Experimentation Through Witnessing Tragic British Theatre

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses various techniques used by contemporary British playwrights that aim to position the audience as witnesses rather than analysts. The role of the audience has changed drastically since the postdramatic trend encompassed the arts. Playwrights have now begun utilising different techniques, including the role of the witness, traumatised characters, drama-in-the-head, testing the audience, and the death of the author. All these techniques employ different means to accomplish one goal, to involve the audience and give them the responsibility to witness. The contemporary audience is no longer receiving a direct explanation from the play as to what it is. Instead, they must now engage with performances and decipher the playwright's underlying intention.

What does witnessing mean as it relates to contemporary theatre? This is what this dissertation aims to answer. To answer this question, I will provide examples from numerous playwrights that follow these techniques and reflect on ones we see from the 60s onward. This dissertation will be structured into different chapters that provide a deep analysis into how the techniques work. Some playwrights' texts include more than one of these techniques, thus I will discuss some plays more than once. However, they will be discussed in different ways regarding how they utilize these contrasting techniques to include the audience. The historical playwrights that I will include in this dissertation are David Hare, David Edgar, and some of Martin Crimp's work. The contemporary playwrights that use similar styles, but not limited, to the notion of the witness will be debbie tucker green, Caryl Churchill, Ella Hickson, Simon Stephens, David Greig, Anthony Neilson, Sarah Kane, and Jez Butterworth. Many of these contemporary playwrights' plays ask the audience to take on responsibility and either witness, investigate or

become the playwright themselves. Even though these plays may take on different themes and techniques, they all aim to include the audience in the performance process.

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Introduction

Many contrasting techniques have been used throughout theatre history to obtain certain goals. Obviously, these goals are to capture the audience's attention to sell more tickets, however; many theatre makers aim to make a political stance, get the audience thinking about their own morals, or place the audience in the position of a witness. This notion of the witness is one I aim to define and determine what it means as it relates to contemporary theatre. In the early 90s, a shift in techniques emerged. What once was very clear and direct, is now rather vague and requires more dissection from the audience. For example, State of the Nation theatre is a common technique of the 60s through the 70s, which informs the audience of a specific political opinion the playwright holds. State of the Nation theatre is direct and unambiguous about the overall takeaway. Contrasting from State of the Nation is theatre that erupts in the 90s, postmodern theatre. A famous postmodern playwright, Caryl Churchill, includes the audience in a relationship with the message of the performance.

Postmodern plays tend not to be as politically forward and instead become ambiguous. Like other postmodern playwrights, Churchill's work seems to be like a puzzle for the audience to put together throughout their experience. As British theatre became less direct and more obscure, playwrights began to place their audience in the role of the witness. Some performances from playwrights, such as debbie tucker green, take on a political agenda to show the audience the atrocities going on around the world for people of colour, mainly black individuals. The audience takes on the role of the witness by being an active participant in these horrors and being overcome with the responsibility to provide testimony. Similar playwrights whom I will mention in greater detail further in this dissertation are David Greig, Martin Crimp, Sarah Kane, Simon Stephens, and Anthony Neilson. What all these contemporary playwrights have in common is

their changing relationship with the audience. All of these playwrights use unique techniques to incorporate their viewers into their performances. The next section, titled Theoretical and Cultural Context, will provide detailed definitions and a more complex introduction to what the rest of the dissertation will be in reference to.

Theoretical and Cultural Context

Throughout this dissertation, I aim to dissect the unique theatrical styles of Contemporary British theatre. This will first include an analysis of the texts I used to solidify my argument for what all these theatrical styles pertain to. In this section, I will look at the following: State of the Nation, in-yer-face, feminist theatre, death of the author, doomed characters, drama-in-the-head, and offending the audience. In this analysis of the texts I use in my thesis, I will begin by providing background information relating to critical terms. The first half will include the broader context of contemporary theatre, including the information I will utilise. Following this will be detailed theatrical terms that coincide with artistic movement during a specific period. This is where I will provide definitions and particular examples of playtexts and the playwrights who wrote them.

As Graham Saunders calls it, the golden age of political theatre began in the late 60s to early 70s. In *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa*, he describes themes of British theatre from the 70s through to the mid-90s. I utilise much of Saunders' research to give historical context to my overall argument. However, before discussing theatre forms that developed during these times, it is essential to define modernism and Postmodernism. Modernist theatre is an avant-garde time that encompasses several movements that began in the late nineteenth century. According to Catherine Allegretti, modernism 'was the belief that the previously sustaining elements of human life, like religious beliefs, social mores,

and artistic convictions, had been destroyed or proven false or fragile'.[1] I interpret this as modern art forms were formed as a distinct change from societal norms. As Allegretti says, contrasting religion and traditional ways of representing art forms.

Furthermore, in the 60s, postmodernism emerged as a direct response to modernism. Even though modernism pushed the boundaries of traditional art, postmodernism wanted to break free of any constraints that were keeping the arts bound by society's standards. Postmodernism is defined by Rachel K. Fischer and Aimee Graham as a concept in the arts that has a general distrust of grand theories. Postmodern, as a concept-

> -puts forward the unpresent-[...]-able; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable.[2]

Postmodernism relies more on the relationship between play and audience and takes on an anti-realist approach. A notable postmodern play includes *Hamletmachine (1977)* by Heiner Müller. *Hamletmachine* is defined as a postmodern play because it resists any convention of theatre and challenges the audience to think outside the realms of reality. Postmodern theatre is known for including 'fractured language', according to Saunders, which is also a trait of *Hamletmachine*.[3] Nevertheless, many experimental forms of theatre that occurred from the changes that modern

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[1] Catherine Allegretti, 'British Modernism', in *Eastern Connecticut State University*, <https://www.easternct.edu/speichera/understanding-literary-history-all/british-modernism.html> [accessed 8 July 2021].
[2] Rachel K. Fischer and Aimee Graham, 'Postmodernism', *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 54.1 (2014) 29–33, p.29.
[3] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 160.

and postmodern theatre created emerged from the general shift that Margaret Thatcher's regressive policies brought about.

Modern and postmodern techniques emerged before Thatcher's win as Prime Minister on 4 May 1979. The previous Prime Minister, James Callaghan, introduced the economic theory of Monetarism towards the end of his term, thus anticipating Thatcher's economic policies. This government strategy was not popular among theatre-makers due to cuts in government spending. These labour cuts caused theatre companies to go back to an old style of protest play. Examples of this include 'the agitprop-style protest play' performed by 'the touring theatre company Foco Novo's 1977 *Tighten Your Belts* by Jon Chadwick and John Hoyland'.[4] These protests were valid because, in late 1978, Callaghan imposed a one-per cent cut on government public expenses to curb inflation. Private and public trade unions alike protested this, which led to a government pay freeze magnified by one of the coldest winters in sixteen years. This event is what is now called the Winter of Discontent. While Thatcher was running for Prime Minister, she acknowledged the severity of this event while current Prime Minister, Callaghan, denied the chaos he caused. Unemployment reached a forty-year high of one and a half million during Callaghan's term. Thatcher eventually won the vote with the largest swing from Labor to Conservative since 1945. Once Thatcher took office, 'reform of the unions was to be a priority […], although changes were brought in cautiously via two employment acts, in 1980 and 1982, that placed significant curbs on union power'.[5] There was a clear shift in theatre forms once she took office, primarily due to financial cuts to the lower-income creative industries.

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[4] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 3.

[5] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 7.

Political theatre in the 70s was drastically different from what emerged the following decade. Plays tended to be written by white male playwrights instead of by minority voices. This began to change from the mid-1970s and onward, so by the 1980s, more voices were eventually represented. During this transition, what transpired from this male-only authority was a more open-minded approach that ultimately heard from the voices of the elderly, youth, people of colour, women, people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community, which Saunders mentions held a lot of 'underrated strength and power'.[6] This type of community is what Saunders calls *constituency theatre*, which 'specialised in cabaret, performance art, mime, and community work'.[7] Theatre that emerged from these LGBTQ+, Feminist, Black, and Asian companies was seen as a type of mobilisation that represented a group of people that rejected Thatcherism. During the 80s, which Thatcherism dominated, theatre companies in the 80s represented the voices of the LGBTQ+ community and other feminist actors. These performances targeted a specific type of audience outside of the typical working-class crowd. In the 1980s, styles of writing began to move toward a form that later became called postdramatic theatre, which will be defined in the next subsection. This evolution was a part of a general cultural turn toward postmodernity, and later, toward the postdramatic.

The Turn Toward the Audience

[6] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 51.
[7] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 50.

The terms modern and postmodern were defined as separate theatre forms that defied traditional notions of realism. However, postrdramatic is another theatre movement that occurred for similar reasons, to push the boundaries of what live theatre was meant to be. Postdramatic, not to be confused with postmodernism, is a term that was coined in 1999 by Hans-Thies Lehmann, a German theatre scholar, in his book, *Postdramatic Theatre*. Carroll, Jurs-Munby and Giles classify postdramatic as 'absolv[ing] itself of the traditional [...] requirement or expectation that the stage should generate what Elinor Fuchs calls "a fictional world that aligns all dramaturgical elements into a synthetic whole"'.[8] Thus, postdramatic theatre does not intend to create a coherent fictional world for its audience. Instead, it is meant to engage its viewers in active participation. This, I believe is the contrast from postmodern to postdramatic theatre, that postdramatic includes the audience. Regardless, Lehmann's argument for postdramatic theatre is that there is a 'connection between performance's status as "not real" and its latitude for critical distance [...], however [...] it is this distance from reality [...] that allows for a postdramatic "politics of perception"'.[9]

Postdramatic theatre engaged the audience in a way that broke the fourth wall. Actors were meant to be seen as they are, actors. Postdramatic theatre was not meant to be an escape; instead, it is meant to remind the audience that they were watching a performance and not become immersed in the fake world that was created. Lehmann continues to argue that postdramatic theatre is 'dependant on the release of active energies of imagination', and that imagination must not continue to become 'weaker in a civilisation of the primarily passive

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[8] Jerome Carroll, Steven Giles and Karen Jürs-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* (New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 4.
[9] Jerome Carroll, Steven Giles and Karen Jürs-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* (New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 15.

consumption of images and data'.[10] Postdramatic theatre aims to challenge the audience, and since it is meant to remind them that what they are participating in is not "not real" and merely a performance, they must rely on their imagination more since the actors do not do it for them. However, as we arrive towards the 1990s, technology begins finding its way into live theatre, which is what Lehmann argues postdramatic theatre would push against. Technology, when pertaining to creating special effects, is meant to immerse viewers into believing fabricated scenarios are lifelike. Theatre makers aimed to utilise this as well, which is the opposite of postdramatic ideals.

