 MPs in total) voted for a rebel amendment challenging the Blair government's pro-war stance (Tempest, 2003). On 19 March 2003, the number had grown to 139 Labour MPs (217 MPs in total) (BBC, 2003a).

difficult at the best of times, it is arguably more difficult following recent collective failure. Several of the war plays discussed below address the traumatic experience of individuals swept up by the tide of history.

Plays about Iraq appeared within a year of the invasion and continue to be written and performed over ten years later. Arguably, no single event has captured the theatrical imagination more during this period. The popularity of the documentary model of resistance is evidenced by the fact that the first responses to the war were documentary plays:[86] Richard Norton-Taylor's *Justifying War* (Tricycle, 2003) and David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (NT, 2004), soon followed by Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* (Royal Court, 2005), and Richard Norton-Taylor's *Called to Account* (Tricycle, 2007). Jonathan Lichenstein's *The Pull of Negative Gravity* (Traverse, 2004) was the first dramatic play to appear, followed by Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* in 2006 (NTS, 2007), Simon Stephens' 2006 play *Motortown* (Royal Court, 2009), Colin Teevan's *How Many Miles to Basra?* (West Yorkshire Playhouse, 2006), Roy Williams' *Days of Significance* (Swan, 2007), Esther Wilson's *Ten Tiny Toes* (Liverpool Everyman, 2008), Adam Brace's *Stovepipe* (Hightide, 2008), Mark Ravenhill's *Shoot/ Get Treasure/ Repeat* (Royal Court, 2008), David Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (Royal Court, 2008), and Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* (Arcola, 2010).

---

[86] Although a series of short plays and events at the Royal Court, entitled War Correspondence, appeared in April 2003.

Truth in the dock: *Justifying War* and *Stuff Happens*

Public debate over the build-up to Iraq was fixated on truth. Who knew what, when they knew it, and when certain decisions were taken would have far-reaching repercussions – this element of the whole Iraq affair would, incidentally, inspire my creative journey in writing *Quicksand*, the hierarchy of knowledge being a key concept in dramatic playwriting.

Richard Norton-Taylor's *Justifying War* functions in the same way as other Tribunal plays. By condensing the lengthy, complex findings of a public inquiry – in this case the Hutton Inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly – into a clear, dramatic treatise, the play allows its audience to comprehend an injustice, form an opinion and experience an emotional reaction to the material. As with other Tribunal plays, the audience is challenged to disagree that the events that occurred were wrong; which is not to say that one side of the story is privileged over another. As Luckhurst has observed of *Colour of Justice*, there is a freedom of testimony in public inquiries that might be considered libellous in the press (2008:207): this freedom is particularly important in the case of David Kelly, as is evident in government bullying of BBC journalists and Dr Kelly himself.

David Kelly was found to have killed himself shortly after he was outed as the source who implicated elements of the Blair government in 'sexing up' the dossier outlining the case for war. The form of the play, as we have already seen, adopts a model of resistance frequently employed by political playwrights in the 21st century. The exposure of the inner workings of government, particularly its relationship to the media and the public, challenges this status quo very directly: as when the testimony

of journalist Andrew Gilligan reveals the cynicism with which the Blair government

had progressed from spinning policy announcements to spinning documents

justifying war:

> GILLIGAN: Then you see standing almost on its own a very bald statement: Intelligence 'shows… Iraq has continued to produce chemical agent.' This is not what the earlier bit says. It says it could produce it within weeks. This says it has continued to produce it. (16)

As the play progresses we are privy to wave upon wave of such revelations: the way

the Prime Minister's Press Secretary Alistair Campbell bullied BBC journalists to

retract their statements and reveal their source; the underhanded exposure of Kelly

as the source by Blair's spokesman; the speculative harassment of Kelly by the

press in the aftermath of his exposure; and his public interrogation by parliamentary

committees that evidently contributed to his death. Truth itself becomes tarnished.

The final image of the play draws a line under proceedings by reminding us that a

good man, loved by his wife and family, took his own life as a result of his

government's complete lack of integrity. This very human moment contrasts starkly

with the evasive, dissembling voices that populate the play – a reminder, perhaps, of

the wider human cost of the war.

Kelly himself comes across as an interesting figure, oscillating between courageous

whistle-blower on one hand and bullied prevaricator on the other. As an individual

who has spoken out against an injustice, he is ground beneath the wheels of state

and media machinery and we are prevented from assessing Kelly as a figure of

resistance by only hearing second-hand accounts of his character and actions.[87] The (often deceased) victim, as Janelle Reinelt has observed, recurs frequently in documentary plays (2011:18). Unfortunately these figures seem to deny the possibility of opposing power, the act of resistance passing to the playwright in the form of remembrance. It is one of the weaknesses of documentary forms that events cannot be freely imagined to suggest otherwise; as Thompson has done to some extent in *Palace of the End*. Though *Justifying War* is bound by the testimonies given, it does nevertheless expose the attempted political cover-up over Iraq by restructuring our experience of these testimonies: whereas Hutton's report was critical of the BBC, dismissed claims official actions pushed Kelly towards suicide, and supported the government, the play leads the audience to very different conclusions; functioning as 'a kind of counter-discourse' to hegemonic interpretations of events (Reinelt, 2011:17).

As Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson have argued, the proliferation of forms within the documentary genre acknowledges the contested nature of reality (2011:3). If the Tribunal plays seek to contest the 'objective truth' of official record by presenting alternative accounts, other documentary plays experiment reflexively and undermine the notion of objective truth itself. In a rather different approach to Norton-Taylor's, David Hare's *Stuff Happens* reflects the Iraq dossier's blend of truths and half-truths by combining verbatim material with imagined exchanges, making it difficult for the audience to tell where fact and fiction meet. Like *Justifying War*, the compression of drawn-out events into a cohesive narrative serves to undermine the US and UK governments' intentions in the build-up to Iraq, challenging the official version of

---

[87] Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* gives Kelly a voice. A fictionalised monologue based on publicly available information, Thompson imagines Kelly as a courageous and sensitive man.

events. Identifying pre-emptive decision-making by US administrations – as early as 2001 – alerts the audience to the brazen falseness of official rhetoric in the months prior to the invasion. But while certain speeches, such as George W. Bush's address to military cadets in June 2002 (46), are undeniably true, the private exchanges between leaders are imagined; the author's note that 'events within [the play] have been authenticated from multiple sources' notwithstanding. In a concept not dissimilar to the non-realist playwright's assertion that fiction reveals the world as it really is, Hare has referred to this as an 'artistic paradox – that by telling lies we reach the truth' (2005:73). But as Jenny Hughes has pointed out, what Hare has achieved in the play is to imagine a contest between good and evil: the idealistic, compassionate Tony Blair being outfoxed by the scheming Bush (2011:115). Needless to say, this dichotomy somewhat absolves Blair (and the UK) from blame, rather uncritically downplaying the role Britain plays in the new imperialism. Having licensed himself to invent, Hare fails to challenge the status quo as he might have done, say, by portraying Blair as a powerful man complicit in beginning a war in which hundreds of thousands have been killed.

Black Watch

Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* is the outstanding Iraq War play and one of the few to seriously address the nature of imperialism. The play's superlative military research informs complex, nuanced representations of soldiering too frequently absent from stage and screen. The play's critique of the imperial centre acknowledges the historical context of the Iraq War, disrupting the patriotic discourses that inform many war plays. Its realist credentials are complemented by a dynamic performance style incorporating physical theatre and graphic, authentic dialogue.

The play is set against the backdrop of actual events. In 2004, soldiers of the Black Watch regiment were deployed to a dangerous location in northern Iraq dubbed the 'Triangle of Death'. The deployment was politically motivated: in order to reduce casualties leading up to the US presidential election, the 800-strong Black Watch temporarily replaced 4,000 US Marines. It is during this deployment that the MoD announces the regiment will be amalgamated with other Scottish regiments. The perspective of the play springs from this betrayal of the soldiers during one of their toughest engagements.

A scene entitled 'Fashion' recounts the history of the regiment and its role in British imperialism: a list of campaigns includes battles in both World Wars alongside lesser known engagements in Syria, Palestine, and 'to crush the Mau Mau rebels' in Africa (33).[88] The final campaign connects Iraq to Britain's imperial past:

> CAMMY: Before we went tay Palestine tay take Jerusalem. Then Syria tay drive out Ottoman Turks. Which we did in 1919, in Mesopotamia.
>
> *Beat.*
>
> Where the fuck have I heard that before?
>
> *Beat.*
>
> Oh… aye.
>
> *Beat.*
>
> Here we are.
>
> *Beat.*

---

[88] Britain held up to 1.5 million Kenyans in concentration camps, where mass executions and torture were prevalent (Elkins, 2004).

Again.

The capitalist roots of the regiment go even deeper than this history alludes to; as David Archibald has pointed out, the formation of the regiment arose from the need to defend private property during the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion (2008:8). Sons of landed gentry (those with something at stake in the prevailing socio-economic order) were recruited to put down the rebellion, and in some ways the soldiers in the regiment today resemble these early recruits – whatever their status at home, as Britons they sit at near to the top of the global world order. Initially deployed as a means to economic ends during the conquest and formation of a 'domestic' British empire prior to the advent of its global equivalent, the Black Watch resumes the role in the 21st century in support of US capitalist imperialism. An instrument of empire for hundreds of years, the ruling elite nevertheless shows no loyalty to the Black Watch.

Economic necessity has long been the factor motivating men to join up: first 'the Highlands were fucked' (30), later 'the pits are fucked' (29). Neoliberal capitalism's erosion of the individual's property or livelihood is a recurring motif in Iraq War plays, from the loss of the family farm in Lichenstein's *Negative Pull of Gravity* to the closure of the docks in Wilson's *Ten Tiny Toes*. The pomp and pride of the uniform and tradition have been used to get 'the cannon fodder hammering down the recruitment office doors' (32). A soldier's complicity in imperialism is revealed to be less by conscious decision than via the imperative of an empty stomach, or in today's consumerist society the emptiness of not owning things (Baudrillard, 1998).

As stated above, a collective of soldiers cannot easily oppose power. Though a tight-knit group, the soldiers' solidarity is founded on a common enemy and the desire to fight for each other (72). The queen and country rhetoric of government – and much of the press – is exposed as a palatable veneer. In reality, the soldiers are trapped; subject to the existential imperative to kill or be killed. Their powerlessness is highlighted by Stewarty's arc: suffering from PTSD after his first deployment, he seeks medical help only for the army to 'conveniently' lose his paperwork. He is deployed a second time, afterwards suffering depression and rage; at one point almost breaking the Reporter's arm over a perceived slight. The play does feature one genuine figure of resistance in Cammy, however. As an individual, he voices concerns about the nature of the war to a journalist:

> CAMMY: It's a buzz, you're in a war ay, but you're no really doing the job you're trained for but it's no like they're a massive threat tay you or tay your country, you're no defending your country. We're invading their country and fucking their day up. (38)

Observing an artillery bombardment of an Iraqi city, he goes on to say that 'this isnay fucking fighting. This is just plain old-fashioned bullying like' (40). Deployed in a hostile environment where the soldiers are constantly mortared, Cammy nevertheless has no choice but to perform his duties. Ultimately, his only recourse is to leave the army, refusing to be complicit in future deployments.

The powerlessness of soldiers in war plays is something I have wrestled with in *Quicksand*. Cammy's arc reflects decisions that I had to make in my own life and has informed the development of Si in *Quicksand* – the character whose trajectory most closely resembles my own. The challenge was to overcome the soldier's – and my

own, further problematising a character that is to a certain extent autobiographical –

lack of agency. Burke gives Cammy a breadth of historical knowledge and an

oppositional political consciousness that is decidedly non-realistic, allowing Cammy

to transcend this powerlessness. In *Quicksand*, however, Si only gains this level of

insight much later on.

Ten Tiny Toes

Esther Wilson's *Ten Tiny Toes* takes a more domestic approach to the wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan than the plays previously discussed, and does so without

sentimentalising its characters or material. Centred on mothers' experience of war,

the play follows several families who have sons deployed on combat operations or

who have been killed in action. Like *Black Watch*, the play is impeccably researched;

the playwright having spent time with and interviewed mothers of service personnel

and protest group Military Families Against the War (Wilson, 2008). Resistance is at

the heart of the play, as one by one, mothers speak out on behalf of sons who, as

soldiers, are unable to speak out for themselves.

Maya is the only mother who has already lost her son at the beginning of the play. It

is revealed that he died not in Iraq, but in his garage. Interrupting the Remembrance

Sunday service at the Cenotaph, Maya asks why 'the soldiers who've been left on

the scrapheap […] all the homeless ones, drunk in the gutter' are not remembered

(37). When she draws the attention of the media, she recounts a harrowing incident

that contributed to her son's PTSD and eventual suicide:

> MAYA: The second tour of Iraq finished my lad off. (*Beat*). You could see it
> in… (*Beat*). He had this puzzled look on his face… every time I saw him, it

seemed to get worse. (*She breaks*). He'd given sweets to a little girl playing in the street, and the next day he saw her body hanging from a tree… An Iraqi policeman told him not to give out any more sweets to the kids. […] I knew he needed help, but you don't ask for that sort of help in the army. The only thing he could do was get out. (38)

The cruel irony being, of course, that unlike for Cammy, getting out was not enough for Maya's son. Maya is arrested several times during the play for reading out the names of fallen soldiers outside Westminster, eventually being convicted under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (71) in a clear reference to the civil rights infringements that the Iraq War precipitated. Undaunted, Maya continues to protest, research, and agitate for an end to the war, attracting others to her cause and gaining attention. What begins as individual dissent ends as a small collective grouped together around a common interest, resolved to stand up to power.

Contrasting versions of military service are put forward by two military mothers, Lucy and Mrs Weston, who are associated with the same regiment. Mrs Weston, the wife of the Commanding Officer, upbraids Lucy for protesting against the war with Maya's group; demonstrating a patriotic loyalty anchored in the days of empire and representative of majority public opinion once the war was underway (24). There is a clear undercurrent of class struggle in the play represented by the two women's perspectives: Weston's son is an officer from a prestigious military family, who according to Lucy will 'never be in any real danger' (25), while Lucy's son was picked up from the dole queue by recruiters and drafted into the infantry. Patriotic duty and material necessity clash, the former upholding the state's use of the military and the latter challenging it. Throughout the play, Lucy asks difficult questions about the lack of equipment, absence of WMDs, and the war as oil-grab (25-6). Despite her own

son being killed, Mrs Weston remains inert, quietly grieving, within the military structure; watching her husband put on his elaborate uniform, clutching the last letter she received from her son.

The largest family in the play begins as a unit and is steadily torn apart by Iraq. Eldest son Michael is already serving, and is dismayed when his younger brother Chris wants to join up. As with the class commentary in Lucy's argument, there are subtle references to consumer capitalism in the play; Chris is stuck working as a doorman at an upmarket boutique, 'standing in a doorway watching shoppers… shop! Buying things I could never afford' (17). Their mother Gill sits at home plugged into the constant stream of media coverage, finding out about the incident in which Chris is killed from the television. When she joins Maya's group, Gill damages her relationship with Michael and her husband Mike but like the other mothers she does not give up.