In *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream*, Liz Tomlin argues that theatre in the 1990s began to incorporate new digital technologies in their work. Tomlin discusses how, by the mid-2000s, theatre companies such as Station House Opera 'were [...] seeking to discover how technology might offer progressive political tools for intervention in the globally mediatised landscape'.[11] With digital technology, we can connect from anywhere, and as the world becomes more globalised, theatre explores the possibilities of virtual connection. Utilising technology that makes it possible to connect to other creatives around the globe brings the opposing audiences together. Some theatre companies in the 1990s that experimented with early multimedia technology are Blast Theory and Station House Opera. Blast Theory's first work, *Gunmen Kill Three (1991)* was an early experimental piece that was based on an event where three people were killed in a mobile shop. During the play, there was 'live drumming [and] live wireless video projections'.[12] A later example of technology being used during

[10] Hans-Thies Lehmann, Karen Jürs-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), p. 16.
[11] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: Mind the Gap, Kneehigh Theatre, Suspect Culture, Stan's Cafe, Blast Theory, Punchdrunk* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 106.
[12] Blast Theory, *Gunman Kill Three*, <https://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/gunmen-kill-three/> [accessed 14 September 2021].

performances is Station House Opera's production of *The Other is You (2006)*. They employed live video streaming alongside three performances that were each located in a different city or country. These performances were observed at the same time by three different audiences; thus the audience members could also view each other via the live recording. This mode of performing engaged audiences to expand their realities outside their own and recognise their fellow theatregoers. While the audience witnessed the performance, they were also witnessing the other audience members present through the live recording. This breaking of the fourth wall involved audience members recognising one another instead of giving into egotistical tunnel vision focused only on the actors.

Many performances that experimented with technology during the early transition era were also quite avant-garde and maintained elements of the postdramatic, such as *The Other is You*. As mentioned, this performance forced the audience to also gaze upon the other audience members who were on the video monitors. This, I would argue, is an element of postdramatic theatre because it distances itself from reality, as Lehmann's argument explains. Tomlin also points out that many theatre companies that experimented with technology had academic researchers working alongside them such as, '(Andrew Quick (Lancaster University), Pete Brooks (Central Saint Martins), [and] Peter Petralia (Manchester Metropolitan)'.[13] Since these companies had educated researchers who were experimenting with creating new theatre vocabulary, this also pushed for a theoretical 'sophisticated questioning of the real itself'.[14] Postdramatic art pushes to break boundaries between real life and philosophical questions about the meaning of life. The combination of technology and postdramatic theatre made for very

[13] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: Mind the Gap, Kneehigh Theatre, Suspect Culture, Stan's Cafe, Blast Theory, Punchdrunk* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 107.
[14] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: Mind the Gap, Kneehigh Theatre, Suspect Culture, Stan's Cafe, Blast Theory, Punchdrunk* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 107.

interesting theatre. By the 2000s, the term ‘digital visual technology can be seen as an accepted theatrical vocabulary within much of the practice’.[15] Tomlin details that the theatre trends that began in the 2000s and continued through the decade turned towards the inclusion of the audience as well. This inclusion is what began further research into the role of the audience.

The Role of the Audience

Many examples of contemporary theatre tend to treat the audience as witnesses. Viewers have always been seen as an essential aspect of performance; however, contemporary theatre holds additional responsibilities. Whether it is to force them to witness something tragic, offend them with controversial dialogue or provide an ambiguous story and allow them to piece it together themselves, audience members are now given the tools to make each story their own. The audience’s role has, therefore, changed since the 1970s. Political theatre was prominent before and during Thatcher's terms in office, as I previously explained. The 60s through to the mid-80s gave birth to State of the Nation performances, which can be defined as historically relevant and politically charged texts that allow the audience to relate to the current affairs directly affecting their lives.

State of the Nation plays such as *Destiny (1976)* by David Edgar and *Plenty (1978)* by David Hare are examples that I will go into further detail later in my paper. These are performances that discussed war, disagreements over political parties and gender discrimination. *Plenty* details the life of an Englishwoman after the conflicts of WWII. The central character, Susan, struggles over the contrast between her thrilling past life as a young resistance soldier and

[15] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: Mind the Gap, Kneehigh Theatre, Suspect Culture, Stan's Cafe, Blast Theory, Punchdrunk* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 108.

her new life as a housewife. In the text, Susan remarks to a friend that 'to be merely your husband's wife is demeaning for a woman of any integrity at all'.[16] Susan's contrast between her old self and new self is used by Hare as a metaphor for the old Britain and the new. *Plenty* is considered a State of the Nation play because it deals directly with Britain's loss of power at the end of WWII. Another example of State of the Nation is *Destiny* by Edgar. This play begins in the late 40s in India, at the end of British colonial rule. Three decades later, Edgar shows a three-cornered disagreement between the Labor party, the Conservative party, and the Nation Forward party. The Nation Forward party was modelled after the National Front, a far-right political party that was prominent at the time. Turner, the candidate for the Nation Forward party, gives a speech at a meeting where he says, 'the thing about these parasitic [immigrants] is that they're passed on by cutlery and using the same toilet. Of course, that's when these people sit on the toilet. Usually, they do other things, as you know'.[17] Unfortunately, the Nation Forward party ran on a platform of hate towards immigrants, which is how they got people to rally behind them.

In the next decade, theatre groups began to break away from the traditional text-based style of performance and began, what is now called, postdramatic theatre. Forced Entertainment is a postdramatic experimental theatre company that first performed in 1984. They were 'probably the single most significant force in shaping the landscape of postdramatic performance practice in the UK'.[18] Forced Entertainment's techniques can be labelled as postdramatic if you cross-reference their style with Lehman's definition. Forced Entertainment's 'randomness of means and quoted forms, [their] unabashed use and combination of heterogeneous styles [...] show[s] a renunciation of the traditions of the dramatic form', which is exactly what

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[16] David Hare, *Plenty*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) p. 74.
[17] David Edgar, *Destiny*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) p. 351.
[18] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 103.

postdramatic techniques encompass.[19] An example of postdramatic techniques can be found in Forced Entertainment's random and the chaotic performance of *Quizoola (1996),* which follows Lehman's definition. This improvisational performance entails performers asking themselves questions ranging from comical to violent to serious. This play directly rejects traditions of previous decades of theatre in many aspects, including how the audience is allowed to come and go as they please. The performance spans many hours; thus, audience members can purchase tickets for certain time slots. This creates an atmosphere where the audience is constantly changing, and the environment is never completely stable. Following early postdramatic theatre groups, such as Forced Entertainment, postdramatic theatre then became an umbrella that defined many theatre techniques that followed it, such as physical theatre. Physical theatre can be defined explicitly as 'a type of performance that emphasises the actor's body, rather than their words or their mind'.[20] DV8, for example, began in 1986 and was the first theatre company to label itself a physical theatre company. Physical theatre is postdramatic because both are defined 'as a trend that represents a shift from text-based theatre'.[21] Physical theatre 'extends the traditional disciplines of dance while maintaining the aspect of telling a story' rather than using a script of words and dialogue.[22] Theatre that developed in the 1990s was also described as a shift from traditional modes of performance, however, for different reasons.

[19] 'Postdramatic Performance Critical Reflection Gallery' <https://up696998.wixsite.com/postdramatic/blank-z3bzu> [accessed 14 September 2021]

[20] Patrice Pavis, 'Physical theatre and the dramaturgy of the actor' in *Contemporary Mise en Scène* (London: Routledge, 2012), p.3.

[21] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 98.

[22] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 98.

Testing the Audience

Alongside the rise of postdramatic performance, a new style of writing emerged in the 1990s. It was given the name in-yer-face theatre. This type of performance aims to shock the audience by forcing them to witness horrific and violent events. Aleks Sierz, defined in-yer-face as 'the kind of theatre which grabs the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message'.[23] In-yer-face theatre is typically accomplishes this with gore and scare tactics. These plays embraced shocking topics, for example, a well-known example of in-yer-face is Sarah Kane's *Blasted (1995),* (which only gained positive recognition after her early death). *Blasted* includes horrific stage directions where the characters eat body parts and sexually harass one another.

> **Ian** Are you going to kill me?
>
> **Soldier** Always looking after your own arse.
>
> *The **Soldier** grips **Ian's** head in his hands.*
>
> *He puts his mouth over one of **Ian's** eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it.*
>
> *He does the same to the other eye.*[24]

This scene depicts an unhealthy and abusive man, Ian, being brutally tortured by a soldier who appears later in the play. The depiction of eyes being eaten on stage is meant to cause distress among the viewers. It is in this way; Kane gets her audience to engage in a passive participation.

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[23] Aleks Sierz, 'What is in-yer-face-theatre' in *IN-YER-FACE THEATRE* <http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/intro.html> [accessed 14 July 2021].

[24] Sarah Kane, *Blasted*, (London: Bloomsbury,1995) p.48.

These plays were largely unpopular when they first began production. It seemed to be because critics did not see the intention behind scaring the audience with aggressive actions. However, in-yer-face took advantage of theatrical constraints which keep an audience from voicing their opinion during the performance.

On the other side of involving the audience in controversial material, there is a technique that I label as 'testing the audience', which involves recognising the audience's presence. It also breaks down the fourth wall and invites the audience to feel a part of the performance by breaking down their boundaries and engaging with them in sometimes spontaneous and uncomfortable ways. The difference between testing the audience and in-yer-face is that in-yer-face aims to shock the audience while the techniques of the latter are meant to cause tension. Over the decades after the 90s, playwrights tended to steer away from gore and horror and instead implemented tragedy and controversial political situations. Plays that encompass this include *random (2008)* by debbie tucker green and *The Writer (2018)* by Ella Hickson. Even though these two works were written a decade apart, there exists a desire from the playwright to engage their audience in discord. tucker green's *random* is a monologue told from the point of view of a young black woman who explains the killing of her brother at the hands of the police. tucker green's audience is placed in the role of the witness to her performances. She engages the witnesses of *random* to take responsibility for the tragedy that befell her family. The actress repeatedly describes the scene she watches in front of her as if she wants the audience to feel her pain.

> Standin by the yellow an' blue murder/board/the battlefield where brother slain.
> Alone./Me on my own./Cept for the boys in blue guarding the pavement piece/I guess./Watchin/the Police tape bouncing/in the breeze.
> Too late.[25]

During this dialogue and the rest of the text in the performance, the character is speaking directly to the audience in a way which evokes empathy and guilt. The text included many moments such as this, and the audience is asked to empathise and feel a connectedness to the narrative, rather than to be shocked or repulsed by the events portrayed.

Another example of testing the audience can be found in Hickson's *The Writer*. This play is about a young female writer who wishes to change the rules of playwriting. It begins as any traditional performance set in realism; however, the audience quickly finds out that it is a play within a play. As the lights come up and a character playing the director and the writer emerge, the audience comes to realise that their inability to see eye to eye is what we will be viewers of. The character of the writer attempts to write a play that goes against typical patriarchal hierarchies, however, the director thinks differently and tried to undermine her at every turn. However, along the way of writing her play, she realises that it is more complex than she thinks to go against patriarchal tropes. In the lines of dialogue below, the writer explains to the director why she has a passion for being a playwright, but that men like him determine what sells tickets and what fails.

[25] Debbie tucker green, *random*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2008), p.38.

> It might suit you to call it a profession but it was never meant to be – it was meant to be a dedication, a calling. Not for mortgages and pay cheques and career progression, it was for God, it was an offering. [...] But now it belongs to you because you've paid for it and it's judged on whether it will shift tickets.[26]

This play has feminist trends which portray how difficult it is for female playwrights who wish to write plays outside of traditional standards. Which is why it fits into the category of testing the audience, because of the many disputes that Hickson includes. Each scene is set up as a complex argument that seems to contradict the other. This performance creates discord between the audience and forces them to discuss the events in the play. Both *random* and *The Writer* leaves the audience slightly disturbed. Even though the plays had different techniques, they gained traction because of the controversial and aggressive performance style.

Techniques in testing the audience forces thinking and reasoning among their viewers to keep their attention by manipulating their emotions in this manner. In *Theatre and Spectatorship – Meditations on Participation, Agency and Trust* by Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte, they mention why playwrights use this technique. These two authors describe it as

> A method of "gentle interrogation" that [is] not only about recognising the audience's presence but crucially about inviting their imaginative and effective engagement with the ideas being explored.[27]

[26] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 73.
[27] Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte, 'Theatre and Spectatorship – Meditations on Participation, Agency and Trust', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4.1 (2016), 3-19, (p. 4).

Testing the audience is exactly as it says, and how the above authors describe it, as a "gentle interrogation". The reason why the audience's participation, even passive, is important to these types of theatre methods is because breaking the fourth wall and speaking directly to them is what makes these performances different from previous ones such as State of the Nation. Instead of telling the audience exactly the opinions of the playwright, providing a summary and purpose of the performance as a conclusion, postdramatic performances, such as testing the audience, wants them to do the thinking themselves. Furthermore, the above authors, Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte, analyse these techniques to encourage awareness in their viewers to apply critical thinking of the themes being discussed in the play. In addition, they have another chapter in the book *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground* where they discuss immersive methods as well as the role of the witness. The role of the witness is a technique similar to testing the audience, except that the performance contains physical actions that can be perceived as traumatic or abusive. The role of the witness is described 'as a device that promotes an effective response', which is the focus of this style of performance.[28] The response from the audience is the central principal, such as with previous examples of contemporary performance, and their reactions to being a witness to trauma. Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte go on to explain witness theatre, and that-

> -the word "to witness" carries the connotation of "eye-witnessing" but also "bearing witness to something that cannot be seen". Witnessing, therefore, implies a complex ethical position, particularly with regards to trauma, torture and abuse; by being

[28] Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 147).

> addressed as witnesses, spectators are asked to take responsibility for what they see and hear and are offered the space for a more enduring engagement and critical reflection on issues of social injustice and human rights abuse.[29]

In further examination of this quote from *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground*, witnessing in real life and witnessing in performance are contrasting since witness theatre contains a condition that a "wrong" has happened. Furthermore, witness theatre contrasts from simply watching a play because the performance requests that they put themselves in the position of taking responsibility. The audience is not meant to be a passive participant, instead, to engage in the performance as if they were watching a traumatic event unfold in front of them in their real lives.

The Role of the Witness

The role of the witness is clearly defined in *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance* by Patrick Duggan. Duggan explains this technique by describing a bystander witnessing a car accident. He insists that the same action the bystander will have to the crash, or tell someone about it, is the same feeling that overcomes an audience member who is bearing witness to a traumatic event on stage. He explains that the audience will be 'driven by a desire to comment upon, stimulate some form of action in relation to and potentially come to

[29] Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 147-148).

reconstitute or historicise trauma-events and symptoms'.[30] By this explanation, I would define witnessing, as it relates to theatre, as a technique where the audience is placed in the position of a witness to a traumatic accident. This position forces the audience to take responsibility for what they are witnessing, which in turn, drives the audience to testify for what they have witnessed. This definition coincides with Duggan's explanation for audiences being placed in the role of a witness.

Furthermore, there are other forms of witness theatre which engage the audience to witness more than just the actions happening on stage. Duggan discusses these forms which include, 'audience to performer, performer to audience and, crucially, audience to audience'.[31] The first form of witnessing, audience to performer, happens when the audience is placed in the first person and is present at the happening of the event. Performer to audience is when there is no longer a barrier between performance and viewers and there is a new shared space created. The last, audience to audience, creates tension for the viewers because they are aware that their reaction to the events is under scrutiny by the other members of the crowd. These forms of witness theatre in tandem create an ethical responsibility for the audience. There is also an implicit responsibility to being a witness, and with it comes 'the responsibility of imparting the action to others'.[32] Not only must a witness account the event to themselves, but there is an obligation to spread awareness of the trauma event to others. Thus, when performing documentary trauma theatre, which contrasts from witness theatre, it must contain facts since it behaves as a documentary.

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[30] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 86.
[31] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 86.
[32] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 89.

Duggan details that to accurately perform a documentary performance of a tragic historical event, there needs to be a responsibility 'to the truth of what happens during an event and to being part of its continuing circulation in history'.[33] Documentary theatre is based on actual historical events; for example, Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists (2012)* is constructed as a series of interviews with people who have been involved in terrorism, as well as victims of these horrors. The play dissects what makes people commit dreadful acts of violence.

> You can give adolescents the feeling they're shaping history; "You think you can change the world… well, yes actually, you can…I'll show you how." [...] Terrorists certainly aren't thinking about the day after tomorrow. They're enjoying the moment. Even if it's ghastly, it's invigorating. It's what's called a "peak experience".[34]

As Duggan claims, for a play to be labelled as documentary theatre, the playwright's responsibility is to be true to the event and what transpired. In documentary theatre, the audience is meant to feel empathy for the characters in the play by being asked to play the role of the witness to events that they know are real. In contrast, witness theatre is not bound by the rules that it must be a true and accurate depiction of actual events. Witness and documentary theatre alike ask their audience to be fully aware that the topic in question is a contradictory issue and that they "witness" the events unfold before them as if they were real.

Immersive theatre, which developed as a genre in the early years of the 21st century, is another type of performance where there is a modification to the relationship between the

[33] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 89.
[34] Robin Soans, *Talking to Terrorists*, (London: Oberon Books, 2012), p. 26.

audience and the actors. The term Immersive theatre is defined by Adam Alston in *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation*. He argues that immersive theatre calls on the senses for audience members to become wholly engaged in the performance. To illustrate the theory of 'experience machines' Alston describes his experience while participating in two immersive performances (Punchdrunk's *The Masque of the Red Death* and a piece by members of De La Guarda called *Fuerzabruta*). These performances can be called an 'experience machine' because it includes all aspects of theatre, 'scenography, choreography, dramaturgy, and so on'. All these elements work in tandem to maintain a united space for the audience, which 'resources their sensuous, imaginative and explorative capabilities as productive and involving aspects of a theatre aesthetic'.[35] When audiences are placed in the role of the witness within an immersive performance, they play a vital role in the show's operation. Many contemporary performances that take on the role of the witness, such as *random* and *stoning mary*, request that their audience asks themselves questions relating to the performance so that everyone is filled with an empathetic response to the show.

The Death of the Author

In a text that was previously quoted, *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground* by Vicky Angelaki, there is a chapter written by Dan Rebellato titled *Exit the Author*. The examination of immersive theatre and the inclusion of the audience has adapted into the 'death-of-the-author', a theoretical term borrowed from Barthes. The status of the playwrights

[35] Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation*, (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), p. 2.

has changed. For example, State of the Nation playwrights present an argument while 'death-of-the-author' playwrights give their audience a text that they must interpret. The strategy of this type of play removes the playwright from the performance, whether that is metaphorically or literally. The impact that this has on the audience forces them to interpret the plays meaning themselves rather than being told what it means. Some plays that include this method of performance have the author die, such as *San Diego* by Greig. However, many other plays choose to use this technique in a symbolic sense, for example, Caryl Churchill does this in her more recent work.

Churchill writes her plays so that the overall meaning is more ambiguous rather than delivering a straightforward conclusion. *Love and Information* does not follow a single storyline and there are no stage directions or names for the characters. Each scene is distinct from the next, which allows the audience to piece together the scenes however it makes sense for them. However, there is a clue given by the title of the play that there is a central theme throughout the text, human connection. However, that is a loose connection that can mean many different things. Are the relationships good or bad? Are they healthy or toxic? Depending on the infliction the actor gives the lines, they could result in many different interpretations. This could be interpreted as creating a complicated environment for the audience to reflect how communication is profoundly complex. In one of the scenes in *Love and Information*, the script portrays a conversation, seemingly between two people, about a secret. One character works to convince the other to tell them their secret, while the other tries to convince them to drop the topic.