The way the mothers come together, making use of the internet and broadcast media, is reminiscent of Hardt and Negri's multitude. And yet Military Families Against the War are not against war *per se*. Rather, they want soldiers to be remembered, treated properly and not thrust into 'unjust' wars like Iraq. While their resistance is admirable and in many ways a positive example, it is not quite the same as shrugging off the imperial mind-set or trying to bring politicians to account. Neither do their actions initiate change: bringing us back to the question of agency in the neoliberal age. But what is interesting about Wilson's play is its emotional force and uncompromising attitude, a potent mix of tenderness and rage that engages in a very human way designed to spur audience members into reviewing their stance on

the war. It is a prime example of choosing an appropriate perspective, character or story that demonstrates how the dominant discourses can be challenged in politically restrictive times. While Wilson's resistors initially act alone they become a collective, and this too was useful in thinking about how to redraft my own play *Quicksand*. Having overseen the fragmentation of the group in the Iraq scenes, *Ten Tiny Toes* encouraged me to think about bringing them back together in 2013.

Quicksand

The play that would become *Quicksand* began with a simple scenario, one that I thought could say something about the Iraq War very directly. It was also a scenario through which I had lived. In January 2003, as the debate and opposition to the war intensified in the UK, troops from 1 Armoured Division were deployed to Kuwait to join a huge US force already in place. For all the arguments over the dossier and government memos, which have been spun ad nauseam ever since, this one incontrovertible truth stands out: whole armoured divisions would not have been deployed to the Iraqi border, long before parliamentary assent, if war was not certain.[89]

With the 10th anniversary of the invasion approaching, an opportunity arose to revisit this tawdry period of British history. In October 2012 I approached York Theatre Royal and the play, still unwritten, was programmed for their TakeOver Festival 2013 to premiere ten years to the day since the invasion. Although I wanted to link the

---

[89] To put this expenditure of resources in context, throughout 2002 my unit, 7 Armoured Division, had been exercising in Germany (where we were permanently based). But due to a restriction on 'track miles', the distance these ageing armoured vehicles could be moved, we would simulate manoeuvres by driving a few metres away from our current position to the 'new' location.

build-up to war to the wider neoliberal context, in particular the financial crisis and period of austerity that ensued, the play as performed was set solely in the desert during 2003. In hindsight, it was rushed in order to take advantage of the production opportunity and approaching anniversary. The play as submitted here revisits the characters ten years later, juxtaposing the two time periods to improve the dramatic arc of the story and craft a stronger critique of neoliberalism; allowing the characters to change and (some of them) to push back against the tide of history upon which they have been carried.

As has been observed of soldiers in other war plays, there is always a degree of complicity according to the purposes of military intervention. In Iraq this was particularly problematic given the dubious legality of the war and highly questionable aims of the Bush administration, as became increasingly clear with time. But in *Quicksand*, the characters have been deployed to Kuwait in early 2003 for one obvious reason but with very little concrete information, their presence there in stark contradiction to the noises issuing from politicians back home. Any hope of resistance, then, is contingent upon first finding out 'what the fuck is going on' (4). The decision to structure the play according to a hierarchy of knowledge whereby the audience, in theory, know everything and the characters know nothing reflects the importance of who knew what and when in assigning responsibility to the circumvention of democratic process.[90] In real life, instances of conscientious objection during the Iraq war emerged a few years into the conflict, once damning information had been revealed.[91]

---

[90] Although many details of the play concerning troop movements – exactly when they were deployed and so forth – surprised the audience.
[91] Barring one instance related to Northern Ireland, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were the first to which professional British soldiers conscientiously objected since the 1920s. Flight Lieutenant Malcolm Kendall-Smith

The journey of the characters in the Iraq plot-line from ignorance to knowledge mirrors the public's journey in 2003. Dramatic irony plays an important part in the play's political rationale; the audience's superior perspective intended to uncomfortably remind them of their own deception at the hands of the Blair government and right-wing press. In the first scene, Si arrives in country several weeks after the others. Having experienced more of the public debate about the war, he alone questions their presence in the desert. Throughout the desert scenes Si refuses to accept the inevitability of conflict, with Cat beginning to only when, as her daughter falls ill, her priorities change. Youngy, like most soldiers in my experience, is completely uninterested in rationale and is keen to fight. Magic, as a leader, feels obligated to toe the line. Conflict in the play arises when the engagement they have been sent to perform fails to occur – the void of inaction created by prolonged, low-intensity war preparations being filled in part by Si's unwelcome prevarications on the legitimacy and likelihood of war. Unlike most war plays, the survival imperative – fighting for your life, for your mates – is absent from the first 'act' of *Quicksand,* and the characters' solidarity disintegrates into acrimonious individualism as the act progresses. It is not until 2015, long after they have returned home, that we recognise that they have been fighting a different kind of war – a political and social (one might even say class) war.

---

refused to undertake a third tour of Iraq, stating that the War was illegal. He was sentenced to eight months imprisonment and discharged. Royal Navy rating Michael Lyons objected to service in Afghanistan on grounds of civilian deaths following Wikileaks revelations and was refused, being sentenced to seven months in prison. Numerous other incidences were dealt with internally; the military seemingly preferring to reassign or discharge COs to prevent negative publicity. SAS trooper Ben Griffin, for example, also objected to the legality of the Iraq War, but unlike Kendall-Smith was discharged with a glowing recommendation (Deakin, 2014).

In the desert the characters' problem – of having no enemy to fight – is the allegorical equivalent of the neoliberal age as well as a symbol of the WMDs that would fail to materialise. After the collapse of socialism and the sterilisation of discourse to erase talk of class or ideology, capitalist realism is the remainder. As John McGrath has noted of the Establishment, 'the more powerful [it] grows, the more invisible it becomes' (1990:12). Stuck in the desert, the soldiers have few resources with which to assess the situation; it is only much later that some of them come to terms with their experiences. The audience's privileged perspective in the Iraq scenes disappears in 2015: like the characters, they too are living through uncertain and precarious times.

When we re-join them in 2015, Si has attempted to arm himself with knowledge through education, assuming that to understand will allow him to oppose the neoliberal imperialism that led to Iraq. But Youngy's trajectory of redundancy, poverty, criminality and imprisonment provokes an alternative concept of opposition driven by a dangerous nationalism. Exposed to the fluctuations of the labour market, he identifies immigrants rather than free trade as his enemy, and Si's education proves impotent in changing Youngy's mind.

Cat, forced into dependence on the state after her accident, gains insight into her predicament the hard way. By reconciling with Magic and effectively rescuing him from his nihilistic, materialistic worldview, she recognises that protection from events lies in being able to repair the bonds between them – restoring a collective capable of supporting each other through crisis, rather than competing as individuals.

On reflection I would say that *Quicksand* has proved the most difficult of the three plays to write. The problem, which I would eventually recognise as a common one when researching First World War playwrights, has been dramatising personal experiences in a way that epitomises the subject of the play, transforming one soldier's story into a more authoritative account of the Iraq War. Unlike the Great War, where a large proportion of playwrights were war veterans, as far as I am aware I am the only playwright-veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Several plays have involved veterans as performers or consultants: *The Two Worlds of Charlie F* (2013) by Owen Sheers used the testimony of wounded soldiers, some of whom performed in the play, and *Surrender* (2008), a US immersive theatre production, involved an ex-soldier in the devising process and performance. But the ambition of these plays is not oppositional, rather summed up in a review of *Surrender,* which 'laudably encourages empathy for our troops but doesn't try to explain just why we are in Iraq and Afghanistan' (Webster, 2008). These plays either struggle or do not attempt to transcend personal experience, doing little if anything to contest Western involvement in these wars.

In the first iteration of *Quicksand*, my aim was to challenge the politics of the Iraq War, but I too struggled to represent much beyond what it was like to be waiting in the desert. I was proud, nevertheless, of being able to offer a different representation to the too-often poignant, heroic, patriotic depictions of soldiering on stage and screen – the pressures of fidelity pushing my writing towards ultra-mimetic realism[92] – and numerous audience members, particularly those with military experience or

---

[92] I insisted on attention to detail in production: the actors had the right uniforms and equipment, and they were put through chemical warfare drills in rehearsal. Perhaps to the detriment of theatricality, character and plot were in keeping with the taciturnity of professional soldiers and historical events; in a note on the first version of the script, Damien Cruden, artistic director of York Theatre Royal, pointed out the absence of 'big moments' and universal resonance in the play.

vivid memories of the build-up to the war, responded warmly to this aspect of the production. There was clearly an emotional and political core in the production that resonated with people. But the intention to challenge the neoliberal politics that underpinned the conflict and setbacks of the following decade was underdeveloped. As written, the play shoehorned this political ambition in through a tableaux-monologue final scene which did not work dramatically. While the characters remained in an apolitical, liminal space they lacked agency; I would need to take them back into the public realm in order to develop more active arcs.[93]

Wilson achieves this in *Ten Tiny Toes* very directly by siting many scenes outside the Houses of Parliament as the mothers exercise their democratic right to protest. The open structure and fluid performance style of *Black Watch* allows Burke to contextualise Iraq against a long tradition of exploiting economic depression to recruit young working-class men to serve on the front lines of British imperialism. But the single location and mimetic mode in *Quicksand* restricted my ability to write more universally. In the second version I therefore opened up the structure and brought the characters back into a public space. Their trajectories since Iraq bring together more universal aspects of the conflict that are shaping our society: the privatisation of function is represented by Magic's job as a security contractor; the neoliberal individualist mantra that dictates that the disadvantaged must work harder to better themselves affects Cat, whose war pension no longer protects her from austerity. When Youngy, likewise, falls between the cracks in society, there is no safety net there to catch him. Si's dilemma emerges when, frustrated with his lack of

---

[93] Following Hannah Arendt, the public realm is the only site of free political action; a space where individuals can be seen and heard (1958:50). The soldier, particularly on operations, is too far removed from the public realm to have political freedom.

knowledge in the desert, he seeks agency through education, realising the fragility of knowledge when pitted against dominant public discourses controlled by a powerful corporate media. In uniting the characters, however, I created the possibility of repairing the collective that had disintegrated in Iraq: as the storylines developed, the interdependence of the characters on one another shifted my focus away from a sustained protagonist (originally Si) in favour of an ensemble or multi-protagonist play.

While the second version of *Quicksand* is stronger than the first, I am only partially satisfied with the end result. Attempting to establish links between the Iraq War, capitalist crisis and austerity politics was always going to be difficult in a limited-budget four-hander.[94] While character arcs provide a clear trajectory and go some way towards making these overarching connections, I wonder if an uninformed audience would recognise these links. Given that credible resistance was at the heart of my ambition for *Quicksand*, the play was proving difficult to resolve and I partially attribute this to the prevailing political context, which offers no easy solutions to those who oppose neoliberal hegemony. The vote to leave the European Union, in fact, was riddled with the sort of nationalistic, xenophobic politics that Youngy is seduced by in the play – but while Brexit can be seen as a reaction to the growing inequality resulting from over thirty years of neoliberalism, it is far from a viable alternative.

In subsequent drafts, the final image (now the end of scene ten) was full of danger: the angry polarisation of Si and Youngy seemingly irreconcilable. Magic and Cat,

---

[94] The initial production was crowdfunded and performed in a small space, these factors necessitating economical writing.

whose relationship appears to be healing, are trapped between them. Cat is physically damaged but strong, whereas Magic's injuries are psychological and we can only hope his panic attack will at least lead to recognition of his problems. For me, there is hope in their reconciliation; by looking after each other, rather than turning on each other, they reject the neoliberal interpretation of society as essentially individualistic. They will be able to resist more forcefully together than alone. But as in *The Ends,* this interpretation is a subtle one given the weakened state of collective resistance today. Ultimately, the political realities of these characters demanded a less optimistic – realistic, you might say – outcome than I would have liked. In this regard my creative quest in *Quicksand* has ended similarly to many of the playwrights whose work I have explored in this thesis: Churchill's in *Mad Forest*, where the dance in the final scene is riven with ominous tensions, or Burke's in *Black Watch*, where Stewarty is traumatised, several characters are dead and Cammy's sole option is to leave.

In the final draft I eventually settled on a different final scene, instead showing the moment in Iraq when Cat reveals that Magic is Amy's father shortly before her accident. The emotional impact of the moment, and the symmetry of juxtaposing it with the renewal of their relationship in the present, invests the audience more completely in the characters' future; a future which is not so far removed from the audiences own but recalls a more hopeful time.

Chapter Five

Resistance to the First World War

The First World War needs little introduction. Its tropes and themes are well known to most Britons, courtesy of a century of cultural production and historical analysis (Wilson, 2013). It is a substantial subject on most school history curriculums, and its literature – particularly the war poetry of writers like Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen – contains arguably some of the nation's best known works. But as numerous critics have pointed out, at its centenary the general perception of the First World War remains narrowly focussed on the Western Front, trench warfare and industrial-scale loss of life. If the War was a consequence of competing imperialisms, there is still an imperial blindness detectable in the wider scope of the War and its aftermath (Kosok, 2007:17; Furedi, 2014; Gerwarth and Manela, 2014; Morrow, 2014). Campaigns in the Middle East and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the remnants from which modern-day Iraq was hastily formed under British rule in 1920, are just some aspects of the First World War that are relatively unknown in the UK today, despite its far-reaching repercussions throughout the 20th century and to this day.[95] Furthermore, as is evident in a 2014 article written by then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, there has been a concerted revisionist attempt to downplay the 'lions led by donkeys' narrative in favour of a narrative of heroism and necessity reminiscent of state and military propaganda in 1914.[96] Hegemony will not

---

[95] The establishment of borders failed to consider the volatile ethnic and sectarian mix of the new state, which would later become a source of major conflict after the 1990 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War. Iraq was a British client-state until its independence in 1932. UK and US support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War enabled the use of chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurds in 1988. The capture of vast quantities of military equipment since the departure of the US from Iraq in 2011 has helped to establish Islamic State and further destabilise the region.

[96] One of Gove's many errors in the article was to describe historian Alan Clark, who popularised the 'lions led by donkeys' narrative and would become a junior minister in successive Thatcher governments, as a left-wing

be complete, it seems, until not only the present but the past has been cleansed of discourses which contest neoliberal and imperial worldviews. In this context, the First World War becomes an ideological battleground that must be contested.

If, as discussed in the Introduction, Britain at the close of the 19th century suffered from imperial myopia – more pronounced in the centre than abroad – the First World War served to bring imperial oppression to home soil. The characterisation of Germany as greedy and unscrupulous invader, a threat to poor Belgium, France, and ultimately Britain itself, one imagines, would aptly describe Britain from the perspective of its many colonies. Although recognition of the similarities between Germany's actions and our own is, even now, far from universally accepted, numerous political organisations circa 1914 approximated this worldview.[97] In particular, socialist and trades union movements campaigned against a war that sent workers from one country to kill workers from another on behalf of the industrial capitalists who stood to profit. Pacifism featured in socialist discourse as a result, as well as in the doctrine of several religious sects such as Quakers. The women's suffrage movement campaigned against the War, arguing that a stabilising female influence to counteract male war-mongering was necessary (Kosok, 2007:37).[98] In party politics, the Labour party and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) initially opposed the war, only the latter continuing to do so after the War began.

---

academic. It is without irony that Gove can apparently label all those who fought 'conscious believers in king and country, committed to defending the western liberal order' (Shipman, 2014).

[97] Although their sympathies were often limited to other European nations, anti-imperial sentiment was hamstrung by an inherent racism.

[98] Tensions within the suffrage movement arose once the war had begun. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst advised women to support the war effort (even becoming prominent in 'white feathering'), while Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst resisted it; the schism within the family mirrored the greater divide across the movement (see Purvis, 2002).

As Frank Furedi has argued, it was only after the War that politics hardened into the Left and Right divisions that characterised the 20th century, these early movements having gone on to influence politics in the present day. It is Furedi's thesis, in fact, that despite vast change, the political and social conditions that fostered the Great War remain essentially the same (2014:1). Certainly, the 2015 General Election campaign was dominated by issues that dominated the 1910s: namely nationalism, inequality, and (arguments for and against) market capitalism; allusions I make in the third of my plays, *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*.