> Please please tell me
>
> I'd die before I told

if there's this secret we're not [...] close any more we can't ever

but nobody knows everything about

yes but a big secret like this

it's not such a big

then tell me

will you stop

it's big because you won't tell me

All right I'll tell you

Tells in a whisper.

No

I warned you

Now what? now what? now what?[36]

This scene is powerful as written, since the secret is never revealed to the audience, they are left questioning what the other character now knows and what it could have been. Going along with the title of the play, this scene also sticks to the central theme involving communication and an exchange of information. Depending on how this scene is delivered by the actors, the audience could interpret it their own way and imagine all sorts of things that the secret could have been pertaining.

Exit The Author examines the techniques of the death-of-the-author describes them more closely and examines why a playwright might choose to write this way. The author is seen as the scripter, meaning that playwrights connect different art, culture, society, politics, and history.

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[36] Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012), p. 4-5.

Rebellato explains that a sense of intentionality is essential for us to derive certain kinds of meanings from texts at all.[37] Thus, for rival interpretations to be derived from a text, there must already be a sense of intention in the play. For a play to be categorised as death-of-the-author, it must show that the text aims to be interpreted by the audience rather than there being a clear statement being told by the playwright. The writer still has an intention, however, what the play lacks is a fully formed argument. This is what I believe Churchill aimed to accomplish with *Love and Information*. This technique allows theatre to no longer be a place where an audience can sit comfortably knowing that they agree with the opinions of the playwright, rather they must piece together the ambiguous dialogue to make sense of the performance.

Traumatised Characters

Another term I use to describe performances in my thesis is the incorporation of traumatised characters. However, even though playwrights have always incorporated these types of anti-heroes into their texts, there are contrasting techniques I have noticed in Contemporary performances. The difference between then and now is how the playwright portrays these types of characters to their audience. Without explicitly telling them via a protagonist breaking the fourth wall to explain who the anti-hero is, contemporary playwrights let their audience discover them on their own. In other words, it is not evident from the script what that character's fate will be, and the audience must piece together all the fragments themselves. Examples of this

[37] Dan Rebellato, 'Exit The Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground*, ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p. 23).

performance style include as old as the late 1990s, such as *Blue Heart* by Churchill, or as new as 2015, like tucker green's *hang*.

Blue Heart is a wonderful example of this style of performance because the characters are seemingly stuck in a time loop of their worst nightmares, thus why I labeled them as traumatised. In *Blue Heart*, the play begins in a very realistic style, however, two lines into the text, the actors all reset and start over, continuing this until the end of the scene.

> **Brian** She's taking her time.
>
> **Alice** Not really.
>
> *They all stop,* **Brian** *goes out. Others reset to beginning and do exactly what they did before as* **Brian** *enters putting on a tweed jacket.*
>
> **Brian** She's taking her time.
>
> **Alice** Not really.[38]

This repetition continues, signaling to the audience that these characters are stuck in this loop. I will discuss more of this play and how the characters fit this technique later in this dissertation. Similarly, in tucker green's *hang*, her interpretation of traumatised characters is inspired from real trauma from historical events. Her main character, Three, is a woman who has suffered some crime against her husband. The other two characters, One and Two, are employed by a system that allows a victim to choose how their assailant dies. All the characters end the play in the same room and position that they began. The primary victim of the play comes to a final

[38] Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997), p.6.

decision; however, it is not healthy retribution or acceptance for her. This performance shows just how torturous it can be for someone to walk to line of revenge and justice.

> **Three** I want him hung. (*Beat.*) …That's my decision.
>
> *Beat.*
>
> **One** You're sure – ?
>
> **Three** I'm sure.
>
> **Two** Revenge isn't the best motivation to make / a –
>
> **Three** This isn't revenge nowhere near.[39]

hang contains a traumatised character that must make a very difficult decision. The audience is forced to witness One relay information pertaining to her traumatising past that led her to this place. This is another text that I will discuss in further detail later in the dissertation. Both *hand* and *Blue Heart*'s characters have a sealed fate from the start of the show, whether that be because they suffer a never-ending nightmare or because they have lost a loved one and now must decide on how the killer meets their fate.

Cristina Delgado-Garcia mentions traumatised characters and how playwrights write them in *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity.* Delgado-Garcia calls contemporary performances that incorporate these types of characters '*character-less* plays'.[40] More specifically, she uses this term when talking about 'theatre scripts that dismantle and foreclose the traditional attribution of speech to stable and

[39] Debbie tucker green, *hang*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015) p.58-59.
[40] Cristina Delgado-Garcia, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre : Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, (London: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015) p. 17.

well-defined characters/performers'.[41] I interpret this to mean that character-less plays contain hyper realistic dialogue that makes an audience member view them in a real situation rather than a performative one. Playwrights such as tucker green and Churchill incorporate informal speech into their script, including pauses, repeating words, stumbling over words, stuttering, and many other things that reflect realistic dialogue. In many of Churchill's texts, she disturbs the language and linear structure of her plays. Her play in question, *Blue Heart*, includes dismantled speech and 'well-defined characters', as Delgado-Garcia put it; thus, *Blue Heart* is a 'character-less play'. I argue that it also includes traumatised characters who are bound by their anxieties revolving around their daughters' travels. Right from the beginning of the play, it is evident to the audience that the characters are traumatised, and this keeps a tension present in the space that keep an audience's attention.

Many of these plays also lack any character development. For characters to grow, there usually is a problem to be solved, leading to an overall conflict, followed by falling action and safely into a resolution. However, the characters present in these plays lack this characteristic. Such as in *Blue Heart*, the characters begin in their home, having a normal conversation. These characters do have a problem: their daughter is taking a long time coming home from her flight. However, it is not followed by conflict, falling action or a resolution. Instead, as soon as the audience gets a semblance of the resolution, the play restarts again to perpetuate the character's suffering.

Susy Here I am.

Brian Here you are.

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[41] Cristina Delgado-Garcia, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre : Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, (London: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015) p. 17.

Alice Yes here she is.

Susy Hello aunty.

Brian You are my heart's –

Reset to top. **Brian** *enters putting on old cardigan.*

Brian She's taking her time.

End.[42]

This scene is an example of how this family remains traumatised and the resetting of their anxieties proves that this play is a 'character-less play', as Delgado-Garcia describes. In a way, the true character of *Blue Heart* is the anxiety and torture the audience is forced to be a part of. However, other Contemporary plays also portray traumatised characters that live in the same reality as present day rather than in an anti-realistic fashion.

Jez Butterworth, the playwright of *Jerusalem (2009)*, gives his audience the comfort of a realistic style of performance, unlike *Blue Heart.* However, the audience is left wondering whether the main character, Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, is a hero or a monster. *Jerusalem* incorporates a complex version of traumatised characters, ones that must be deciphered by the audience throughout the performance. Rooster is portrayed as the stereotypical anti-hero. He is the protagonist of the play; however, he is also a disorderly man who acts out of his self-worth. The outcast teenagers that socialise with him also fit the context as traumatised characters as well. Johnny keeps these juveniles entertained by telling them stories of mystical creatures who he has personally met.

[42] Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997), p.36.

Johnny You don't want to believe everything you hear, now, girls. There's some men'll tell you anything to get you to believe it. I never jumped Stonehenge. But I once met a giant that built Stonehenge. [...]

Ginger Where is it?

Johnny Where's what?

Ginger Where's the drum?

Johnny What?

Ginger Where's this giant's drum? His earring. Where's that then?

Johnny You're sitting on it.

Ginger *leaps up. There it is.*[43]

This scene could convince the characters, but also the audience that Johnny is telling the truth. The irony of Johnny telling the girls to not believe everything they hear, right before telling them a story of how he met a giant who built Stonehenge is quite comical. By the end of the play, the audience is forced to choose whether they believe all the wild stories Byron has been claiming or if he met a fate much worse. In the final scene of the play, Ginger, Johnny's sidekick, tries to warn him that the town is planning on forcibly removing him from his home. As an audience member, this scene proves that Johnny truly believes that he has the power to conjure woodland spirits to protect him. He beats on his drum until his caravan that he doused in petrol explodes around him.

[43] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p.56-61.

Ginger Johnny. There's two dozen South Wiltshire on Upavon Road. They got shields and batons. They're tooling up. They got an army. They're coming here.

Johnny An army, you say? Well, you better get home, Ginger. Get away from here.

[...] *Spitfire flies over.* **Johnny** *goes around the back of the caravan. He reappears with a can of petrol. He splashes it around the inside of the caravan, and on the outside too.*

[...]*He picks up a handful of the ashes of the petition. He limps around the clearing, dropping piles of ash. [...] He stops in the middle, by the drum. Closes his eyes. And begins to incant.* [...] *Relentlessly he beats the drum. Faster. Faster. Staring out. He pounds on and on until the final blow rings out and…*

Blackout.

Curtain.

The End.[44]

This play meets the definition of containing traumatised characters because, whichever way the audience perceives it, these characters are broken. If Johnny really is there to protect the England woodlands, or if he is an alcoholic, drug-pushing crazy man; he is still trying his best to be a figure of resistance towards the developers who aim to desecrate the forest. The underage kids who socialise with him are also traumatised; they are outcasts who find solace in the fantasies Johnny sells them. For many of them, Johnny's caravan is a second home, even though many of the townsfolk see him as a fugitive. This complex play is meant to force the audience to go back and forth on the idea that Johnny is a saint rather than a villain. It is insinuated from the

[44] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p.105-109.

beginning that he is the antagonist of the play, however, he proves himself to be the protector of both the forest and of Ginger as well.

Conclusion

In this section, I have examined the unique theatrical styles of Contemporary British theatre. This included State of the Nation, in-yer-face, feminist theatre, death of the author, doomed characters, drama-in-the-head, and offending the audience. All these forms incorporate many different techniques; however, what they all have in common is their relationship with the audience. The viewers are forced to take on a larger role while watching contemporary performances. What is meant by taking on a larger role is that playwrights wish for their audience to be involved in one way or another instead of passively being entertained. For example, in the 70s, State of the Nation playwrights were portraying a message of political revolution and told their audience what they wanted from them. The difference now is that playwrights incorporate the fractured aspect of our new reality into the space of their performances.

The different techniques of contemporary playwrights are what encompasses this new relationship with the audience. Techniques such as the role of the witness, testing the audience and the death-of-the-author all use different strategies to utilise this different relationship with the audience. The role of the witness works by placing the audience in the first-person point of view as a witness to a traumatic event. This sparks an ethical responsibility in the viewer to comment upon and, metaphorically, give a testimony of the events that transpired. Testing the audience is the technique that playwrights use to force conversation and possible discord among

their audience. This keeps them actively engaged in the performance by testing their ability to remain a well-behaved audience. For example, when an actor directly addresses the audience and asks them questions and the audience is not allowed to respond, tension is created in the space by the awkward silences. Lastly, death-of-the-author is one where the playwright relinquishes authority to the audience to uncover their hidden intentions for the play. Thus, the audience is forced to piece together the clues that the writer gives them to discover the meaning of the performance. All these techniques have different strategies, however, the one factor that they all have in common is that the audience is vital to the effects the play has. Without the tension and involvement of the audience, there is no one to be the witness, and thus, no one to testify.

Chapter I: Historical Background: Where did the Themes Originate?

Playwrights have always reflected on the present situation and used shared experiences to connect with their audience. Because of this, theatre in Britain changes with the country's current politics and state. State of the nation theatre began to highlight how the postwar British state was changing and became an outlet for those who disagreed with their representatives. When the Conservative party won over the Labour party, state of the nation playwrights were no longer on the winning side. In this section, I will discuss the changes from state of the nation theatre to the techniques and styles of today. First, I will go over the historical background following a linear timeline, followed by subsections that deal specifically with the plays I discuss.

Theatre Before Thatcherism

Before Thatcherism took hold of the political atmosphere, state of the nation theatre analysed the political struggles that faced British society. Some examples of state of the nation theatre include *Destiny (1976)* by David Edgar and David Hare's *Plenty (1978)*.

Destiny and Maydays (David Edgar, 1976)

In *Destiny*, Edgar's topic of concern is Britain's Fascist right-wing party, The National Front, which gained support in the early to mid 1970s. In the play, this party is parallel to The Nation Forward party. Many moments in this play are worrisome, such as the many racist and anti-Semitic remarks made by men in the Nation Forward party. *Destiny* makes a clear stance against these ideals, thus taking a stance against the National Front Party (founded 1967) which

has many- if not all-of the same policies. In the 70s, the National Front Party focused its efforts on curbing South Asian migration to Britain, which is a topic of concern in *Destiny* as well. The play's chairman for the Nation Forward party is Mr Turner. This character portrays very similar qualities to Britain's National Front party's chairman, John Tyndall. This character is very outspoken in his opinions on Asian labour and whether they are deserving of the same rights as English-born citizens.

> **Cleaver** Mr Turner, would you admit to racial prejudice?
>
> **Turner** We all have a natural and healthy preference for our own kind.
>
> **Maxwell** Colour?
>
> **Turner** That's what I mean. Certainly, giving an Asian a British passport doesn't make him British.[45]

This quote portrays the racist opinions that the character has, as well as his counterpart, Tyndall. Tyndall led the National Front Party in the 70s, whose stance on immigration was to send immigrants 'home where possible or at least to resettle them [...] somewhere in the world'.[46] Tyndall seems to be an inspiration for the character Mr Turner in *Destiny*. Edgar writes this play to send a straightforward message to his audience that the National Front Party was founded on racism and is not to be trusted by the British people.

Plenty (David Hare: 1978)

[45] David Edgar, *Destiny*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 333-334.
[46] John Tyndall, 'National Front leader (1971-1974 & 1976-1979) John Tyndall in 1970's interview', *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7LU2V4ghWE> [accessed 17 September 2021].

Hare's *Plenty* brings attention to the struggle people faced in postwar England. Hare tells the story of a courageously independent woman, Susan Traherne, who risked her life as a resistance soldier working in Nazi-occupied France when she was seventeen. The play's title comes from the belief that post-war Britain would be a time of 'plenty'. There was the knowledge that many women fought for their country through a secret organisation called the Special Operations Executive, which is the background for this text. Susan is a woman who longs for her adventurous past while becoming more and more depressed, realising that her life ahead is full of nothing, but dullness compared to what it used to be. Britain was not like it used to be before the war and Hare uses this text as a metaphor for the declining state of the nation at the time. While following the heroine's life story, it becomes clear that her mental health is deteriorating. Symbolically, it shows how Britain was equally declining after WWII. Following the Second World War and the collapse of the British Empire, there was a time of prosperity and fortune. The play relays this message when Susan says, 'it's money that did it, it's money that rots. That we've all lived like camels off the fat in our humps'.[47] The prosperity that Britain found itself in in the 1950s can be linked to the quote. Unemployment was down to only 2%, and there was a 'dramatic rise in the average standard of living, with a 40% rise in average real wages from 1950 to 1965'.[48] This quote can be taken to be Susan's point; however, I believe Hare's point is just to show the slow decline of Britain after WW2.

Susan feels that this prosperity has made the average Briton selfish and money hungry. Hare's heroine does not care for an affluent lifestyle; she merely longs for the respect and thrill

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[47] David Hare, *Plenty,* (London: Faber And Faber Limited, 1996), p. 85

[48] Hugh Pemberton, 'The Transformation of the Economy' in *A COMPANION TO CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN 1939–2000* ed. by Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005) pp.180-203 (p.191).

she received in her younger life. This is also attributed to how wealth coincides with a loss of ideals and moral values, which can be said to be responsible for the decline of the British Empire. Susan's declining mental state symbolises how the country began to diminish. Toward the end of the play, Susan meets with her husband's boss to persuade him to give her husband a promotion. She ends up threatening to commit suicide if he refuses. When her boss attempts to get Susan to a doctor, she becomes hysterical.

> **Susan** If Brock is not promoted in the next six days, I am intending to shoot myself. [...]
>
> **Charleson** John, I wonder, could you give me a hand? [...] If we could take Mrs Brock down to the surgery…
>
> **Susan** I assure you, Sir Andrew, I'm perfectly all right.
>
> **Charleson** Perhaps alert her husband…
>
> **Begley** If you're not feeling well…[...]
>
> **Susan** *starts to shout.*
>
> **Susan** Please. Please leave me alone.
>
> **Charleson** *and* **Begley** *stop.* **Susan** *is hysterical. She waits a moment.*
>
> I can't… always manage with people. (*Pause.*) I think you have destroyed my husband, you see.[49]

The way that Susan threatens her own life with such carelessness is attributed to the ongoing symbolism of how the country also begins to lose hope of ever returning to a pre-war style of life. Dr Sabine Picout's, interpretation of this play is that it symbolises how the

[49] David Hare, *Plenty*, (London: Faber And Faber Limited, 1996), p. 79-80.

‘continuation of the Empire’ was something many Britain's sought after and that it was unfortunate having to give up that dream. Picoult also mentions that the way Hare focuses on how post-war life affected individual people adds to the impact the play has on Britain. The characters in *Plenty* portray a ‘lack of direction who can’t cope with their situation’, which reflects the politics of the time.[50]

Plenty is a staple state of the nation play for this time because of the metaphor between Susan’s mental state and the quality of life in Britain. It speaks to an audience in 1978 because of their current struggles and how Hare validated their experiences as individuals who lived through these difficult times.

Thatcherism and the 1980s

State of the Nation theatre used realism and was primarily meant to be politically charged. It utilised realistic forms of performance to get its messages across; however, during the 80s, a new wave of contemporary theatre emerged. The 80s saw unemployment reaching record highs, and peaked ‘in 1984 when 11.9% of the UK population aged 16 and over were out of work’.[51] On top of unemployment highs, riots covered the nation in 1981; the Falklands war in 1982, the Miners’ Strike in 1984 and a global stock market crash in 1987. The Miners’ Strike specifically was one that Saunders explains ‘marked a watershed by defeating the National Union of Mineworkers’. This achievement of Thatcher’s was a ‘key aim [of] breaking union power nationally, and at the same time removing them from their central place in promoting

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[50] Dr. Sabine Picout, ‘"Plenty" by David Hare - An Interpretation’, in *Grin* <https://www.grin.com/document/188973> [accessed 16 June 2021].
[51] Sian Burkitt, ‘Unemployment in the 1980s: “It felt like a bereavement, I didn't know what was going on”’ in *WalesOnline* <https://www.walesonline.co.uk> [accessed 23 July 2021].

socialist values'.[52] Thatcher brought about many regressive strategies in efforts to dismantle socialism. Her main goal was to change how the economy worked and weaken trade unions. She cut government spending anywhere she did not see fit, including the arts. Unfortunately, Thatcher had her hold over Britain until 1987; however, that did not keep those who wanted her out of the office from protesting her.

During the same time as record-breaking unemployment, the government implemented cuts in funding for theatre communities. These unfortunate events caused small local political theatre groups to fail while funding went to large-scale productions.

> In spite of [...] decreases in arts funding after inflation had been taken into account, many companies in fact, flourished in the sustaining microclimates provided by Labour-controlled metropolitan authorities. [...] The first half of the 1980s saw a proliferation of new companies that was every bit as remarkable as the expansionist period of the 1970s[53].

Large and entertaining performance displays such as mega-musicals were a staple of the 80s. This included Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats (1981)* and *Phantom of the Opera (1986)*. 'Despite their impressive scale, [...] these productions represented little more than palliatives, offering

[52] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 7.
[53] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 50.

their audiences only a fleeting 'spiritual affirmation in a time of disillusion'.[54] The intention behind these texts was not to empower or educate the public but only to make money. This surge of musical making caused theatre critics to begin calling the 80s 'shoddy entertainment'.[55] In contrast, despite some parts of the theatre community getting hit with economic difficulties, the 1980s also saw a new wave of feminist theatre in Britain.