Opposition to the First World War, then, reacted to provocations that are recognisable today and throughout the 20th century. Radical political collectives featured strongly, although were always outnumbered by much larger establishment collectives such as the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party, and most of all the dominance of public patriotism fed by popular perceptions of the British Empire. Individual acts of defiance were highly visible, in particular Conscientious Objectors (COs) who were often one of a very small number of men in their local area who took this course of action, and not necessarily known to or affiliated with one another in any event. The situation was comparable to the neoliberal era in that a nationalist realism, in place of today's capitalist realism, was pervasive and incredibly difficult to challenge. It differs, however, in the relative solidarity and political consciousness that existed in the labour movement and other radical organisations.

The First World War on stage

In contrast to the famous poetry of the First World War and a solid sub-genre of bestselling novels, the drama of the period is less well-known. Heinz Kosok has

done a great service to this neglected strand of Great War literature in his comprehensive study of war plays written during or about the conflict. Kosok has uncovered over 200 plays (although many more have undoubtedly been lost) ranging from main stage favourites by famous playwrights to amateur plays, some no more than jingoistic recruitment pieces, through light entertainment, pro and anti-war propaganda, gritty realism and objective discursives (2007:2-4). Sixty of these were written during the War itself. Of the anti-war plays, the majority were short amateur efforts – a consequence of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship and the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 (174).[99]

There was also an implicit (self-)censorship from within theatre itself. Compare the fortunes of two Noel Coward plays written 1930-1, *Post-Mortem* and *Cavalcade*: the first, a true anti-war play, was rejected by the commercial theatre and was first performed by PoWs in a Nazi work camp in 1942 and not professionally until 1968; the latter, much more conservative in its message, ran for over 400 performances in the West End (Kosok, 2007:179). Kosok's scholarship provides evidence that R.C. Sherriff's 1929 play *Journey's End* (2000), the best-known Great War drama (often misinterpreted as anti-war), was far from representative of the people who lived through the War. A robust, radical theatrical subculture, largely erased from the official theatrical and wider histories, questioned the dominant perception of the war as necessary and good, and this 'group' included famous as well as lesser-known playwrights.

---

[99] In an interesting insight into censorship between the wars, Steve Nicholson points out that the Lord Chamberlain 'regularly intervened to silence overt criticism of the Nazis, or depictions of Hitler and other German leaders' between 1933 and 1939 (2015).

There was, of course, considerable support for the War, and many of Britain's most respected playwrights wrote patriotic material they would sometimes come to regret[100] as perceptions of the War hardened in the following decades (Kosok, 2007:6). Invariably it was a nationalistic, imperial outlook that underpinned their most regrettable works. Several writers altered their stance as the War progressed, including Shaw. As Field highlights, Shaw, perhaps somewhat flippantly, ventured that in the case of competing imperialisms one may as well support the British one; his support for the Boer War an earlier indication of this attitude (1991:142-46).[101] And yet his 1915 short play *O'Flaherty V.C.* shows Shaw quite capable of viewing the imperial centre from the periphery – in this case from a decorated Irish war hero, who provides a dose of reality to the English officer who is surprised that the Irish are not fighting for love of king and country. Kosok argues that of all the plays written during the War, only Shaw's 1919 play *Heartbreak House* 'seems to have grasped the serious issues that must have overshadowed everybody's lives on the home front' (2007:31).

Of the plays written after the Great War, Sherriff's *Journey's End* and Theatre Workshop's 1963 play *Oh What a Lovely War!* (in Rawlinson, 2014) are the best known and both have done much to define the War in retrospect, documenting changing attitudes in the process. As mentioned above, Sherriff has stated that there is nothing in the play that is anti-war but many readers and play-goers have interpreted it as such since. Joan Littlewood, likewise, is reported to have shied away from difficult material – a gas attack scene, for example – in order to give the

---

[100] J.M. Barrie's *Der Tag* (1914) is a notable example; it was excluded from his collected works.
[101] Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1905) too posits a martial worldview indicative of the time: the characters concluding, ironically, that poverty is the true enemy, and if the industrial manufacture of arms for future wars can eradicate poverty, then it should be pursued.

audience a good night out, conceiving the play as a social history rather than an anti-war piece (Rawlinson, 2014:27-8). But audiences were devastated by the play's encroaching brutality, as the jollity of the first act gives way to the destruction of the second; the numbers on the ticker increasingly disturbing (Sweet, 2014). The contrast between receptions of the two plays reveals attitudes towards the War hardening over time.

One of the most interesting aspects of First World War theatre in the context of resistance is the high proportion of playwrights who had fought or served. This number included Sherriff, Hubert Griffith and A.A. Milne, who served as officers, as well as private soldiers Miles Malleson and Patrick MacGill. Somerset Maugham and Cicely Hamilton volunteered for ambulance service, and Gilbert Cannan was a CO (Kosok, 2007:8). Neither was direct involvement limited to soldiers: such was the scale of the war that those at home will have known someone who had served, fought, and perhaps been killed – often somebody close to them. German Zeppelin raids also meant that British civilians were killed on home soil. This resulted in a great deal of semi-biographical playwriting that sought to represent what the War was really like: in 1924 Griffith's *Tunnel Trench* (in Rawlinson, 2014) exposed the War 'as the bureaucratic maximisation of the destruction of life' (Rawlinson, 2014:21) and *Journey's End* is the archetypal officer-class experience of the War; MacGill's 1930 play *Suspense* offers a less poignant, working-class soldier's perspective. As a result of this experience, realism was often the dominant mode of First World War plays, problematised by an individual particularity which often excluded wider critique; as Kosok notes, the characters manning the trenches are rarely aware of the wider context and offer no critique – and, in most cases, neither does the

playwright. Instead, characters see the War as a natural disaster, rather than a 'man-made event that could [...] have been avoided if some degree of sense had prevailed on all sides or if the victims had practised some resistance' (2007:159).

Many of these autobiographical plays are politically neutral, neither supporting the War nor denouncing it – the example of Coward's *Post-Mortem* perhaps indicates the difficulty in challenging generally supportive perceptions of Britain's involvement. Over time, as the First World War has gradually become a historical event for writer and audience, the autobiographical has disappeared but been replaced by the freedom to interpret according to the prevailing context. The First World War history play – Frank McGuinness' *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1986), for example – has often been used to critique more contemporary events – an approach I have taken in *The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins*, where conscientious objection becomes a positive example of resistance in today's less committed political landscape.

The Silver Tassie

Of all the First World War plays that attempted to transcend individual experience and represent the universality of war, Kosok argues that O'Casey's 1928 play *The Silver Tassie* (1965) has been the only play to do this well (2007:25-6). Fusing a heightened realism with expressionist techniques – such as, in Act II, universality of setting and character, distorted causation and logic in dialogue and interaction, and grotesquery – O'Casey's genius lies in eliciting sympathy for certain characters through realism, while achieving universality through these symbolic elements (Kosok, 2007:178). Crafted, according to J.C. Trewin, 'to show the horror of war and

its aftermath', the play was denied production at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and was premiered instead in London (O'Casey, 1965:xi).[102] It is interesting to note that plays critical of the war emerging from or set in the periphery of the British Empire have found production at the imperial centre, while being too challenging to perform on their home stage.

The premise of the play is a neat one, executed with considerable skill and flair. Harry Heegan, three-time winner of the football trophy he christens the Silver Tassie, departs for the War a hero and returns a broken man. Paralysed from the waist down by shellfire, surviving only because his friend Barney pulled him to safety, the war has unmanned him in the eyes of his lover, Jessie, and soured his greatest triumph; at the end of the play, he destroys the trophy, powerless to prevent Barney's seduction of Jessie. His macabre wheeling around after the couple at a club dance signifies the cruel irony of his tragic fall. No character in *The Silver Tassie* is capable of opposing the War, blind as they are to their manipulation by forces beyond their control. It is not without a hint of fury that O'Casey closes Act I with Mrs Heegan's line, as the soldiers board the boat to France, 'thanks be to Christ that we're after managin' to get the three of them away safely' (46). Yet neither does O'Casey particularly portray them as complicit: rather they are portrayed as incapable of comprehending their place in history. The spectator is instead being urged to resist: we identify with Harry, sympathise with his inability to articulate his protest, and do so on his behalf. Like many Great War plays written after the armistice, *The Silver*

---

[102] *The Silver Tassie* shared the same fate as Shaw's *O'Flaherty, V.C.*, the only other Irish First World War play to be set in Ireland. As Kosok notes, it was not until the 1980s that the War ceased to be taboo for Irish playwrights and audiences (2007:56).

Tassie asks us to oppose war as universal injustice; to oppose the coming war, whenever it may be; and the political rationality that makes war inevitable.

Despite the success of *The Silver Tassie*, I am trying not to rely solely upon the playwright's oppositional potential in my own work, instead creating characters that have more political agency than O'Casey's. While the stark depiction of Frank's brutal treatment in *Zeppelins* owes a lot to the power of the empathy O'Casey elicits for Harry Heegan, it was important to me to portray my protagonist's fate from the opposite perspective. Whereas Harry is destroyed by the War having volunteered for service, Frank emerges triumphant from the torture of the punishment camp for refusing service.

Post-Mortem

Noel Coward's *Post-Mortem* (in Rawlinson, 2014) was written on the boat back from Singapore, where Coward, having played Stanhope in a touring production of *Journey's End*, was angry at the attitudes epitomised in the Governor's wife's comment that the play was libellous because none of the soldiers drank alcohol during the War. It was also an attempt to prove that he could dramatise serious subjects (Rawlinson, 2014:22). As mentioned above, this anger proved futile as the play was shunned in its time and Coward quickly returned to lighter work. An early example of disrupted time structure, the play takes place 'simultaneously' on the Western Front in 1917 and various English locations in 1930; the premise being that John Cavan, at the moment of his death, travels through time. What passes in a few moments in 1917 is much longer in 1930, with John feeling as if he is in both places

at once. As he lies dying, he visits his mother, fellow soldier Perry Lomas, his love

interest, and his father.

The dialectic of the play takes place between John and Perry initially – with Perry

being vehemently anti-war, whereas John has faith in progress, in surviving for

something better – before John gradually comes around to Perry's viewpoint, taking

the torch of resistance from him, and attempting to influence the people he visits.

The attitude of the play (and the writer) is summed up in Perry's response to John's

faith that the public will one day understand the War:

> Never, never, never! They'll never know [...] They'll smarm it all over with
> memorials and Rolls of Honour and Angels of Mons and it'll start looking so
> noble and glorious in retrospect that they'll all start itching for another war,
> egged on by dear old gentleman in clubs [...] and newspaper owners and oily
> financiers, and the splendid women of England happy and proud to give their
> sons and husbands and lovers [...] There'll be an outbreak of war literature in
> so many years, everyone will write war books and war plays and everyone will
> read them and see them and be vicariously thrilled by them, until one day
> someone will go too far and say something that's really true and be flung in
> prison for blasphemy, immorality, lese-majesty, unnatural vice, contempt of
> court, and atheism. (144)

Not content with his private thoughts, in 1930 Perry has written a book about the war

that attempts to disabuse the public of all the memorialising that he predicted would

come to pass. His challenge to the perspective of the political and social elite is met

with full force, however. John's father, the owner of a newspaper, has conspired with

his chief propagandist Borrow, the Bishop of Ketchworth, politician Sir Henry

Merstham, and the jingoistic socialite Lady Stagg-Mortimer, to have the book publicly

burned and, if possible, banned. John, convinced of Perry's arguments in the

preceding scene, tries in vain to shake them from their narrow-mindedness.

In the context of the First World War plays' canon, Perry's critique of the War, and those back home who unquestioningly supported it, is rare; soldiers do not tend to speak out while in the trenches, even in plays written during the interwar period when attitudes towards war had hardened considerably. It is also significant that Perry continues his dissent back home, and so publicly. What is at stake, as many anti-war plays of the 1930s attest to, is the genesis of the next war in the failure to confront the causes of the First. The benefit of hindsight convinces us of the prescience of this stance, while in the play John is finally convinced by Perry that if attitudes do not change then further wars are inevitable. *Post-Mortem* is also interesting in that acts of individual resistance, chiefly Perry's outspokenness and radical writings, clearly influence another to act; despite the attack on the book, it has potentially influenced others as well as John. However, these instances of defiance are tempered by the death of both characters, Perry by his own hand and John on the battlefield, while the representatives of the status quo continue unperturbed. In Scene V, in fact, the other characters do not respond to John's words but answer according to their own thoughts. The effect is absurd, a further stylistic device that distinguishes Coward's work from the prevailing realism of his contemporaries.

Despite the failure of John's resistance, the powerful ending of Scene VI is designed to elicit recognition of the validity of his altered perspective: returning to 1917, holding John's body, Perry says 'I think he opened his eyes' (203). *Post-Mortem* was a bold attempt to disrupt the heroic narrative of the First World War, in the hope that the Second could be prevented.

Angels of War

One of a small cluster of female playwrights who challenged the War through positive models of femininity, Muriel Box's 1935 play *Angels of War* (in Tylee *et al*, 1999) features 'resistance from within […] isolated and weak but definitely anti-war' (Tylee *et al*, 1999:113). Following a group of women ambulance drivers in France, the themes of the play include the 'coarsening of women through war experience, looser sexual mores, the rejection of facile patriotism, and the conflict between ordinary drivers and their Commandant' (Tylee *et al*, 1999:113). *Angels of War,* like *Journey's End*, employs a naïve newcomer through which to contrast the myth and reality of war. In terms of tone, however, the play is far removed from the chummy camaraderie of Sherriff's officer class: hailing from a wide array of backgrounds, the characters become equals in hardship on the front line and, underneath the mundane cruelty they inflict upon each other, share a solidarity that can be relied upon in time of greatest need.

The coarseness – one might say the accurate, nuanced portrayal – of the women contrasts with Nobby's fresh-faced innocence upon arrival. She represents the ignorance of the general public, they, the grim understanding of the veteran. Their interaction with her, and with each other, is brutally matter-of-fact:

> NOBBY: That's right. Clarke with an "e".
>
> COCKY: I shouldn't worry about the "e", lass. Ye'll be Nobby to everyone except Commandant.
>
> NOBBY: Nobby!
>
> COCKY: That's right.
>
> NOBBY: But why?

COCKY: Search me. Because Clarkes always are called Nobby – whether they've got an "e" or not – so you'd best get used to it.

NOBBY: (*in a forlorn voice*) It doesn't sound very pretty.

COCKY: Nothing's very pretty out here. (115)

Yet when parcels arrive, they trade and share what they have. Throughout the play, favours and the few home comforts the drivers can muster highlight the bond between them. Despite their quarrels and fractiousness, the enemy is not one another nor the Germans, but their superior the Commandant; a common trope in First World War drama. The hierarchy is aligned with the ruling class when the Commandant presents the drivers to a visiting dignitary, who has come to see with her own eyes 'Britain's brave daughters […] who are bringing honour and glory to the name of English womanhood by their gallant service'. She professes to be with them in the 'spirit which has built our glorious Empire and inspired our men to sacrifice their lives for its protection' (120). The women dismiss such nationalistic rhetoric instinctively, instead speaking of fear and squalor:

MOANER: Brave! And I'm sick with fear every time I take out my bus!

VIC: I know. Terrified at every pot-hole in case you shake up some poor devil inside with his legs half off.

COCKY: Ploughing through blinding snow –

SALOME: Or a bombing raid on a moonlight night –

SKINNY: Noble work!

JO: Cleaning lavatories!