Feminist theatre took over much of the first half of the 80s, however this will be covered in more detail in the following subsection. After feminist theatre became popular, State of the Nation playwrights began discovering ways to adapt to Thatcherism's changes to the country. Saunders argues that political theatre that came out during the middle of the decade 'dissected some of the changes that Thatcherism sought to bring about [...which...] captured both the energy and ruthlessness of such individuals who flourished under Thatcherism'.[56] This included *Maydays (1983),* by Edgar, which was published towards the end of Thatcher's first term in 1983. This State of the Nation play speaks to the people of England regarding the political changes that were happening during the time. It shows the progression of the right in the country and where they originated from. Edgar was a playwright who would specifically discuss how the policies Thatcher initiated affected the arts community. He noticed an 'ideological shift was being engineered', even though there was not an administered strike against the arts that resulted from politics, Edgar did note that 'dramatic economic shrinkage, in combination with gentle but

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[54] Michael Billington, Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 31.

[55] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 28.

[56] Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 30.

consistent political pressure, pried open the cracks sufficiently to let the sap of Thatcherism through'.[57] This is why Edgar's plays, specifically *Destiny,* are so important to history at the time. In an interview he did with Misha Berson, Edgar touches on how it is important for 'non-professional people' as he describes, to be aware of their impact on making history. Berson asks Edgar why he has begun using 'lesser known central figures' in his historical plays, and he replies, 'If you don't believe you can make history in your daily life, you can become very irresponsible'.[58] He aims to tell his audience how they are also impacting history daily with the decisions they make, just like Susan in *Destiny*. The next section details the historical context surrounding how "normal people", such as the women of the feminist movement, began fighting against regressive policies, such as Thatcherism. What coincides with these details are the playwrights introduced at the time and what they did to imitate the history being made before their eyes.

New Forms of Theatre in the 1980s and 90s: Feminist theatre

Feminist Theatre was part of a wider movement in the culture of the time, which can be attributed to the New Women's History Movement. This history is important because it gave birth to feminist theatre such as Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls (1982)* and Martin Crimp's *Dealing with Clair (1988),* which will be discussed in detail later. These plays sparked a trend of theatre that spoke out about the violence that women experience in the world. During the 70s to early

[57]David Edgar, Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 11.
[58] Misha Berson, 'The Politics of a Playwright: Talking with David Edgar'
The Threepenny review, (1981) 25-26 (p.25).

80s, accounts of women's involvement in history began being given attention. Female writers wrote 'of the ignored topics of the history of women [...] that had not been previously considered legitimate for historical investigation'.[59] Female playwrights brought their lived experience to the stage and provided a literal platform where it would be appropriate to bring these injustices to light. These women include Kay Adshed, who wrote *Thatcher's Women (1987)*, Debbie Horsfield who wrote *Red Devils (1983)* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls (1982).* Jane Milling notes that these texts brought attention to the effect unemployment and 'the changing nature of the workplace' had on women in Britain.[60]Feminist theatre changed how playwrights interact with their audience because this type of performance spoke to the needs of a specific part of the country. Feminist theatre reached out to all women, including those in the LGBTQ+ community. These performances allowed individuals in a tight community to gather and discuss changes they wished to see.

Bringing attention to the history and noting the links between the feminist movement and theatre that developed because of it is important. The first instance where we can notice this change in relationship between play and audience can be traced back to feminist theatre. Female playwrights were dedicated to making their voices heard and writing the stories of women that had not gotten the attention they deserved. This is where we see a shift in intention. Before 1980, Theatre spoke to the audience with a single message that was told to them very clearly. Male playwrights did not leave room for interpretation by the audience and were mostly centered in realism. However, groups such as The Women's Theatre Group (renamed The Sphinx theatre

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[59] Charlotte Canning, 'Constructing Experience: Theorizing a Feminist Theatre History' *Theatre journal (Washington, D.C.)*, 45.4 (1993) 529-540 (p.532).

[60] Jane Milling, Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 14.

company in 1999) had a goal 'to reclaim through our plays women's history and to record women's condition now, for the future'.[61] Feminist Theatre companies performed to a specific audience of individuals who believed in women's equality and wanted to make a difference.

Furthermore, the effects that Thatcherism had on Britain do not stop with politics, she effected theatre in Britain as well. As a powerful conservative woman, Thatcher's overall effect on feminism in the 20th century is generally seen to be negative. Thatcher's 'ambivalence towards feminism was well documented' and when asked if she was involved in the feminism movement, she responded by 'asking what the movement had "ever done for" her'.[62] Thatcher's attitude against the efforts toward gender equality is one factor that led to an increase in Feminist Theatre. Churchill was obviously one of the early feminist playwrights who became prominent during the time; however, it was still a struggle for female playwrights. Because of this, some men pursued writing on the topic of gender inequality. One such playwright was Martin Crimp, who became famous after Churchill. It could be said that Churchill opened the space to be experimental, and Crimp took advantage of this. In 1988, he wrote *Dealing with Clair*, which will be described in detail later in this chapter. This play examines the truth of how society treats women, and without explicitly accusing the audience of unconscious bias towards women, the conclusion makes it clear that there is still a long way to go until true equality is reached.

Caryl Churchill's Early Plays: Top Girls and Serious Money

[61] Elaine Aston, 'Policies of Women's Theatre Group', *Feminist Theatre Voices: A Collective Oral History* <http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/womens-theatre-group/> [accessed 31 July 2021].
[62] Katie Weaver, 'Feminism Under Duress: Was the Thatcher Government Bad for the Women's Movement in the U.K.?' *Women Leading Change © Newcomb College Institute*, I.I (2016), 106-115 (p.107)

Caryl Churchill is one of the most influential playwrights of this century. Her work encompasses many of the themes I dissect in this dissertation, thus, her texts will be mentioned more than once. In this subchapter, I focus on how her early work influenced the feminist movement, and later, I will analyse her texts as it relates to postdramatic theatre. Churchill began writing in the early 70s. Being born in London just a year before WWII, her childhood was engulfed in the war. When she was ten years old, she and her family moved to Canada, however she returned to England when she was nineteen and attended college. In her twenties, she began pursuing a career in playwriting and 'was already offering the establishment of the London theatre a radical manifesto declaring that "Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions"'.[63] Once she began publishing plays, she first began by writing political feminist plays, and addressed topics such as 'anti-capitalism, [...] Thatcher, feminism, the new legislation on race, gender and sexuality, unemployment, monetarism, industrial action and urban terrorism'.[64] Churchill's early work, such as *Objections to Sex and Violence (1974)*, 'led to her successful association with David Hare [...] and Monstrous Regiment, a feminist group'[65]. Arguably the most prominent feminist play of the 80s, Churchill's *Top Girls (1982)*, tells the story of a middle-aged working woman and her relationship with her job. This play discusses women's role in the workforce and 'asks how success is defined for women'.[66] The meaning behind this play is to describe the corruption that could arise from those willing to exploit the people underneath them and expose individuals that prospered during the Thatcher movement while the lower class continued suffering. The experimentation comes from the distinction between the opening scene

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[63] Sally Richards, 'Caryl Churchill' in *Australasian drama studies*, (2017) 209-213 (p.210)
[64] Sally Richards, 'Caryl Churchill' in *Australasian drama studies*, (2017) 209-213 (p.210)
[65] Gloria Lotha, John M. Cunningham, Amy Tikkanen, 'Caryl Churchill', in *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Caryl-Churchill> [accessed 24 July 2021].
[66] Sally Richards, 'Caryl Churchill' in *Australasian drama studies*, (2017) 209-213 (p.210)

and the rest of the performance. The play begins with a scene that includes many different women from art, culture, and history, including Marlene, the modern-day woman that the second half of the play is centered around. Some of these legendary women include Isabella Bird, Lady Nijō, Dull Gret, Pope Joan and Griselda. In the following quote, the women compare life stories and adventures while Marlene mostly listens and soaks in all the information.

> **Marlene** Griselda's life is like a fairy-story, except it starts with marrying the prince. [...]
>
> **Nijo** How old were you?
>
> **Griselda** Fifteen.
>
> **Nijo** [...] Had you ever seen him before?
>
> **Griselda** I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in the fields with the sheep. [...] But of course a wife must obey her husband. / And of course I must obey the Marquis. [...]
>
> **Joan** I never obeyed anyone. They all obeyed me[67].

This opening scene is symbolic of the themes that appear in Marlene's life for the rest of the play, including the struggles of 'motherhood, love, abuse, and disappointment'. It becomes evident during the rest of the play, and the scene itself, that these feminist heroes had this conversation with Marlene because they all 'stem from the crushing violence of a life lived on the terms of the patriarchy'.[68] As for the rest of the play, the chronology is non-linear, which was not a practiced concept in theatre during the 80s.

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[67] Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p.22-23.
[68] Ben and Justin, 'Top Girls Summary' in *LitCharts* <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/top-girls/summary> [accessed 23 March 2021].

Texts that follow a non-linear story structure were not familiar until Churchill's plays gained traction. British theatre had not encountered such shifts in time that go unexplained; thus, there is no clarification for the audience. This means that, for the audience, pieces of the story need to be put together by the viewers. Therefore, the audience must be flexible and understand that the play will not be set in realism nor follow a linear structure. Churchill does this in her early work; however, it becomes more prominent in her more contemporary performances. Specifically, Churchill's *Top Girls* described how much some individuals prospered during the Thatcher movement in Britain. In her other plays, such as *Serious Money (1987)*, Churchill tells a story of corruption and materialism that came from the financial sector of the British economy.

> Flight to England that little grey island in the clouds where governments don't fall overnight and children don't sell themselves in the street and my money is safe. [...] The city rising high into the sky, but the towers stopped short, cement, wires, the city spreading wider instead with a blur of shacks, miners coming down from the mountains as the mines close. The International Tin Council, what a scandal, thank God I wasn't in tin, the price of copper ruined by the frozen exchange rate, the two rates, and the government will not let us mining companies exchange enough dollars at the better rate, they insist we help the country in this crisis, I do not want to help, I want to be rich.[69]

Serious Money was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London for an audience that would be on the side of the individuals that Churchill was attacking. The audience mainly comprised people of the city, thus they flourished from the corporate greed that many others

[69] Caryl Churchill, *Serious Money*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p.59.

would consider a struggling time. What makes this play different than the State of the Nation theatre before it is that it changes the relationship with the audience. For example, *Serious Money* makes demands on the audience of a different type than *Top Girls*. Contrastingly, in *Top Girls*, the audience is asked to piece together the different elements of the play. In *Serious Money*, the audience must negotiate the writing itself because it is a verse drama. Churchill not only precipitated the revolution of contemporary theatre, but she also was one of the first successful feminist playwrights of her time. However, the most crucial flair that she brings to British theatre is how she tells her stories. She experiments with form and content.