MOANER: Swilling out your ambulance – blood and filth, till you vomit at the sight of the muck. (120-21)

This outspokenness is unusual in First World War plays, where soldiers and those back home are often depicted as staying positive whatever they suffer, and it is interesting to observe how even veteran-playwrights with anti-war worldviews rarely express their views fully through their characters.

The collective grows stronger as their situation becomes more serious. By Act II, Nobby has changed beyond recognition to become more cynical than any of her comrades. Clearly traumatised, she turns her back on them and has to be brought back into the fold by Vic, who reminds her that there is a code that binds them together. When Cocky is killed after having swapped shifts with Moaner, recriminations threatening to tear the collective apart, the women eventually close ranks in a 'Spartacus' moment, covering for each other in front of the Commandant. Contemplating their return home at war's end, they express defiance towards any return to the pre-war status quo*:* 'they sent us to do men's work and we've done it. When we get back, I'm hanged if I'll be fobbed off with a nursery maid's job' (138). The play, then, functions as the formation and articulation of a collective resistance to the conditions in which the War became inevitable. Opposition will start in earnest once they return home, with history recording the political successes of the suffragist movement in gaining the vote and the first Labour government; but the failure to prevent the resurgence of nationalism, Britain's imperial myopia and the Second World War – the problems that Box, writing in 1935, sought to address. The play's ending represents a glimmer of hope in what would become the most traumatic period in human history, but from which would emerge great social and political change between the 1950s and 1980s.

Friends of Alice Wheeldon

One of the few First World War plays to focus on organised political resistance to the War, Sheila Rowbotham's 1980 production *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* (1986), would not have been possible to stage before the Second World War. Like Peter Whelan, Rowbotham enjoys the freedom granted by historical distance to bring fresh perspectives on the War to light. Though the political material is dense, Kosok praises Rowbotham's commitment to dramatising 'an aspect of the home-front scene which is ignored by the rest of British drama' (2007: 39). There is an aspect of documentary in the composition of many history plays that also appears here, *Alice Wheeldon* attempting to challenge dominant narratives through the telling of an untold 'true story', through which she presents an overview of pacifist politics.

Alice Wheeldon and her daughter Hettie were members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), an organisation that used militant direct action,[103] although the Wheeldon's are not recorded as partaking. But, like other radical groups, the hysteria that surrounded the women's movement tarred all its associates with the same brush. They were also active in the ILP and the broader socialist movement in Derby prior to the War. Once hostilities broke out, Derby became 'the centre of clandestine opposition to the war of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP)' and experienced an influx of agitators from across the country. The Glaswegian union men who appear in the play visited Derby as well as other towns, playing a similar role to Communist cadres, providing support to local groups and forming networks of resistance (not to mention evading the authorities). The Wheeldons were members

---

[103] Rowbotham records the burning down of churches, bomb scares and indoctrination of school girls as supposed suffragist acts – and that just in the Derby area (1986:6).

of the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and supported incarcerated COs, but also took part in covert operations by sheltering war resistors (1986:11). Leftist schisms abounded during this period, notably the Pankhurst feud and the tension between the Labour party and the ILP. Whatever differences of political opinion existed between Left organisations before the War, to support it was to cross a line in the sand. The Wheeldons were clearly aligned with Sylvia Pankhurst and those groups who refused to be overcome by war hysteria.

Friends of Alice Wheeldon documents a broad alliance of working-class collectives rooted in socialism and feminism. Rowbotham's exposure of these misrepresented and little known movements is in itself an act of resistance, seeking to revise dominant perceptions and recent ideologically-motivated revisionism of the War – something I have attempted to do in *Zeppelins* by shedding light on the experience of COs and those who supported them. The play itself is densely plotted and fact-heavy, but the story is remarkable: Alice and her wider family are targeted by agent provocateurs of the British government, who indict her in a fabricated plot to kill Prime Minister David Lloyd George, for which she is imprisoned.

Within the play is a sustained analysis of resistance: after being 'deported' from Glasgow by police for his involvement in the Clyde Workers Committee, Arthur reveals the precarious position of resistors faced with the full power of the establishment:

> ARTHUR: It doesna' matter. Your sense of strategy and theory. It all falls away. I felt like a wee boy in my bed at home. And the bobbies – they looked enormous. When they come for you, you're just a wee boy in your bed. Sticky

>wi' fear […] Alone in the night, I just wanted to say, why me? It's nae right. It's not fair. I havna' done something bad. I'm just Mac. (151-52)

Crucially, despite setbacks the characters do not give up. Arthur is pulled through his darkest moment by John: 'you lost a skirmish. So you retreat […] and plan the next attack from a better position' (152). The socialist theory Arthur has acquired cannot dissipate his fear, but the support of the collective can.

Arthur's resolve is firm when he later argues with Hettie about the importance of the collective, advocating the workers' power in numbers as crucial to resistance, as opposed to the peace pamphleteering of the ILP (162). His response to his deportation and the fragmentation of the Committee is to travel the country, establishing a network of shop stewards that will be more resilient. In truth, Hettie and Alice's defiance is equally important; the shelter they offer men like Arthur allows them to carry on their vital work. When Arthur is lauding trade-unionism, Hettie is quick to remind him that it is not just skilled labourers who can fight, but all workers, and especially that women possess vast untapped potential (161).

In 1917 Alice was imprisoned. Fifty years old, she was put on the same hard-labour regime as the Irish rebel Constance Markiewicz (whom she briefly met while in prison), in appalling conditions. She went on hunger strike several times and was finally released early in 1918, but incarceration had ruined her health and she died soon after. The final scene of the play is a graveside eulogy, attended by the other characters – and though this image is a tragic one, the collective remains intact. Though Alice paid a high price for her convictions, her imprisonment did not escape public attention. Ramsey MacDonald seized upon the use of agents provocateurs in

parliament, and the case spread unease among workers, with the *Manchester Guardian* accusing the government of fomenting labour unrest during wartime (Rowbotham, 1986: 77-8). *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* is a rare example of political playwriting that presents strong resistors who remain defiant to the end, and whose actions were effective – strongly advocating choosing the right historical moment to reflect upon resistance in the playwright's own time and proof that such a strategy can lead to positive figures of resistance on stage.

The Accrington Pals

Peter Whelan's 1981 play *The Accrington Pals* (in Rawlinson, 2014) is one of the best-known First World War plays of the late 20th century. It has recently seen a spate of revivals to mark the Great War centenary, including at Colchester Theatre Group (2013), the Royal Exchange (2013), Bridewell Theatre (2014), and Lichfield Garrick (2015). Described by Michael Billington as 'a play that induces a retrospective rage at the tragic waste of so much local pride and patriotism' (2013), it rather defines the still dominant attitudes towards the War, which tend to focus on the tragic body count on the Western Front with a poignancy that insulates us from a more visceral interpretation.[104] But the play is more nuanced than one might expect of a story whose background is, as is stated in the play notes, the raising and destruction of a battalion recruited solely from one small Lancashire town (Rawlinson, 2014:31).

---

[104] To mark the centenary of the War, the installation Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red installed 888,246 ceramic poppies around the Tower of London's moat. Each represented one British military fatality during the War. Prime Minister David Cameron called for its run to be extended, whereas it was savaged by *Guardian* art critic Jonathan Jones as aestheticising the horror of war, prompting the *Daily Mail* headline: 'Why DO the Left despise patriotism?' (Brown, 2014).

The action takes place at home, however, prior to and after the enlistment of Tom, Reggie and Arthur. Accrington suffered from chronic unemployment, and the women who remain attempt to continue without them. The play contains several complex characters who at times are complicit with the War despite their criticism of it. May, who owns a stall selling fruit and vegetables, is fiercely individual; a trait which renders her seemingly incapable of admitting her true feelings for Tom. She speaks out against the war and attempts to get Tom un-enlisted, but we sense from self-interest more than anything else: the war has interfered with her plans to buy a shop and taken away her assistant. Later, she delights in the economic activity the war has stimulated:

> MAY   While I was out I looked at a shop or two… the ones I've fancied taking on, you know. And suddenly it all seems more possible. I never believed the war would make a difference like this. There's money around. The mills are back […] and there's shops that fell empty in the hard times you could have for really low rents. (333)

She wants the war to go on, not long enough to take Tom and Ralph but long enough 'so's I can afford the stock' (333). Her complicity in the war is further influenced by her desire to be independent from men: she mentions gendered pay inequality (335), and later on she invites Eva to become a partner in her business rather than an employee (362). But however valid May's feminism may be, her independence relies on the War. She is effectively caught between her repressed desire for Tom and her independence, between the benefits the war confers on her and the danger he faces.

Tom is described as a socialist, at one point vaunting the army as a model of cooperation. He rants at the capitalist owners who refuse to cooperate: 'this war has

got them worried. They're cornered. It can't be carried on without the free exchange, d'you see? Skills have to be taught. It's all out in the open' (356). But this aspect of his character seems ill-judged, even allowing for purposeful inconsistency of character; soldiers are paid and learn skills relevant to warfare, so which skills is he referring to? How is the exchange free? Many socialists, in fact, refused to fight on the grounds that they would not kill other workers for the sake of capitalists.

Ultimately, it is Tom's death – he appears in an uncanny scene at the end of the play, a walking corpse – that forces May's opposition to harden. When CSM Rivers entreats her to tell him he died a hero, she replies that he died a slave, alone (391). The cruel irony of Tom's misguided beliefs is reflected in his description of his death at the hands of an enemy – 'we exchanged our skills. No money was involved…' – prompts May to tell him that if he had not lived like a slave, he would not have died like one (391). In a time when the collective was poisoned by nationalism and rosy perceptions of Empire, May's actions suggest that the only sensible response is individualism; to resist is to go it alone. Whelan's examination of resistance in troubled times is an interesting one, perhaps influenced by Thatcher's political counter-revolution during the 1980s, and explores the same tension that many later playwrights have come to address concerning the efficacy of individual struggle set against the individualism that drives capitalist consumerism. Although it is worth noting, as has been described above, that numerous radical political organisations (such as the IPL or the NCF) existed during the First World War. Nevertheless, Whelan's inclusion of elements in his history play that critique the 1980s socio-political landscape has influenced my own work and the nuanced characterisation of *The Accrington Pals* was also useful in developing my own characters in *Zeppelins.*

By imagining the full complexity of the period without losing the benefit of hindsight, Whelan imbues the characters with a vitality that is instrumental in the audience's active engagement with the play's themes. As described below, my creative process was oriented to achieving this same complex vitality.

The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins

The Uncivilised Warfare of Zeppelins was conceived as a First World War play in order to coincide with the centenary of the conflict. As described in the account of Michael Gove's interventions on the centenary above, there remains an attempt to perpetuate or revert back to perceptions of the War as a necessary conflict, and my choice of subject matter was partly motivated by a desire to challenge this perception. There are similarities between the First World War and the Iraq War in this justification of necessity, and I became interested in a strategy playwrights have often used to critique their contemporary political situation, whereby historical material is represented in a way that challenges dominant accounts of the period as well as critiquing the present. *Zeppelins* is a history play and extensive use of archival sources was undertaken in its creation, but drawing thematic parallels to our own time is an important function of the narrative.

During the research phase, similarities between the political conditions of 1914 and 2014 quickly began to stand out; particularly the rhetoric of the Cameron government, which chimed with the xenophobic, 'strivers versus shirkers' rhetoric prior to and during the Great War. It also became clear that conscientious objection was a widely but only superficially understood aspect of our history. Although broadly pacifist plays have been written and performed since the War broke out, as

mentioned above, conscientious objection has not been a prominent narrative in First World War drama despite its suitability for critiquing the conflict – another aspect of the War which attracted me to it. This is particularly the case when considering conscientious objection or pacifism as a political act, which it was for socialist COs. Before the armistice, pacifist plays would have been censored and the playwright possibly imprisoned; but even after that time few anti-war plays dealt with COs directly. Heinz Kosok identifies two dominant approaches to pacifist drama, the first being directed at the causes of the War and the second at its consequences (2007: 174). More acceptable, seemingly, is the critique or pathos of the returning veteran: John Cavan's tardy protest in *Post-Mortem* or Harry Heegan's tragic fall in *The Silver Tassie*. In terms of resistance, these characters share the complicity of the volunteer soldier, however the playwright has chosen to represent their accountability. Additionally, their tragic status is designed to elicit audience sympathy, usually requiring them to be killed or injured. But my ambition was to write characters whose resistance is live or ongoing, and COs are a rare example of political commitment that has been vindicated by history.[105] The result is a stage trick: convincing the audience that characters who are long dead are living out their lives before them, creating the illusion of active opposition. History plays often allow the playwright to engage an audience in themes that would be off-putting if too contemporary, creating distance to provoke comparisons between then and now – allowing political points to be made subtly without resorting to dramatising an edition of *The Guardian. Zeppelins,* I hope, is a play that has things to say about nationalism in the 21st century as well as the First World War and its causes.

---

[105] As evidenced by *Angels of War*, the historical approach can backfire; Box's optimism that another war would be prevented was very quickly undermined by events. Though, presumably, Box would have maintained that the effort to resist the Second World War was the right thing to do.

There is a wealth of primary sources on individual COs in archives at the University of Leeds's Brotherton library. Some, like the memoirs of Howard Marten, are extremely detailed. Most, like those of York railwayman William Varley, consist of a few letters, photos, and official documents; mere fragments of a life. To write about Varley would require extensive invention around the few known facts, drawing upon the commonalities of the CO experience. Another option was to dramatise Marten's memoirs. Fraser Grace has written several plays about real people in addition to *Who Killed Mr Drum?* and his advice has been useful in developing *Zeppelins*. Asked about his approach to writing real people, Grace responded:

> You try to be accurate and not wildly misrepresent people or their views, but most of all, I try to make sure that what I produce is a genuine drama; the real, living character and their dilemmas have to be explored in a genuinely dramatic way, a way that provokes us to question our assumptions about them without doling out simple judgements. (Turney, 2011)

In consideration of Grace's advice, I decided to create composite characters. This approach would give me the flexibility to invent in the service of the drama – without wildly misrepresenting the collective experience of COs – that would be somewhat constricted in the representation of a real individual.

This quickly felt like the right decision. The first draft was overly long, plotting each stage of Frank's incarceration (of which there were many). I felt more confident eliding this journey, cutting entire scenes, because I was not writing about a real

person.[106] The lessons of *Quicksand* stood me in good stead here, giving me the confidence to push beyond personal experience to craft a compelling narrative. The composite characters, unbound by the particularity of individual lives, I think achieve a universality I'd struggled to find in my previous plays. Frank's journey is representative not just of himself, but of the psychology of opposition; it not only documents one form of protest to a specific event, but explores what it means to resist under extreme duress. In this sense, I hope the play can also say something about resistance today.

The composite approach has helped me to avoid the pitfalls of *Alice Wheeldon,* where Rowbotham's plot has been hamstrung by the density of factual detail. *The Accrington Pals*, where Whelan has imagined situations around a historical event from an alternative perspective rather than dramatising documentary sources directly, is undoubtedly the stronger of the two plays and persuaded me to give greater weight to Regina's journey, which emerged as an interesting and lesser-known aspect of the First World War in early drafts. So compelling was the discovery that my initial plans to create one sustained protagonist in Frank were revised to give equal weight to Regina. In reflection, her journey has provided the most valuable insights into writing figures of resistance because her protest is less clearly motivated than Frank's, and more intriguing as a result. Regina always has the option of escape: to go back to relying on her father, or to renounce Frank, making her decision to stand firm a bolder declaration of her commitment in some ways. Despite her early belief that only Frank, as a man, can oppose the War by objecting,

---

[106] The play is somewhat sensitive as it is based upon several York COs and the political scene at the time. During a reading of *Zeppelins* at a York Festival of Ideas event, among the extremely knowledgeable audience was the author of several local history books that I had used as sources. I was extremely anxious about having misrepresented or got my facts wrong. Fortunately, the audience was very supportive of the play; although several members delivered comprehensive mini-lectures on certain details.

she has realised by the end of the play that her resistance can take a different form. Regina's battle is to live independently of men as a woman in her own right.

The other significant challenge in writing *Zeppelins* – an aspect of my playwriting which has been slow to develop, but which I feel has done so here – is crafting strong emotional connections with the audience. The pathos of Harry Heegan's downfall in *The Silver Tassie* is the key to its success as an anti-war play; the expressionistic scenes alone are not capable of eliciting an emotional response. Returning to the quotation from Grace, above, it is essential to find the emotional centre of your characters, the living character, and this is no different for historical ones. Fully inhabiting the mind of individuals who lived one hundred years ago, imagining their desires and dilemmas, is arguably harder than doing so for contemporary characters who inhabit the same world as the playwright and the audience. Making this task more challenging still is avoiding the trap of reifying commonly held assumptions about the historical period and its people through poor characterisation.

Besides archival research, character development was undertaken through structured improvisations with actors and directors. I was invited to workshop the play at Whitestone Arts Research Centre in West Yorkshire by playwright Jonathan Hall, a friend whose advice and support have been invaluable. Over three days, the assembled company of three writers, nine actors and three directors developed full scenes from basic dramatic scenarios. Initially, writers provided character backstories and some dramatic context for the actors and directors to improvise around, followed by discussions and questions. The writers used the product of

these improvisations to develop structured improvisations with a list of dramatic

beats that the actors could focus their creativity on, finding out what worked and

what didn't, testing the material and gaining deeper insights into the characters'

psychology. It was during these sessions that Regina's story began to stand out as

the more interesting narrative, as the company explored her role in Frank's decision

to object:

> **Regina**   You've got to stand up for what you believe in, Frank. Even if it means prison.
>
> **Frank**   I know. But part of me thinks it's pointless. What am I going to change by getting locked up? There's a dozen men round here who might do the same, that's it. A lot of those Quakers are going to take partial. They're supposed to be the true believers.
>
> **Regina**   But you will change things. It's all anybody can do, stand up for what they believe in. Say no.
>
> **Frank**   What if we just go?
>
> **Regina**   What do you mean? Go where?
>
> **Frank**   Somewhere else. America. Canada.
>
> **Regina**   You want us to run away?
>
> **Frank**   It's not running away. It's for us. What?
>
> **Regina**   I don't know. It seems almost… cowardly.
>
> *Beat.*
>
> **Frank**   What do you mean cowardly?
>
> **Regina**   Frank…
>
> **Frank**   I'm cowardly? I'm a coward for wanting to live my life, spend my life with you? (331)

In this moment, Frank's motivation to oppose the war is far from straightforward.

Regina's idealism is perhaps stronger than his own, the dilemma of losing her more

disturbing than imprisonment. For her, there is an almost erotic attraction in making a stand; something, as she points out later, that as a woman she does not have the opportunity to do. But there is also something strangely akin to the hero-worship much of the public lavished upon its soldiers in Regina's stance, which she comes to regret as their situation grows more difficult. The moment expresses thought and emotion in flux, two young people being swept along by events outside of their control. When performed to a small audience on the final day of workshopping, Whitestone founder and playwright Judith Adams praised the emotional depth of the scene and the unorthodox perspectives we'd identified. In staging resistance in embryo, imperfect but firm, I can challenge the re-appropriation of the period by revisionists such as Michael Gove, and refute the simplistic remembrance of events like Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red. I hope that in doing so I can also remind audiences that resistance is possible, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Overall, I feel *Zeppelins* is the most well-rounded of the three plays written for this thesis, reflecting developments in my creative process and insights gained from established playwrights into writing figures of political resistance. Choosing a moment of genuine, transformational resistance (such as conscientious objection or *fanshen*) seems to me an effective strategy whether utilising an individual, collective or documentary model. The solution is imperfect, of course: one of the downsides of writing historically is distancing your aims from your specific political context, negating the play's influence to a certain extent. But neither does the playwright lose the audience by implicating them directly, the historical buffer affording a softer touch. Of all methods and strategies I've explored, the history play seems best-

suited – in the current environment – to positive representations where characters

are not politically neutralised by the end of the play.

Conclusion

Developments in my writing between iterations and across the three plays

A close look at the early plays of most of the playwrights discussed here suggests an alternative meaning for Yeats' line 'the worst are full of passionate intensity' (Ferguson et al, 2005:1196). There is a tendency for those who are politically-engaged to present their views so forcefully as to alienate those they would seek to influence, and playwrights are no exception. Not long after visiting Occupy London, I wrote a play full of long political speeches that would become *The Ends* – a situation that mirrors Howard Brenton's visit to Paris in 1969 and his disastrously-received decision to end a play with a 22-minute long political speech (Megson, 2009:93-4). For some writers this political ardour remained a feature of their work – Terry's speech at the end of Bond's *The Worlds* being a prominent example, or Arden's entire works after 1968 – but a greater number moved into the mainstream, making perceived political 'concessions' to audiences and theatres.

It is notable that both Bond and Arden had exiled themselves (or been exiled) from mainstream theatre by the time of Thatcher's second term. The changed political landscape in Britain today is defined by the neoliberal political economy championed by Thatcher and their role in globalisation, meaning my choices as a political playwright are not those of Brenton or Bond. Many playwrights, such as Ravenhill, Crimp and Kane, have responded to this changed world by radically altering notions of playwriting in the 21st century – abandoning realism and the certainties of grand narratives.

My trajectory across the writing of the three plays presented here is in some ways a return to the approach of Brenton, Edgar and Hare, most obviously the adherence to realism amidst the proliferation of postdramatic forms and a commitment to main stages. Trevor Griffiths chose realism as a form because it was the one most familiar to the mainstream, largely working-class audiences he sought to reach; though British audiences are much changed since Griffiths' time, I also see realism as the most accessible form. Unlike these writers, who worked for many years in a time of greater popular political engagement, I have also made concessions to make my work more accessible to a theatre system that tends to conservatism and lower political engagement generally. The potential reward is to reach a greater audience and contest a public forum that has been sterilised politically.

I have found David Edgar's career especially useful in plotting my own course. *The Ends* is a good example of this influence. The earlier drafts, with their dense layers of anti-capitalist political content and descriptions of ecologically damaging economic practices, share some qualities and problems of reception with the agitprop of Edgar's early writing – namely the potential to alienate audiences, a result of attempting to convey complex political arguments at the expense of theatricality and dramatic depth. Edgar's arguments for 'social realism' – combining dramatic conventions, such as suspense and reversal, with the political content which at the time was usually reserved for agitprop – influenced the final draft of *The Ends*. The finished play combines the original political content (in elided form) with a plot and depth of character that does much more to engage dramatically.

Comparing early drafts of *The Ends* or *Quicksand* to the finished draft of any of the three plays, but especially to the third play *Zeppelins,* is to see a finer balance between political content, emotional impact and dramatic convention. The 'love story' that frames Regina and Frank's resistance to nation and capital is the most obvious example of my change of approach in the scripts, though decisions made with production constraints in mind (economy of cast size primarily) have also shaped the finished plays. Both *The Ends* and *Quicksand* changed significantly between first and final draft, with several drafts in between required to develop emotional depth, refine narrative structure and weave political content into the fabric of the play with more finesse. By contrast, the lessons learned in writing the first two plays and the decision to bring devising with actors into the writing process means *Zeppelins* changed less radically from first to final draft. In this regard (as well as in my estimation), *Zeppelins* is the strongest of the three plays, and best exemplifies my development as a writer and the iterative nature of the project.

Writing figures of political resistance for the British stage

Though this research has evaluated figures of political resistance written by a wide variety of playwrights and in such contrasting political contexts – with many more by necessity omitted – certain conclusions can nevertheless be drawn. Political resistance by its very nature is never easy, nor is the task of creating characters whose political agency survives confrontation with the dominant order. Whatever form of realism playwrights have adopted, confrontations with power test the resilience of individuals or collectives, and frequently overcome it. The realist playwright's commitment to accurate representation according to contemporary understanding of individual psychology and social relations – present even in non-

naturalistic plays such as *Top Girls* – precludes simple or heroic characterisation. The struggles of writers like Churchill and Bartlett to challenge the status quo have been mirrored in my own attempts to create positive figures of political resistance, my understanding of the disparity between artistic intention and written text having developed as a result. Returning to my initial perception of a crisis of political resistance on stage, it is easier to appreciate why radical playwrights such as Churchill do not necessarily reflect their political beliefs in the trajectories of their characters. I should add that my observations do not deny that exposing injustice or eliciting sympathy for victims of injustice are powerful weapons in their own right – but that, in a time of capitalist realism and neoliberal hegemony, positive examples and viable alternatives are sorely needed.

The models of resistance explored all have their own strengths and weaknesses. As already stated, as a 'literary' playwright, strict documentary models do not offer the creative freedom required. The malleability of truth in the current political landscape also undermines the oppositional potency of documentary forms – a situation that has arguably not been helped by Hare and other playwrights' experimentation with fact and fiction in documentary plays.

The individual model of resistance is the one I have adopted in *The Ends* and *Zeppelins* with very different results. Given the weakened state of political collectives in the neoliberal era, the individual seems to be the default choice to explore dissent dramatically. But as critics of neoliberal theory recognise, the individual is not without compromise in a consumerist society riven with discourses that privilege competition among individuals over collective solidarity. To accept the sustained protagonist as

the vehicle of resistance is in many ways to accept the changed rules of the game –
yet playwrights such as Zinnie Harris in *Further than the Furthest Thing*, or Grace
and Stein in *Who Killed Mr Drum?*, have managed to contest right-wing
appropriations of individualism. What these plays have in common, as is the case in
Zeppelins, is the relocation of character and setting to a place outside present-day
Britain. Political engagement and commitment around the time of the First World War
was greater than it is today, as it often is in places where oppression is greater than
it is in Britain (such as Palestine or South Africa). In *The Ends* I remained firmly tied
to the current status quo and I found it much more difficult to craft positive resistors
from the compromised socio-political context of austerity Britain. The networked
multitude that Fierce becomes a part of at the end of the play offers some hope for a
more robust collective political rationality, but as yet the ethereal nature of these
networks have struggled to match the physical resources of the state, including mass
surveillance of digital communications, or the influence of the corporate media.

One of the most challenging realisations that I've had in conducting this research is
that collective resistance is fundamental to effective political change, but that
currently collective power is weak; while I would like to write about strong collectives,
it feels unrealistic to do so at the present time without admitting to the precarious
position of the collective. This difficulty is borne out in the tentative reconciliation at
the end of *Quicksand*; while not without hope for the future, it does not shy away
from the very great challenges that the characters face. The credibility of the
characters as resistors is not as compelling as I hoped it could be, and I feel that this
will continue to be a difficult creative challenge to overcome for political playwrights.

I take encouragement that playwrights like Grace, Harris, and Rowbotham have all represented strong resistors and demonstrated how individuals or collectives can contest power successfully by approaching contemporary politics from an indirect angle. I feel my adoption of this strategy in *Zeppelins* has produced my strongest work so far in terms of my primary creative goal; both Regina and Frank are credible figures of resistance that successfully challenge dominant discourses. Nevertheless, contemporary British theatre remains a highly challenging environment for overtly political playwrights intent on writing about big, serious and contentious subjects. With a majority Conservative government committed to further cuts to arts funding, the pressure on theatres and companies to balance the books by producing work that will sell is greater than it has been since the introduction of public subsidy in the 1950s. Unless the green shoots of alternative politics – evident in support for Jeremy Corbyn, the Green party and the SNP – grow rapidly and inspire a renewed audience appetite for political playwriting, the next five years will be difficult for political theatre.

If such a moment does arrive, I hope to be well placed to populate the stage with characters who will have the courage and resilience to speak truth to power.

Bibliography

Adam, Karla. (2011). Occupy Wall Street protests go global. *The Washington Post.* 15 October 2011. Available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/occupy-wall-street-protests-go-global/2011/10/15/gIQAp7kimL_story.html [accessed 26 November 2014]

Adiseshiah, Sian. (2009). *Churchill's Socialism.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Adorno, Theodor. (2001). *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass culture.* London: Routledge.

Angelaki, Vicky. (2012). *The Plays of Martin Crimp.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ansorge, Peter. (1999). Really a Golden Age? In Edgar, ed. *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting.* London: Faber and Faber, pp 37-47.

Archibald, David. (2008). 'We're just big bullies…': Gregory Burke's Black Watch. *The Drouth.* Available at http://issuu.com/drouth/docs/blackwatch_d_archibald_26 [accessed 4 April 2015]

Arden, John. (2002). *Plays: 1.* London: Methuen.

Arendt, Hannah. (1958). *The Human Condition.* London: University of Chicago Press.

Arnett, George. (2014). Elitism in Britain – breakdown by profession. *The Guardian.* 28 August 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/aug/28/elitism-in-britain-breakdown-by-profession [accessed 30 October 2014]

The Arts Council of Great Britain (1970). *The Theatre Today in England and Wales: The Report of the Arts Council Theatre Inquiry 1970.* London: Arts Council Great Britain.

Arts Council England. (2010). *Achieving Great Art for Everyone.* Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/achieving_great_art_for_everyone.pdf [Accessed 9 June 2012]

Arts Council England. (2011a). National portfolio key facts and figures.

Arts Council England. (2011b). *The Arts Council Plan 2011-15.* Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Arts_Council_Plan_2011-15.pdf [accessed 10 June 2012]

Arts Council England. (2011c). Theatre and the New Portfolio. Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/portfolio_summaries/theatre_final.pdf [accessed 2 June 2012]

Arts Council England. (2012a). *Arts Council Stakeholder Focus Research April 2012.* Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/ace_stakeholder_focus_report2012_final.pdf [accessed 11 June 2012]

Arts Council England. (2012b). Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/browse-regularly-funded-organisations/npo/slung-low/ [accessed 11 December 2012]

Arts Council England. (2014). Our Investment 2015-16. Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment-2015-18/ [accessed 8 May 2014]

Ball, James. (2015). Osborne plans cuts of £30bn – but how can he squeeze welfare any further? *The Guardian*. 19 March 2015.

Barker, Howard. (1989). *Arguments for a Theatre*. London: Riverrun Press.

Barker, Howard. (2006). *Plays One*. London: Oberon.

Bartlett, Mike. (2010). *Earthquakes in London*. London: Methuen.

Bartlett, Mike. (2011). *13*. London: Methuen.

Barton, Laura. (2011). Why I love Jez Butterworth's Jerusalem. *The Guardian*. 25 October 2011. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2011/oct/25/why-i-love-butterworths-jerusalem [accessed 21 November 2014]

Baudrillard, Jean. (1998). *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*: London: Sage.

Bauman, Zygmunt et al. (2014) After Snowden: Rethinking the Impact of Surveillance. *International Political Sociology*, doi: 10.1111/ips.12048

BBC. (2003). 'Million' march against Iraq War. 16 February 2003. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2765041.stm [accessed 22 May 2015]

BBC. (2003a). Blair wins war backing amid revolt. 19 March 2003.