Martin Crimp's Dealing with Clair as a Feminist Text

Martin Crimp's *Dealing with Clair* was revolutionary for its time, especially because he participated in the feminist theatre movement. In this subchapter, I will be analysing this text strictly as how it was represented in the feminist movement. Later in this dissertation, I will analyse it as a postdramatic text. Crimp makes bold decisions in this text and shows his audience the fears women deal with every day. This text may also show audience members how they may have been guilty of the same crimes as the villains in the play. *Dealing with Clair* follows a couple, Mike, and Liz, who are selling their home. They employ a real estate agent, who ends up being a beautiful young woman named Clair. A man named James offers to buy their house, and Clair gets stuck in the middle of the two parties and becomes 'an object of unhealthy curiosity on the part of James'.[70] A strange voyeuristic male gaze is exhibited from James and Mike onto the

[70] 'Dealing with Clair' in *Drama Online* <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/playtext-overview> [accessed 29 July 2021].

female characters throughout the play. The uncomfortable tension between the genders is meant to be felt throughout the space. Crimp is ambiguous when writing these uncomfortable moments and portrays his message through body language and uneasy lengths of silence. In a review by Billington, he describes this by discussing how 'language can camouflage people's baser actions'.[71] Crimp purposely makes the language vague to mimic real-life encounters between persistent men and women who do not reciprocate the advances. There is a disturbing moment between James and Clair where she stands up for herself after James goes on about how he imagines she lives. After he laughs at how she cannot afford to live anywhere but by the train tracks, she retaliates with,

> **Clair** I told you: I don't like being laughed at.
>
> **James** But Clair…
>
> **Clair** No. Stop.
>
> **James** All I meant Clair was that –
>
> **Clair** (*on 'Clair'*) I asked you to stop.[72]

The constant pressuring from James makes Clair obviously uncomfortable, which can be felt by the audience. By using this type of realistic behavior, the audience is involved in how the characters are feeling, however there is more to it. This play's version of realism is slightly different than past examples. The techniques that Crimp uses is subtlety, the characters do not make their intentions obvious to the audience, thus they must listen closely and carefully. Crimp

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[71] Michale Billington, 'Dealing With Clair review – Martin Crimp's fierce swipe at pious yuppies' in *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/oct/31/dealing-with-clair-review-martin-crimp> [accessed 23 March 2021].

[72] Martin Crimp, *Dealing with Clair* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1988), p. 51.

utilised these methods in his play, such as allowing his audience to come to their conclusions without the answer being too obvious; this is another factor in contemporary playwriting. Language becomes increasingly more ambiguous and extensively experimental. Techniques, such as vague dialogue, progressed into the 90s as experimentation became ever more present in British theatre.

New Forms of Theatre in the 1980s and 90s: In Yer Face Theatre

In-yer-face theatre, another form of playwriting that also attempted to create a new relationship to the audience, appeared in the 90s. This style of performance included new types of unconventional and chaotic storytelling that shocked the audience. This phrase was first coined by a British Theatre Critic, Alex Sierz, in 2001. This new theatre trend directly incorporated the audience through aggression-

> being forced to see something close up, having your personal space invaded. It suggests the crossing of normal boundaries. In short, it describes perfectly the kind of theatre that puts audiences in just such a situation.[73]

in-yer-face dramatists were interested in using shock as a theatrical weapon. They also engaged with the audiences in unusual ways. Some in-yer-face dramatists include Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson, and Sarah Kane. Kane was influenced by Forced Entertainment, an

[73] Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), p. 17.

experimental theatre company founded in 1984. Forced Entertainment will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Sarah Kane's In-Yer-Face Plays

In-Yer-Face theatre, specifically Kane's play *Blasted*, is an important marker in theatre history. This play set a precedent for shocking material that was written later on, and it proved to be very symbolic of the impact that the state of the world had on one's mental health. In *Blasted*, the play opens in a realistically looking hotel room with an angry alcoholic, Ian, and his much younger ex-girlfriend, Cate. They exchange unhealthy conversations and many violent interactions before a soldier comes banging down on their door with a gun. At the end of scene two, the stage direction indicates a huge explosion. The beginning of scene three begins shortly after the explosion went off.

> *There is a blinding light. Then a huge explosion. /Blackout* [...]
>
> **Scene Three**
>
> *The hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb. /There is a large hole in one of the walls, and everything is covered in dust which is still falling*.[74]

At this moment, the play's unrealistic nature reveals itself to the audience. Before this, there are shocking moments, such as Ian raping Cate after she faints. However, before the explosion, the play seems realistic to the audience. It is only at the end of scene two that the audience realises

[74] Sarah Kane, *Blasted*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.37.

what the rest of the performance will involve. Scene three is when the actions performed by the actors become progressively more shocking. The next scene is between Ian and the Soldier, where the roles are reversed, and Ian is the one who is assaulted. In a violent and horrifying display of aggression and power, the soldier molests Ian, which is described in detail by Kane's stage directions.

> (*He kisses **Ian** very tenderly on the lips./ They stare at each other)*
>
> **Soldier** You smell like her, same cigarettes.
>
> *He gets up and turns **Ian** over with one hand. /He holds the revolver to **Ian's** head with the other. /He pulls down **Ian's** trousers, undoes his own and rapes him - eyes closed and smelling **Ian's** hair. /The **Soldier** is crying his heart out. /**Ian's** face registers pain but he is silent.*[75]

Graham Saunders argues that, since many critics have begun examining her work, they have slowly begun 'erase[ing] any original intent by placing it below their own agenda', which he says has been easy since Kane is not here to defend her original intention.[76] In letters that she wrote to Alex Sierz, she stated that she was motivated

> to create something beautiful about despair, or out of a feeling of despair, [which is] for me the most hopeful, life-affirming thing a person can do. Because the expression of that despair is part of the struggle against it, the attempt to negate it.[77]

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[75] Sarah Kane, *Blasted*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.47.
[76] Graham Saunders, '"Just a Word on a Page and there is the Drama." Sarah Kane's Theatrical Legacy', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 13:1 (2003), 97-110 (p. 98).
[77] Graham Saunders, '"Just a Word on a Page and there is the Drama." Sarah Kane's Theatrical Legacy', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 13:1 (2003), 97-110 (p.105).

Kate battled with the notion of despair in many of her texts, such as *4.48 Psychosis,* the last play she wrote before her suicide in February 1999. She wished for her texts to be assertive towards her audience instead of meek, to force their attention. Such as in *4.48 Psychosis,* the script is in pieces and each scene does not seem to have a link to the next. This text is also shocking to the audience; however, it uses different techniques other than violence and sexual abuse. This text includes many scenes that detail Kane's depression and the words are not spoken by any specific character. The audience must sit in silence and listen to this performance while piecing together the scenes on their own to make sense of the play.

> What does she look like?
>
> And how will I know her when I see her? She'll die, she'll die, she'll only fucking die.
>
> *(Silence.)*
>
> Do you think it's possible for a person to be born in the wrong body? *(Silence.)*[78]

The audience is unable to respond to the questions Kane's character asks, even though it is followed by the deafening silence which begs for an answer. Kane most likely included these silences for this very reason, to symbolise how silent others were when she asked for help. Critics applaud her for not taking an easy route when including stage directions for the directors

[78] Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p.10.

who perform her work. Such as in *Blasted,* Kane directs the stage to blow up and for her characters to enact horrifying acts upon one another. In *4.48 Psychosis,* she includes scenes which have no relevant link to one another besides the theme of depression and suicide. The individuals who wish to put on her plays must find a creative way to fulfil Kane's intention; however, she refused to follow the rules. The push against realism that Kane put in her work is precisely what in-yer-face theatre intends to accomplish. It wishes to include the audience so that their tension and discomfort are what makes these performances so unique.

New Styles of Performance in the 1980s and 90s: Forced Entertainment

Each theatrical technique can be said to have influenced history and vice versa. In the 1980s, performance companies began to use techniques drawn from live performance art. Liz Tomlin gives credit to Forced Entertainment, a theatre company that first began incorporating experimental themes into its work in the 1980s and 90s. This group aims to include the audience in performances. It is notable to mention that Forced Entertainment does not create a structured script for their performances. Their art works best when it is a group effort discussed beforehand and becomes a unique experience shared with the audience. As for some of their other work, such as *Quizoola (1996),* Forced Entertainment challenges the structure of a standard performance. *Quizoola,* a style of play that is part game show, incorporates improvisation between their actors that stretches out over hours and allows the audience to come and go as they please. This performance evokes comical energy, such as the actors' clown makeup; however, the performers' questions spring on one another, ranging from horrific to hilarious. This

performance and many other Forced Entertainment productions call for the audience to take on a new role. As I have discussed, their audience is not present as analysts or observers; they are there to be witnesses. Being a witness means that they are intended to take all the events on stage that do not tie together and form them into their interpretation.

They also pioneered the inclusion of the ensemble as devisers of their own work, which 'manifest [as] an awareness of the poetic and rhythmic qualities of text in performance, such as explorations of riffs on a particular theme, lists and devices of repetition'.[79] Forced Entertainment has the intention of

> making performances that explore the contemporary world, performances that excite, challenge and entertain other people.[80]

They claim that even though their performances vary, their method incorporates improvisation that 'always strive[s] to be vivid and original, demanding a lot from audiences and giving a lot in return'.[81] Tomlin argues that the credit of being 'the single most significant force in shaping the landscape of postdramatic performance practice in the UK' goes to Forced Entertainment.[82] The inclusion of an ensemble to experiment with literary constraints is an effective technique that Forced Entertainment utilised. Nevertheless, Forced Entertainment's standard is that their art must generate energy and tension during the live performance. Forced Entertainment presented

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[79] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 120.
[80] Forced Entertainment (2020) <https://www forcedentertainment.com/about/> [accessed 28 November 2020].
[81] Forced Entertainment (2020) <https://www.forcedentertainment.com/about/> [accessed 28 November 2020].
[82] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 103.

itself as experimental and unique types of performance; thus, they never related with realistic forms of expression.