BBC. (2006). Victory for anti-war protesters. 13 December 2006. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/gloucestershire/6174801.stm [accessed 3 June 2015]

BBC. (2012). 2011 Census: 45% of Londoners white British. 11 December 2012. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-20680565 [accessed 12 April 2015]

BBC. (2014). Economy tracker – inflation. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10612209 [accessed 8 May 2014]

BBC. (2014a). Ministers want to change trespass law to boost fracking. 22 April 2014. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-27110655 [accessed 14 November 2014]

BBC. (2014b). Hong Kong protests – dozens arrested as sites demolished. 26 November 2014. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-30204699 [accessed 26 November 2014]

BBC. (2014c). Poland 'helped in CIA rendition', European Court rules. 24 July 2014. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28460628 [accessed 31 March 2015]

BBC. (2014d). Mark Duggan death: timeline of events. 8 January 2014. Available athttp://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14842416 [accessed 31 March 2015]

BBC. (2014e). Doreen Lawrence says sections of police 'still racist'. 24 February 2015. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26321708 [accessed 31 March 2015]

BBC. (2015). Election 2015 Results. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results [accessed 22 May 2015]

Bean, Richard . (2009). *Plays Three*. London: Oberon.

Bean, Richard . (2013). *Plays Four*. London: Oberon.

Bell, Suzanne, (2013). Interview with the author, 22 February, Manchester.

Bhattacharya, Shaoni. (2014). Pentagon warns the US military of climate change. *New Scientist*. 14 October 2014. Available at http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn26379-pentagon-warns-the-us-military-of-climate-change.html#.VGnAVPmsWSo [accessed 14 October 2014]

Bhatia, Nandi. (1999). Anger, Nostalgia, and the End of Empire: John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. Modern Drama 42:3. 22 September 1999, p391.

Bhatti, Gurpreet Kaur. (2004). *Behzti (Dishonour)*. London: Oberon.

Big Brum. (2016). About Big Brum. Available at http://www.bigbrum.org.uk/bigbrum.html [accessed 1 June 2016].

Billingham, Michael. (2013). *Edward Bond: a critical study*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Billington, Michael. (2007). *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*. London: Faber and Faber.

Billington, Michael. (2011). Greenland – review. *The Guardian*. 2 February 2011. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/feb/02/greenland-review [accessed 12 January 2015]

Billington, Michael. (2012). V is for verbatim theatre. *The Guardian*. 8 May 2012. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/may/08/michael-billington-verbatim-theatre [accessed 18 November 2014]

Billington, Michael. (2012a). Ten Billion – review. *The Guardian*. 19 July 2012. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jul/19/ten-billion-review-royal-court [accessed 21 November 2014]

Billington, Michael. (2013). The Accrington Pals – review. *The Guardian*. 22 January 2013. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jan/22/the-accrington-pals-review [accessed 15 July 2015]

Billington, Michael. (2014). 2071 five-star review – urgent call for the greatest collective action in history. *The Guardian*. 7 November 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/nov/07/2071-review-urgent-call-history-royal-court-theatre [accessed 21 November 2014]

Billington, Michael. (2014a). Speaking truth to power – this is the rebirth of political theatre. *The Guardian*. 7 November 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/07/rebirth-political-theatre-society-stage [accessed 30 March 2015]

Boal, Augusto. (2008). *Theatre of the Oppressed.* Pluto Press. Retrieved 14 July 2016, from <http://www.myilibrary.com?ID=200610>

Bond, Edward. (1992). *Plays Four.* London: Methuen.

Bond, Edward. (1996). *Plays Five.* London: Methuen.

Bond, Edward. (1997). *Eleven Vests / Tuesday.* London: Methuen.

Bond, Edward. (2006). *Lear.* London: Methuen.

Bond, Edward. (2009). *Saved.* London: Methuen.

Bond Edward. (2011). *Plays Nine.* London: Methuen.

Bond, Edward. (2014). *At the Inland Sea.* London: Bloomsbury.

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1998). The Essence of Neoliberalism. *Le Monde Diplomatique.* Available at http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu [accessed 19 March 2014]

Brace, Adam. (2009). *Stovepipe.* London: Faber and Faber.

Bratton, J.S., Richard Allen Cave, Breanden Gregory, Heidi J. Holder and Michael Pickering. (1991). *Acts of Supremacy: the British Empire and the Stage 1790-1930.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Brecht, Bertolt. (1976). *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui.* Translated by Ralph Manheim. London: Eyre Methuen.

Brecht, Bertolt. (1980). *Mother Courage and her Children.* Translated by John Willett. London: Methuen.

Brecht, Bertolt. (2001). *Brecht on theatre: the development of an aesthetic.* Translated and edited by John Willett. London: Methuen.

Brecht, Bertolt. (2001a). *Life of Galileo.* Translated by John Willett. London: Methuen.

Brenton, Howard. (1972).Interview in *Plays and Players.* February 1972.

Brombert, Victor. (1999). *In Praise Of Antiheroes : Figures And Themes In Modern European Literature.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

British Theatre Consortium. (2009). Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003-2009. Arts Council England. Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/publications/writ_large.pdf [accessed 07 April 2013]

Brown, Mark. (2011).Tricycle theatre chief blames arts cuts as he stands down after 27 years. *The Guardian.* 4 July 2011. http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/jul/04/artistic-director-nicolas-kent-quits-tricycle-theatre [Accessed 19 June 2012]

Brown, Mark. (2012). Arts organisations and museums face further funding cuts of £11.6m. *The Guardian.* 10 December 2012. Available at

http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/dec/10/arts-museums-libraries-funding-cuts [accessed 11 December 2012]

Brown, Mark. (2014). Blood-swept lands: the story behind the Tower of London poppies tribute. *The Guardian*. 28 December 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/28/blood-swept-lands-story-behind-tower-of-london-poppies-first-world-war-memorial [accessed 15 July 2015]

Brown, Wendy. (2006). American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-democritization *Political Theory*, 34:6.

Buffini, Moira, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner, Jack Thorne. (2011). *Greenland*. London: Faber and Faber.

Burke, Gregory. (2001). *Gagarin Way*. London: Faber and Faber.

Burke, Gregory. (2007). *Black Watch*. London: Faber and Faber.

Butler, Judith. (2004). *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

Butler, Judith. (2009). Performativity, Precarity, and Sexual Politics. *AIBR*, 4:3. Availabe at http://www.aibr.org/antropologia/04v03/criticos/040301b.pdf [accessed 14 November 2014]

Butterworth, Jez. (2009). *Jerusalem*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Cathcart, Michael. (2012). Richard Bean and The Heretic. *Radio National*. 1 May 2012. Available at http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandartsdaily/richard-bean-and-the-heretic/3981790#transcript [accessed 12 January 2015]

Cavendish, Dominic. (2010). Jerusalem: why no fuss about this radical play? *The Telegraph*. 23 February 2010. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/7265867/Jerusalem-why-no-fuss-about-this-radical-play.html [accessed 21 November 2014]

Cavendish, Dominic. (2012). Ten Billion, Royal Court Upstairs, review. *The Telegraph*. 19 July 2012. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/9412339/Ten-Billion-Royal-Court-Upstairs-review.html [accessed 21 November 2014]

Cavendish, Mark. Beyond The Front Line at the Lowry Centre, Salford, review. *The Guardian* 9 October 2009. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/6283384/Beyond-The-Front-Line-at-the-Lowry-Centre-Salford-review.html [accessed 11 December 2012]

Centre for Disease Control. (2013). Mental Health Basics. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/basics.htm [accessed 23 April 2014]

Chand, Kailash. (2014). The NHS is on the brink of extinction – we need to shout about it. *The Guardian* 8 January 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2014/jan/08/nhs-extinct-government-policy-privatisation [accessed 3 February 2014]

Chin, Christine B. and James H Mittelman. (2000). Conceptualizing Resistance to Globalization. In *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance*. Edited by Barry K. Gills. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp 29-45.

Chu, Ben. (2016). Think you know why people actually voted for Brexit? Think again. *The Independent*. 17 July 2016.

Churchill, Caryl. (1960). 'Not Ordinary, Not Safe: A Direction for Drama?' *The Twentieth Century*, vol. 168, no. 1005 (November): 443-51.

Churchill, Caryl. (1985). *Plays:1*. London: Methuen.

Churchill, Caryl. (1990). *Plays:2*. London: Methuen.

Churchill, Caryl. (1990a). *Shorts*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Churchill, Caryl. (1998). *Plays:3*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Churchill, Caryl. (2008). *Plays:4*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Churchill, Caryl. (2009). *Seven Jewish Children*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Cochrane, Claire. (2011). *Twentieth Century British Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohn, Ruby. (1991). *Retreats from Realism in recent English drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cooper, Chris. (2005). Edward Bond and the Big Brum plays. In Davis, *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child*. Stoke: Trentham Books.

Corrie, Rachel, Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner. (2005). *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. London: Nick Hern.

Coult, Tony. (2005). Building the common future: Edward Bond and the rhythms of learning. In Davis, *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child*. Stoke: Trentham Books.

Crimp, Martin. (2000). *The Country*. London: Faber and Faber.

Crimp, Martin. (2004). *Cruel and Tender*. London: Faber and Faber.

Crimp, Martin. (2007). *Attempts on Her Life*. London: Faber and Faber.

Da Costa, Dia. (2010). Subjects of Struggle: theatre as space of political economy. *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 31, No. 4, 2010, pp 617–635.

Danchev, Alex and John MacMillan, eds. (2005). *The Iraq War and Democratic Politics*. London: Routledge.

Darlison, Neil. Arts Council England: We are not encouraging 'safe' theatremaking. *The Guardian*. 01 March 2012. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2012/mar/01/arts-council-england-safe-theatremaking [Accessed 12 June 2012]

Dathan, Matt. (2015). Budget 2015: Where's the money coming from, George? *The Independent*. 19 March 2015. Available at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/budget-2015-wheres-the-money-coming-from-george-10118830.html [accessed 27 March 2015]

Davenport, Carol. (2014). In climate deal with China, Obama may set 2016 theme. *New York Times*. 12 November 2014. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/13/world/asia/in-climate-deal-with-china-obama-may-set-theme-for-2016.html?_r=0 [accessed 12 November 2014]

Deakin, Stephen. (2014). Conscientious objection to military service in Britain. In Andrea Ellner, Paul Robinson and David Whetham. *When Soldiers Say No: selective conscientious objection in the modern military*. London: Ashgate.

Dearden, Steve. (2014). Interview with Matthew Midgley, 7 May, York.

Delaney, Sheila. (1982). *A Taste of Honey*. London: Methuen.

Department of Culture, Media and Sport. DCMS confirms new board members. 20 January 2011. Available at http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/media_releases/7728.aspx [accessed 02 January 2013]

Devine, Harriet. (2006). *Looking Back: Playwrights at the Royal Court 1956-2006*. London: Faber and Faber.

DiCenzo, Maria. (1996). *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: the case of 7:84 (Scotland)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Donn, Rebecca. Royal Court's 2071 splits critics. *Whatsonstage*. 10 November 2014. Available at http://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/2071-round-up_36391.html [accessed 21 November 2014]

Dunton, Emma, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand. (2009). New Writing in Theatre 2003-2008: an assessment of New Writing within smaller scale theatre in England. Arts Council England. Available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/publications/new_writing.pdf [accessed 08 April 2013]

Eagleton, Terry. (1976). *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen.

Easton, Mark. (2013). Why have the white British left London? *BBC*. 20 February 2013. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21511904 [accessed 21 November 2014]

Ebenstein, Alan. (2001). *Friedrich Hayek: A Biography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Economist. (2012). Food and the Arab Spring: Let them eat baklava. 17 March 2012. Available at http://www.economist.com/node/21550328 [accessed 12 January 2015]

Edgar, David. (1987). *Plays: One*. London: Methuen.

Edgar, David. (1988). *The Second Time as Farce*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Edgar, David. (1990). *Plays Two*. London: Methuen.

Edgar, David. (1990). *The Shape of the Table*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Edgar, David. (1992). *Plays: Four*. London: Methuen.

Edgar, David. (1999). Provactive Acts: British Playwriting in the Post-war Era and Beyond. In Edgar, ed. *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting*. London: Faber and Faber, pp 1-34.

Elkins, Caroline. (2004). *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. (2015). Controversial Isis-related play cancelled two weeks before opening night. *The Guardian*. 4 August 2015. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/04/controversial-isis-related-play-cancelled-two-weeks-before-opening-night [accessed 4 August 2015]

Emmott, Stephen. (2013). *10 Billion*. London: Penguin Books.

European Commission. (2013). Climate Change. Special Eurobarometer 409.

European Commission. The Economy of Culture in Europe. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc887_en.pdf [accessed 19 March 2014]

Eyre, Richard and Nicholas Wright. (2001). *Changing Stages: a view of British theatre in the twentieth century*. London: Bloomsbury.

Fanon, Frantz. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Favorini, Attilio. (1995). *Voicings: Ten Plays from the Documentary Theatre*. Hopewell: Ecco.

Fisher, Mark. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* Ropley: Zero Books.

Flood, Alison. (2016). 'Post-truth' named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries. *The Guardian*. 15 November. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries [accessed 4 December 2016]

Florida, Richard. (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.

Freire, Paulo. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Freire, Paulo. (2004). *Pedagogy of Hope*. London: Bloomsbury.

Friedman, Milton. (1962). *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Forsyth, Alison and Chris Megson, eds. (2009). *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Foucault, Michel. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

Fukuyama, Francis. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest*. Summer 1989, pp 3-18.

Furedi, Frank. (2014). *First World War: Still No End in Sight*. London: Bloomsbury.

Gale, Maggie B. and John F. Deeney. (2010). *The Routledge Drama Anthology and Sourcebook*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gardner, Lyn. (2011). Earthquakes in London – review. *The Guardian*. 4 October 2011. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/oct/04/earthquakes-in-london-review [accessed 12 January2015]

Gardner, Lyn. (2015). Diversity is key to creativity – and British theatre's challenge for 2015. *The Guardian*. 6 January 2015. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/jan/06/diversity-creativity-british-theatre-2015 [accessed 12 January2015]

Garnett, Mark. (2007). *From Anger to Apathy: the story of Politics, Society and Popular Culture in Britain since 1975*. London: Vintage.

Gerwarth, Robert, and Erez Manela. (2014). *Empires at War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giddens, Anthony. (2011). *The Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge: Polity.

Goodall, Chris. (2013). Stephen Emmott's book is unscientific and misanthropic. *The Guardian*. 9 July 2013. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jul/09/stephen-emmott-population-book-misanthropic [accessed 21 November 2014]

GOV.UK. (2014). Public want urgent global action to tackle climate change. 24 November 2014. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-want-urgent-global-action-to-tackle-climate-change [accessed 3 January 2015]

Grace, Fraser and Naomi Wallace. (2005). *Two Into War*. London: Oberon.

Grace, Fraser and Sylvester Stein. (2005). *Who Killed Mr Drum?* London: Oberon.

Grace, Fraser. (2005). *Breakfast with Mugabe*. London: Oberon.

Gramsci, Antonio. (1999). *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: selected writings 1916-1935*. Edited by David Forgacs. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Green, Duncan. (2012). *From Poverty to Power*. Rugby: Oxfam.

Griffiths, Trevor. (1986). *Judgement Over the Dead*. London: Verso.

Griffiths, Trevor. (1996). *Plays:1*. London: Faber and Faber.

Griffin, Gabriele. (2006). The Remains of the British Empire: the Plays of Winsome Pinnock. In Luckhurst, ed. *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1800-2005*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gunewardena, Nandini, and Mark Schuller. (2008). *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press.

Gupta, Suman. (2011). *Imagining Iraq*. London: Routledge.

Gupta, Tanika. (2006). *Sugar Mummies*. London: Oberon.

Hall, Stuart. (1988). *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. London: Verso.

Hall, Stuart. (1988a). 'The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists'. In Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Stuart. (2009). The Neo-liberal Revolution. *Cultural Studies*, 25:6, 705-728.

Hammond, Will and Dan Steward. (2008). *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*. London: Oberon.

Hancox, Dan. (2016). Is this the world's most radical mayor? *The Guardian*. 26 May 2016.

Harding, Luke. (2016). Tony Blair unrepentant as Chilcot gives crushing Iraq war verdict. *The Guardian*. 6 July 2016.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. (2000). *Empire*. London: Harvard University Press.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. (2004). *Multitude: war and democracy in the age of Empire*. London: Penguin.

Hare, David. (1975). 'From Portable Theatre to Joint Stock... via Shaftesbury Avenue'. *Theatre Quarterly* 20.

Hare, David. (1976). *Fanshen*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hare, David. (1996). *Plays One*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hare, David. (2004). *Stuff Happens*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hare, David. (2005). *Obedience, Struggle and Revolt*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hare, David. (2008).*The Vertical Hour*. London: Faber and Faber.

Harris, Geraldine. (2006). *Beyond Representation: Television Drama and the Politics and Aesthetics of Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Harris, Zinnie. (2000). *Further than the Furthest Thing*. London: Faber and Faber.

Harvey, David. (2003).*The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, David. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvie, Jen. (2005). *Staging the UK*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Harvie, Jen. (2013). *Fair Play: art, performance and neoliberalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Haydon, Andrew. (2013). Theatre in the 2000s. In Rebellato, ed. *Modern British Playwriting 2000-2009*. London: Methuen.

Hayek, Friedrich A. von. (2005). *The Road to Serfdom*. London: Routledge.

Hemming, Sarah. (2012). Ten Billion, Royal Court Upstairs, London. *The Financial Times*. 20 July 2012. Available at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/46eda448-d193-11e1-bb82-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3K4YPPDss [accessed 21 November 2014]

Hemming, Sarah. (2015). What's next for London's political theatre? *The Financial Times*. 2 January 2015. Available at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7688c36c-89f7-11e4-8daa-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3VreTAO34 [accessed 30 March 2015]

Higgins, Charlotte. Liz Forgan departure from Arts Council met with dismay. *The Guardian*. 23 March 2012. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/mar/23/arts-policy [Accessed 19 June 2012]

Holder, Heidi. J. (1991). Melodrama, realism and empire on the British stage. In J.S. Bratton *et al. Acts of Supremacy: the British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hope, Christopher. (2015). Tony Blair 'could face war crimes charges' over Iraq War. *The Telegraph*. 6 January 2015. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/tony-blair/11328177/Tony-Blair-could-face-war-crimes-charges-over-Iraq-War.html [accessed 22 May 2015]

Howard, Emma. (2015). Keep it in the Ground divestment campaign attracts 200,000 supporters. *The Guardian*. 7 May 2015. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/07/keep-it-in-the-ground-divestment-campaign-attracts-200000-supporters [accessed 14 May 2015]

Howell, Rachel. (2013). 10 Billion by Stephen Emmott. Available at https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/iges/pdf/Book-review-10-Billion.pdf [accessed 21 November 2014]

Hughes, Jenny. (2011). *Performance in a time of terror: Critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

IMDb. (2016). John McGrath. Available at http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0569819/?ref_=ttfc_fc_dr24 [accessed 30 August 2016]

Innes, Christopher. (1972). *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre: the development of modern German drama.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Innes, Christopher. (2002). *Modern British Drama, 1890-1990.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ipsos MORI. (2003). Iraq, the Last Pre-War Polls. Available at https://www.ipsos-mori.com/newsevents/ca/287/Iraq-The-Last-PreWar-Polls.aspx [accessed 22 June 2015].

Ipsos MORI. (2003a). Iraq: Public Support Maintained – The State Of Public Opinion On The War. 8 April 2003. Available at https://www.ipsos-mori.com/newsevents/ca/180/Iraq-Public-Support-Maintained-8212-The-State-Of-Public-Opinion-On-The-War.aspx [accessed 22 June 2015]

Ipsos MORI. (2010). How Britain Voted in 2010. Available at https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2613/How-Britain-Voted-in [accessed 20 February 2015].

Itzin, Catherine. (1980). *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968.* London: Eyre Methuen.

Jameson, Frederic. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* London: Verso.

Jevrejeva, S, J.C. Moore, A. Grinstead, A.P. Mathews, G.Spada. (2014). Trends and acceleration in global and regional sea levels since 1807. *Global and Planetary Change* Volume 113, February 2014: 11-22. Available at http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921818113002750# [accessed 12 January 2015]

Johnson, Karena. (2014). Theatres are not catering for the working class majority. *The Guardian.* 15 Septemebr 2014. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/sep/15/working-class-people-subsidised-theatre [accessed 30 June 2016]

Jürs-Munby, Karen, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, eds. (2013). *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political.* London: Bloomsbury.

Kane, Sarah. (2001). *Complete Plays.* London: Methuen.

Kelleher, Joe. (2009). *Theatre and Politics.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kelly, Dennis. (2012). Why political theatre is a complete fucking waste of time. *Theatertreffen-Blog.* 10 May 2012. Available at http://theatertreffen-blog.de/tt12/2012/05/10/dennis-kelly-opens-the-stuckemarkt/ [accessed 9 December 2014]

Kelly, Owen. (1984). *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels.* London: Comedia.

Kennedy, Fin. (2013). *In Battalions.* Available at https://www.scribd.com/document/126273288/In-Battalions [accessed 5 June 2015]

Kershaw, Baz. (1992). *The Politics of Performance: radical theatre as cultural intervention.* London: Routledge.

Kershaw, Baz. (1999). *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard.* London: Routledge.

Kirk, Ashley and Daniel Dunford. (2016). EU referendum: The claims that won it for Brexit, fact checked. *The Telegraph.* 29 June. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/22/eu-referendum-fact-checking-the-big-claims1/ [accessed 15 October 2016]

Klein, Naomi. (2014). *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate.* London: Penguin.

Klein, Naomi. (2010). *No Logo*. London: Fourth Estate.

Klein, Naomi. (2008). *The Shock Doctrine*. London: Penguin.

Knapton, Sarah. (2015). General election 2015: highest turnout since Tony Blair landslide. *The Telegraph*. 8 May 2015. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11592557/General-election-2015-highest-turnout-since-Tony-Blair-landslide.html [accessed 25 September 2015]

Kornbluh, Peter. (2013). *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*. New York: The New Press.

Kosok, Heinz. (2007). *The Theatre of War: the First World War in British and Irish Drama.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kritzer, Amelia Howe. (2008). *Politcal Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing 1995-2005*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lacey, Stephen. (1995). *British Realist Theatre*. London: Routledge.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy : towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

Lakoff, George. (2010). Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment. *Environmental Communication: a Journal of Nature and Culture* (4:1), 70-81. Available at http://www.uri.edu/sustainability/documents/Lakoff_Why%20it%20matters.pdf [accessed 4 April 2014]

Lamb, Charles. (2005). *The Theatre of Howard Barker*. London: Routledge.

Lambley, Dorrian. (1992). In Search of a Radical Discourse for Theatre. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 8, 34-37. Available at http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0266464X00006291 [accessed 26 March 2014]

Lavery, Bryony. (1998). *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen.

Lawrence, Felicity and Howard Davies. (2015). Revealed: BP's close ties with UK government. *The Guardian*. 20 May 2015. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/20/revealed-bps-close-ties-with-the-uk-government [accessed 21 May 2015]

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. London: Routledge.

Leys, Colin. (2001). *Market-driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest*. London: Verso.

Lichenstein, Jonathan. (2004). *The Pull of Negative Gravity*. London: Nick Hern.

Long, Chris. (2016). Theatre 'needs to be more diverse' say actors. *BBC* 6 June 2016. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-36360093 [accessed 30 June 2016]

Louise, Dany. Forgan forgone: was the chair of Arts Council England a sitting duck? *The Guardian.* 27 March 2012. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/mar/27/forgan-chair-arts-council-step-down [Accessed 9 June 2012]

Luckhurst, Mary. (2008). Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics. In Holdsworth and Luckhurst, eds. *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Luckhurst, Mary. (2015). *Caryl Churchill*. London: Routledge.

MacGill, Patrick. (1930). *Suspense*. Herbert Jenkins.

Marsh, David, Therese O'Toole, and Su Jones. (2007). *Young People and Politics in the UK: apathy or alienation?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Martin, Brett. (2013). *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution*. London: Faber and Faber.

Martin, Tara. (2009). The Beginning of Labor's End? Britain's "Winter of Discontent" and Working-Class Women's Activism. *International Labor and Working-Class History*. No. 75, Spring 2009. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/27673141 [accessed 30 September 2016]

Mason, Paul. (2014). 'Climate of fear' over corporate sponsorship in theatre. Channel 4 News. 29 April 2014. Available at http://blogs.channel4.com/paul-mason-blog/ravenhill-climate-fear-corporate-sponsorship-theatre/759 [accessed 27 May 2015]

Massad, Joseph. (2012). The 'Arab Spring' and other American seasons. *Al Jazeera*. 29 August 2012. Available at http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/08/201282972539153865.html [accessed 7 January 2015]

McDonald-Gibson, Charlotte. (2013). 'Victory for bees' as European Union bans neonicotinoid pesticides blamed for destroying bee population. *The Independent*. 29 April 2013. Available at http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/victory-for-bees-as-european-union-bans-neonicotinoid-pesticides-blamed-for-destroying-bee-population-8595408.html [accessed 14 May 2015].

McDonnell, Bill. (2008). *Theatres of the Troubles: theatre, resistance and liberation in Ireland*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

McDonnell, Bill. (2013). John Arden. In Nicholson, *Modern British Playwriting: the 1960s*. London: Methuen.

McGrath, John. (1981). *A Good Night Out*. London: Eyre Methuen.

McGrath, John. (1981a). *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. London: Eyre Methuen.

McGrath, John. (1990). *The Bone Won't Break: on Theatre and Hope in Hard Times*. London: Methuen.

McSmith, Andy. (2010). *No Such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s*. London: Constable.

McGuinness, Frank. (1986). *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. London: Faber and Faber.

Megson, Chris. (2012). *Modern British Playwriting: the 1970s*. London: Methuen.

Mendick, Robert. (2014). Tony Blair's fortune boosted £13m by 'bumper' year. *The Telegraph*. 4 January 2014. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/tony-blair/10551183/Tony-Blairs-fortune-boosted-13m-by-bumper-year.html [accessed 3 June 2015]

Menger, Pierre-Michel. (2006). Artistic Labor Markets: Contingent Work, Excess Supply and Occupational Risk Management. In Ginsburg and Throsby, eds. *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*. Available at http://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/science/handbooks/15740676/1 [accessed 19 March 2014]

Milling, Jane. (2012). *Modern British Playwriting: the 1980s*. London: Methuen.

Milmo, Cahal. (2014). Al-Sweady inquiry: 'Deliberate lies' - the verdict on claims that British soldiers tortured Iraqi detainees. *The Independent*. 17 December 2014. Available at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/alsweady-inquiry-deliberate-lies-made-on-allegations-of-torture-by-british-soldiers-in-iraq-9931724.html [accessed 3 June 2015]

Mirowski, Phillip and Dieter Plehwe. (2009). *The Road from Mont Pelerin: the making of the neoliberal thought collective*. London: Harvard University Press.

Mittleman, James and Christine Chin. (2000). Conceptualising resistance to globalisation. In James Mittleman. *The Globalisation Syndrome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp 165-178.

Morris, Steven. (2007). First British soldier to be convicted of a war crime is jailed for ill-treatment of Iraqi civilians. *The Guardian*. 1 May 2007. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/may/01/military.iraq [accessed 3 June 2015].

Morrow, John H. (2014). *The Great War: an Imperial History*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Morton, Adam David. (2007). *Unravelling Gramsci*. London: Pluto Press.

NASA. Consensus: 97% of climate scientists agree. Available at http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/ [accessed 14 November 2014]

Nathan, John. (2010). Censorship is back on the British stage. *Prospect*. 19 March 2010. Available at http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/arts-and-books/censorship-is-back-on-the-british-stage [accessed 4 August

National Geographic. Four ways to look at carbon footprints. Available at http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/energy/great-energy-challenge/global-footprints/ [accessed 21 November 2014]

National Theatre. (2015). Current Corporate Partners. Available at
http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/support-us/corporate-partners/current-corporate-partners
[accessed 27 May 2015]

Needham, Alex. (2012). Theatres taking fewer risks as funding dries up, warn playwrights.
The Guardian. 19 February 2012.

Neilson, Anthony. (2007). *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. London: Methuen.

Neslen, Arthur. (2014). EU leaders agree to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030.
The Guardian. 24 October 2014. Available at
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/24/eu-leaders-agree-to-cut-greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-40-by-2030 [accessed 14 November 2014]

Nicholson, Steve. (2013). *Modern British Playwriting: the 1960s.* London: Methuen.

Nicholson, Steve. (2015). Theatre of war: how the monarchy suppressed anti-Nazi drama in
the 1930s. *The Guardian*. 21 July 2015. Available at
http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/21/royal-household-suppressed-anti-nazi-theatre-1930s [accessed 21 July 2015]

Nield, Sophie. (2015). Tahrir Square, EC4M. In Rai and Reinelt, eds. *The Grammar of
Politics and Performance*. London: Routledge.

Norton-Taylor, Richard. (1999). *The Colour of Justice*. London: Oberon.

Norton-Taylor, Richard. (2003). *Justifying War*. London: Oberon.

Norton-Taylor, Richard. (2007). *Called to Account*. London: Oberon.

Norton-Taylor, Richard. (2015). Chilcot inquiry into Iraq war may be delayed beyond 2015.
The Guardian. 21 April 2015. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/apr/21/chilcot-inquiry-iraq-war-delay-2015-newsnight [accessed 22 May 2015]

O'Casey, Sean. (1965). *Three More Plays by Sean O'Casey*. London: Macmillan.

Open Society Justice Initiative. (2013). Globalizing Torture: CIA Secret Detention and
Extraordinary Rendition. Available at
http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/globalizing-torture-cia-secret-detention-and-extraordinary-rendition [accessed 31 March 2015]

Palanisamy, H, A. Cazenave, B. Meyssignac, L. Soudarin, G. Woppelmann, M. Becker.
(2014). Regional sea level variability, total relative sea level rise and its impacts on islands
and coastal zones of Indian Ocean over the last sixty years. *Global and Planetary Change*.
Volume 116, May 2014: 54–67. Available at
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921818113002750 [accessed 12 January
2015]

Passavant, Paul A, and Jodi Dean. (2004). *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*.
London: Routledge.

Patterson, Michael. (2003). *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peacock, A.J. (1993). *York in the Great War 1914-1918*. York: York Settlement Trust.

Peacock, Keith D. (1999). *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties*. London: Greenwood Press.

Peacock, Keith D. (2007). *Changing Performance: Culture and Performance in the British Theatre since 1945*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Pelling, Henry and Alastair J. Reid. (1996). *A Short History of the Labour Party*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Pickett, Kate and Richard Wilkinson. (2009). *The Spirit Level*. London: Penguin.

Piketty, Thomas. (2014). *Capital in the 21st Century.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Placey, Evan. (2014). *Pronoun*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Plunkett, John. Sir Peter Bazalgette: Big Brother man facing a big challenge. *The Guardian*. 11 September 2012. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/sep/11/peter-bazalgette-big-brother-challenge [accessed 12/12/12]

Poore, Benjamin. (2012). *Heritage, Nostalgia and Modern British Theatre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Prebble, Lucy. (2009). *Enron.* London: Methuen.

Price, Tim. (2012). *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning*. London: Methuen.

Prince, Rosa. (2011). Tony Blair went to war without cabinet consent, senior mandarins say. *The Telegraph*. 22 January 2011. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/tony-blair/8281731/Tony-Blair-went-to-war-without-cabinet-consent-senior-mandarins-say.html [accessed 22 May 2015]

Pritchard, Rosalind M.O. (2011). *Neoliberal Developments in Higher Education*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Purvis, June. (2002). *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*. London: Routledge.

Rai, Shirin and Janelle Reinelt. (2015). *The Grammar of Politics and Performance*. London: Routledge.

Rallings, Colin and Michael Thrasher. (2010). The 2010 General Election: aspects of participation and administration. Available at http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/105896/Plymouth-GE2010-report-web.pdf [accessed 20 February 2015].

Ravenhill, Mark. (1997). *Shopping and Fucking*. London: Methuen.

Ravenhill, Mark. (1999). *Some Explicit Polaroids*. London: Methuen.

Ravenhill, Mark. (2008). *Shoot/Get Treasure/ Repeat*. London: Methuen.

Ravenhill, Mark. (2008a). My near death period. *The Guardian*. 26 March 2008. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/mar/26/theatre [accessed 14/11/14]

Rawlinson, Mark, ed. (2014). *First World War Plays*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

Rebellato, Dan. (1999). *1956 and All That: the Making of Modern British Drama*. London: Routledge.

Rebellato, Dan. (2001). Introduction. In Ravenhill, *Plays One*. London: Methuen.

Rebellato, Dan. (2008). From State of the Nation to Globalization. In Holdsworth and Luckhurst, eds. *Contemporary British and Irish Drama*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rebellato, Dan. (2009). *Theatre and Globalization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Red Ladder, 2012. Available at http://www.redladder.co.uk/bm/history/index.shtml [Accessed 19 June 2012]

Rehman, Javaid. (2010). *International Human Rights Law*. Harlow: Longman.

Reinelt, Janelle. (1994). *After Brecht: British Epic Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Reinelt, Janelle. (2006). Toward a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events: In the Case of Stephen Lawrence. *TDR* 50 No. 3, pp 69-87.

Reinelt, Janelle. (2011). The Promise of Documentary. In Forsyth and Megson, eds. *Get Real: documentary theatre past and present*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ridley, Philip. (2010). *Moonfleece*. London: Methuen.

Robinson, Nick. (2013). Economy: There is no alternative (TINA) is back. *BBC*. 7 March 2013. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21703018 [accessed 27 January 2015]

Roundhouse. (2016). History of the Roundhouse, 1960 - 1970: an arts centre emerges. Available at http://www.roundhouse.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-roundhouse/1960-1970-an-arts-centre-emerges/ [accessed 3 September 2016]

Rowbotham, Sheila. (1986). *Friends of Alice Wheeldon*. London: Pluto Press.

Royal Court. (2014). Birdland. Available at http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/birdland [accessed 5 May 2014]

Royal Court. (2015). Corporate Sponsors and Supporters. Available at http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/support-us/our-supporters/corporate-partners/ [accessed 27 May 2015]

Rubinstein, David. (2010). *War Comes to York Summer 1914*. York: Quack Books.

Sahlane, Ahmed. (2013). Metaphor as rhetoric: newspaper Op/Ed debate of the prelude to the 2003 Iraq War. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 10:2, 154-171.

Samuel, Raphael, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove. (1985). *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Saunders, Graham. (2004). Edward Bond and the Celebrity of Exile. *Theatre Research International*, 29:3, 256–266.

Saunders, Graham. (2012). Mark Ravenhill. In Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting; the 1990s*. London: Methuen.

Sengupta, Kim. (2013). Blood money: Uk's £12.3bn arms sales to repressive states. *The Independent*. 17 July 2013. Available at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/blood-money-uks-123bn-arms-sales-to-repressive-states-8711794.html [accessed 22 May 2015]

Sennett, Richard . (1999). *The Corrosion of Character*. London: Norton.

Shaw, George Bernard. (1934). *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw*. London: Odham's Press.

Shaw, George Bernard. (2010). *Back to Methuselah*. The Floating Press.

Sheers, Owen. (2013). *The Two Worlds of Charlie F*. London: Faber and Faber.

Shellard, Dominic. (1999). *British Theatre Since the War*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shellard, Dominic. (2000). *British Theatre in the 1950s*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Sherriff, R.C. (2000). *Journey's End*. London: Penguin.

Shipman, Tim. (2014). Michael Gove blasts 'Blackadder myths' about the First World War spread by television sit-coms and left-wing academics. *The Daily Mail*. 2 January 2014. Available at http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532923/Michael-Gove-blasts-Blackadder-myths-First-World-War-spread-television-sit-coms-left-wing-academics.html [accessed 25 September 2015]

Sholette, Gregory. (2011). *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. London: Pluto Press.

Sierz, Aleks. (2011). *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today*. London: Methuen.

Sierz, Aleks. (2012). *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s*. London: Methuen.

Sierz, Aleks. (2013). *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*. London: Bloomsbury.

Solga, Kim. (2016). *Theatre & Feminism*. London: Palgrave Macmilllan.

Spencer, Jenny S. (1992). *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Slung Low. (2012). Available at http://slunglow.macmate.me/Archive/styled-16/index.html [accessed 11 December 2012]

Smith, Alistair. (2014). Theatre suffer audience slump. *The Stage*. 16 November 2014. Available at http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2012/01/theatres-suffer-audience-slump/ [accessed 18 November 2014]

Smith, Chris. (1998). *Creative Britain*. London: Faber and Faber.

Soans, Robin. (2005). *Talking to Terrorists*. London: Oberon.

Spencer, Charles. (2010). Earthquakes in London, National Theatre, review. *The Telegraph*. 5 August 2010. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/7929004/Earthquakes-in-London-National-Theatre-review.html [accessed 12 January 2015]

Spencer, Charles. (2011). The Heretic, Royal Court, review. *The Telegraph.* 11 February 2011. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8318442/The-Heretic-Royal-Court-review.html [accessed 12 January 2015]

Spencer, Jenny. (1992). *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Spencer, Jenny. (1996). Review: Mainstreaming British Left Theatre. *Contemporary Literature* 37:3, 471-80.

Spencer, Jenny. (1996). Mainstreaming British Left Theatre. *Contemporary Literature*. Vol.37(3), pp.471-80.

Spencer, Jenny. (2012). *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11: Patriotic Dissent*. New York: Routledge.

Stafford-Clark, Max. Regional theatres must take risks too – so why isn't the Arts Council helping? *The Guardian*. 27 February 2012. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2012/feb/27/regional-theatre-arts-council [Accessed 21 June 2012]

The Stage. Arts council cuts have decimated axed companies. 28 March 2012. Available at http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/newsstory.php/35700/exclusive-arts-council-cuts-have-decimated [accessed 8 June 2012]

Steger, Manfred. B. and Ravi K. Roy. (2010). *Neoliberalism: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steinitz, Vicky and Elliot G. Mishler. (2009). Critical Psychology and the Politics of Resistance. In Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin. *Critical Psychology: an Introduction*. Second edition. London: SAGE Publications, pp 391-409.

Stephens, Simon. (2009). *Plays:2*. London: Methuen.

Sweet, Matthew. (2014). Oh, What a Lovely War: Why the battle still rages. *The Telegraph*. 1 February 2014. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/10604911/Oh-What-a-Lovely-War-Why-the-battle-still-rages.html [accessed 15 July 2015]

Syalm, Rajeev, Andrew Alderson and Catherine Milner. (2003). One million march against war. *The Telegraph*. 16 February 2003. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1422228/One-million-march-against-war.html [accessed 22 May 2015]

Szeman, Imre. (2010). Neoliberals Dressed in Black; or, the Traffic in Creativity. *English Studies in Canada* (36:1) Mar 2010, 15-36. Available at

http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:rec:criticism:R4441287 [accessed 05 May 2013]

Tarrow, Sidney. (1998). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, John. (1969). Anger and After: a guide to the New British Drama. London: Methuen.

Taylor, Marcus. (2006). *From Pinochet to the 'third way': neoliberalism and social transformation in Chile.* London: Pluto Press.

Taylor, Paul. (2010). Earthquakes in London, National Theatre. *The Independent.* 6 August 2010. Available at http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/earthquakes-in-london-national-theatre-cottesloe-london-2044606.html [accessed 12 January 2015]

Taylor, Paul. (2011). Greenland, National Theatre. *The Independent.* 2 February 2011. Available at http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/greenland-national-theatre-lyttelton-london-2202512.html [accessed 12 January 2015]

Taylor, Lib. (2007). In Opposition: Hare's response to Thatcherism. In Boon, ed. *Cambridge Companion to David Hare.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 49-63.

Teevan, Colin. (2006). *How Many Miles to Basra?* London: Oberon.

Tempest, Matthew. (2003). Labour MPs revolt over Iraq. *The Guardian.* 26 February 2003. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/feb/26/foreignpolicy.uk2 [accessed 19 August 2015]

Thorpe, Vanessa. (2016). New study exposes 'class ceiling' that deters less privileged actors. *The Guardian.* 27 February 2016.

Timmins, Nicholas. (2011). OECD calls time on trickle-down theory. *Financial Times.* 5 December 2011. Available at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fba05442-1f3e-11e1-ab49-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3W9Ac8K6m [accessed 31March 2015]

The Telegraph. Arts funding cuts in Tweets. 30 March 2011. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/8416248/Arts-funding-cuts-in-tweets.html [accessed 8 June 2012]

The Telegraph. Arts Council to get new chairman. 23 March 2012. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/9162871/Arts-Council-to-get-new-chairman.html [Accessed 19 June 2012]

Thompson, Judith. (2010). *Palace of the End.* London: Oberon.

Thorpe, Andrew. (1997). *A History of the British Labour Party.* Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Thorpe, Vanessa. Newcastle's arts groups face up to a future without public funding. *The Guardian.* 9 December 2012. Available at

http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/dec/09/newcastle-arts-groups-face-funding-cut [accessed 11 December2012]

Tilly, Charles and Lesley J. Wood. (2013). *Social Movements 1768-2012*. London: Paradigm.

Townsend, Mark and Daniel Boffey. (2014). UK condemned over arms sales to repressive states. *The Guardian*. 8 November 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/08/uk-condemned-arms-sales-repressive-states [accessed 22 May 2015]

Timmins, Nicholas. (2011). OECD calls time on trickle-down theory. *Financial Times*. 5 December 2011. Available at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fba05442-1f3e-11e1-ab49-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3j9bc4ZlW [accessed 21 November 2014]

Toynbee, Polly and David Walker. (2010). The Verdict: Did Labour Change Britain? London: Granta.

Toynbee, Polly. (2013). Competition is killing the NHS, for no good reason but ideology. *The Guardian*. 15 November 2013. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/15/competition-killing-nhs-bournemouth-poole [accessed 12 January 2015]

Tremlett, Giles. (2015). The Podemos revolution: how a small group of radical academics changed European politics. *The Guardian*. 31 March 2015. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/31/podemos-revolution-radical-academics-changed-european-politics [accessed 31 March 2015]

Trotta, Daniel. (2013). Iraq war costs US more than $2 trillion: study. *Reuters*. 14 March 2013. Available at http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/14/us-iraq-war-anniversary-idUSBRE92D0PG20130314 [accessed 3 June 2015]

Tucker Green, Debbie. (2005). *Trade and Generations: two plays*. London: Nick Hern.

Turney, Eleanor. (2011). Fraser Grace: Writing history. 10 November 2011. Available at http://www.ideastap.com/ideasmag/the-knowledge/fraser-grace-playwright [accessed 15 February 2014]

Tylee, Claire M, Elaine Turner and Agnes Cardinal, eds. (1999). *War Plays by Women*. London: Routledge.

Tynan, Kenneth. (1957). Theatre and Living. In Maschler, ed. *Declaration*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Van der Heijden, Hein Anton. (2010). *Social movements, public spheres and the European politics of the environment: Green power Europe?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vickery, Jonathan. (2012). *After the creative City - PART SIX*. Available at http://www.labkultur.tv/en/blog/after-creative-city-part-six [accessed 8 June 2012]

Wade, Laura. (2010). *Posh*. London: Oberon.

Warner, Marina. (2014). Diary. *London Review of Books*. 11 September 2014. Available at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n17/marina-warner/diary [accessed 30 March 2015]

Waters, Steve. (2009). *The Contingency Plan*. London: Nick Hern.

Weaver, Matthew. (2015). Chilcot inquiry: soldiers' families threaten legal action over delay. *The Guardian*. 13 August 2015. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/13/chilcot-inquiry-soldiers-families-legal-action-delay [accessed 13 August 2015]

Weber, Max. (2002). *The Protestant ethic and the 'spirit' of capitalism*. London: Penguin.

Webster, Andy. (2008). Shoulder Arms and imagine soldiering. *New York Times*. 5 November 2008. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/05/theater/reviews/05surr.html?_r=0 [accessed 31 July 2015]

Wesker, Arnold. (1960). *The Wesker Trilogy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

West Yorkshire Playhouse. (2013). Background Information. Available at http://www.wyp.org.uk/media/2587637/wyp_background_info_jan_13.pdf [accessed 30 April 2014]

Williams, Raymond. (1977). A lecture on realism. *Screen*. 18 (1): 61-74.

Williams, Roy. (2007). *Days of Significance*. London: Methuen.

Williams, Zoe. (2016). Think the north and the poor caused Brexit? Think again. *The Guardian*. 7 August 2016.

Wilson, Esther. (2008). *Ten Tiny Toes*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Wilson, Ross. (2013). *Cultural Heritage of the Great War in Britain.* Farnham: Ashgate.

Winter, James. (2013). Mandela's Dream of Black Power Became a "Neoliberal Nightmare". *Global Research*. 8 November 2013. Available at http://www.globalresearch.ca/mandelas-dream-of-black-power-became-a-neoliberal-nightmare/5360825 [accessed 12 August 2015]

Wintour, Patrick. (2014). Tories would scrap wind farm subsidies. *The Guardian*. 24 April 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/24/tories-scrap-wind-farm-subsidies [accessed 15 May 2015]

Wintour, Patrick. (2015). Biggest crackdown on trades unions for 30 years launched by Conservatives. *The Guardian*. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jul/15/trade-unions-conservative-offensive-decades-strikes-labour [accessed 25 July 2015]

Wood, Charles. (1999). *Plays Two*. London: Oberon.

Wright, Nicholas. (1999). Warning Shots. In Edgar, ed. *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting*. London: Faber and Faber, pp 104-08.

Writer's Guild of Great Britain. (2012). The Working Playwright: Agreements and Contracts. Available at http://www.writersguild.org.uk/images/stories/wggb-docs/WGGB_booklet_jun12_contracts_i.pdf [accessed 5 May 2014]

Wroe, Nicholas. (2004). *Britain's Brecht*. *The Guardian*, 3 January. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/jan/03/theatre.stage [accessed 1 June 2016]

Wynne, Michael. (2003). Humour me. *The Guardian*. 3 May 2003.

Yudice, George. (2003). *The Expediency of Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Zarilli, Philip B; Grant McConachie, Gary Jay Williams and Antonio Sorgente. (2006). *Theatre Histories: an introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Žižek, Slavoj. (1999). *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso.

Žižek, Slavoj. (2014). Dear Chelsea Manning: birthday messages from Edward Snowden, Terry Gilliam and more. *The Guardian*. 16 December 2014. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/16/-sp-dear-chelsea-manning-birthday-messages-from-edward-snowden-terry-gilliam-and-more [accessed 16 December 2014]