Once realism became less dominant and postdramatic theatre gained traction in British Theatre, Forced Entertainment continued being successful because their methods already incorporated trends of experimentation and audience inclusion. Their first performance, *Jessica in the Room of Lights (1984),* which was also their only performance that was not recorded, was an aesthetically pleasing choreographed piece of art. The techniques utilised in this performance are as follows and were used for five years,

> [The] use of taped voice rather than live speech, use of soundtrack, choreography of actions drawn from narrative and an approach to storytelling based on the collision and contradiction of fragments rather than on linear unfolding of events.[83]

The soundtrack they used for this performance was crafted by a hired composer, John Avery, who wrote the background music based on what he witnessed during rehearsals. After this successful performance, Forced Entertainment produced another performance, *The Set-Up (1985).* This play also included pre-recorded voice overs; thus, the actors never spoke live to their audience. In *Forced Entertainment's Early to Middle Years: Montage and Quotation* Gorman describes *The Set-Up* as a 'shift in tone to include [...] sequences of found movement in which the performers repeatedly dress and undress'.[84] The type of audience that both *Jessica in*

[83] Forced Entertainment (2020) <https://www forcedentertainment.com/projects/jessica-in-the-room-of-lights/> [accessed 28 November 2020].
[84] Sarah Gorman, 'Forced Entertainment's Early to Middle Years: Montage and Quotation' in *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994: Joint Stock Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Theatre de Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Women's Theatre Group and Talawa,* ed. by John Bull and Graham Saunders (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 198.

the Room of Lights and *The Set Up* were performed for was most likely avid-theatre goers interested in the experimentation of technology. The use of a non-linear story structure is also telling that their audience must be flexible in their absorption of the material. It is most likely that this performance, along with other Contemporary Theatre, is not meant to have one clear meaning or overall message. They are intended to be witnesses to the production instead of only viewing for entertainment.

Tomlin notes an increasing emphasis on the visual, physical and scenographic aspects of theatre, permitted by ongoing developments in visual and aural media and new technologies.[85] This trend was distinct from the political and analytical theatre from the past decade. Forced Entertainment, along with other companies, incorporated these techniques into their performances. *Instructions for Forgetting (2001)* was a performance meant to invoke themes of personal history and the ties it has to 'broader history called culture and politics'.[86] They incorporate technology by centering this whole performance around VCR's, cables, TVs and other technology of the period. Forced Entertainment describes this performance by explaining that-

> [...] using home movies, letters, and videotapes from friends alongside recordings of world events, *Instructions for Forgetting* explores video as an artefact, as a container of image and memory and as an occasion for speculation, storytelling, fiction, interpretation.[87]

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[85] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 118.
[86] Forced Entertainment, 'Instructions for Forgetting' in *Forced Entertainment* <https://www forcedentertainment.com/projects/instructions-for-forgetting/> [accessed 31 July 2021].
[87] Forced Entertainment (2020) <https://www forcedentertainment.com/projects/instructions-for-forgetting/> [accessed 28 November 2020].

but also [there] was a shift in multimedia performance by the mid-2000s away from the imperative to critique the impact of mass media and towards an exploration of its potential for the amelioration of social relations in an increasingly global world view.[88]

Companies such as Forced Entertainment became more and more influential for other theatre artists. Many playwrights during this time 'became more interested in examining not the duplicitous virtuality of what was constructed to appear real but the new realities that were being created by the virtual'.[89] Pushing away from the realistic form of presenting theatre was the main shift towards the postdramatic.

Conclusion

There are historical movements within theatre that change the relationship between audience and performance. These notable movements include early feminist theatre, political theatre that was published during Thatcher's term, In-Yer-Face theatre, and early experimental theatre. All these theatrical techniques began incorporating the audience in a new way which aims to have the audience witness rather than observe. This difference is given by the way that the playwrights write metaphorically and with ambiguous dialogue, thus forcing the audience to piece together the play themselves. No longer were playwrights detailing the play's intention to their viewers, rather they wished for them to discover it themselves through the dialogue and actions. With these new theatrical movements, the audience is now invited to witness rather than judge the performance.

[88] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 106
[89] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014: From Fringe to Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. 106

Chapter II: The Postdramatic and the Role of the Witness

In this chapter, I will begin by discussing postdramatic theatre and describe where it originated. Texts from postdramatic playwrights such as Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp will be analysed. Following this, I will examine the role of the witness and which playwrights use this method. Finally, I will explore the practices of both postdramatic and the role of the witness theatre and how they relate to one another. The structure of this chapter will follow a linear structure, beginning with the most recent techniques and texts first. This will allow for historical events to coincide with their appropriate theatrical texts.

This chapter will entail a further examination into the definition of postdramatic theatre. The term postdramatic theatre, as previously defined in the literary analysis, was first used in 1999 by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book *Postdramatic Theatre.* Lehmann's translator, Karen Jürs-Munby, wants to explain to the readers that Lehmann's definition of "post" does not mean a new period or "after" drama. She defines the postdramatic as 'a rupture [..] that continue[s] to entertain relationships with drama and are in many ways an analysis [...] of drama.[90] Lehmann explains that for the text to be labelled as postdramatic, we must deconstruct the relationship between drama and theatre and analyse how this relationship has changed in contemporary performances. Postdramatic theatre first began when playwrights wrote outside the rules of "drama". As further explained by Lehmann, many of the 'individual entertaining effects of the staging, the textual elements of plot, [and] character' were abandoned by postdramatic playwrights. He says that 'this explains why many spectators among the traditional theatre audience experience difficulties with postdramatic theatre' because it 'demands an ability to

[90] Hans-Thies Lehmann, Karen Juers-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre* (Abingdon:Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

perceive which breaks away from the dramatic paradigm'.[91] This "ability to perceive" is a feature of postdramatic theatre that Lehman stresses. Postdramatic theatre takes methods from Brechtian theatre, in that it is aware that there is a conscious audience viewing the performance. However, it steers clear of 'dogmatization, and the emphasis on the rational we find in Brechtian theatre; it exists in a time after the authoritative validity of Brecht's theatre concept'.[92]

In *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*, the writers explain that postdramatic theatre does not hold itself to traditional performance standards, such as strict character roles, setting, and plot. In addition to rejecting conventional modes of playwriting, postdramatic theatre moves the spectator to the center of the event. The audience is asked to participate more directly in the creation of the story. The purpose of these texts is focused on the viewer, which 'is recognised as being integral to how the "meaning" of any performance is generated'.[93] These playwrights want to spark empathy and awareness in their audience. Therefore, the audience is asked, as witnesses, to be constantly aware of the hidden context and come to individual conclusions.

In *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance (2012)*, Patrick Duggan discusses the audience-play relationship, and claims that 'witnessing brings with it implications of responsibility and imperatives to testify'.[94] Thus, the audience 'is driven by a desire to comment upon, stimulate some form of action in relation to and potentially come to reconstitute or historicize trauma-events and symptoms'.[95] Furthermore, being a witness in real life contrasts

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[91] Hans-Thies Lehmann, Karen Juers-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre* (Abingdon:Routledge, 2006), p. 30-31.
[92] Hans-Thies Lehmann, Karen Juers-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre* (Abingdon:Routledge, 2006), p. 33.
[93] Jerome Carroll, Steven Giles and Karen Jürs-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* (New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 8-9.
[94] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 85.
[95] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 85-86.

from witnessing a performance as an audience member. Witnesses, in the theatre, hold power within themselves to right the wrong that happened. In life, tragedy does not have to have happened for someone to become a witness. However, when audience members take on the position of the witness, without something tragic happening, there is no tension, and the audience simply becomes a viewer. Witnessing holds the implication that the audience is responsible for providing testimony, such as Duggan's example of being a witness to a car crash. Theatre of the Witness have a specific type of witnessing that calls for an ethical intervention from the audience. When trauma is presented on a stage, the audience is positioned as the witness to these actions. However, another uncomfortable realisation exists once the viewers recognise that their fellow audience members are also examining them.

There exist different types of witnessing; not only does the audience watch the actors, but the performer watches the audience, and the audience witnesses itself. Audience members witnessing the rest of the audience experience the same situation is essential for witness theatre. This is due to breaking the barrier between audience and performers. Since witness theatre makes the audience spectators to someone else's trauma, we are filled with that individual's emotions, and we share in their experience now instead of passively viewing it as a separate event. Nonetheless, feeling empathy is not the end of this relationship. Playwrights put us in the position of witnessing so we can then give testimony to what we saw. Plays which call for the audience to witness trauma 'creates a visceral human connection enabling the audience to be physically and emotionally moved by what they are presented with'.[96]

In live theatre, actors and audience members are influenced by each other's actions. Not only is everyone conscious of the fact that they are being watched, but the actors expressly are

[96] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 87.

set up behind a metaphorical and literal frame. This awareness of being watched forces the audience to take the messages of the performance personally, which is how postdramatic theatre 'directly addresses us', as Duggan claims.[97] Live theatre place the audience around a frame to witness the events and, thus, the audience are complicit in the acts. The act of being an audience member to postdramatic performances engages the witnesses to feel involved in the trauma,

> because we can, in theory, stop them at any point, secondly, because they occur precisely because of our material presented at the event and thirdly because we accept the contract that is constituted by the frame.[98]

This quote perfectly explains the art of bearing witness in postdramatic theatre. The audience is aware that this is a performance, however, the metaphorical "contract" that we sign as viewers is to be respectful and not interrupt. Thus, when a performance portrays horrific acts, we must sit silently, observe and be complicit. Audiences are aware that they will be a part of a live performance experience when tickets are purchased. We understand that there is a reciprocal relationship between viewers and performers, the actors present us with an experience, and the audience responds with laughter and applause when appropriate. Witnessing develops when a performance addresses their audience, with the intention of causing the audience to feel impacted in several ways. Such as, the role of the witness, where the performance presents trauma on stage with intention for the audience to feel as if they are complicit in the acts or that they must now give testimony.

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[97] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 87.
[98] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 87.

To summarise, the postdramatic texts that I will be examining in the following sections have a different relationship with their viewers than their modernist counterparts before them. This dynamic has changed what is asked of the audience, which has become a witness. The act of witnesses gives the audience a responsibility for what trauma is presented on stage, so they are now complicit in the events. This stimulates a desire for them to right the wrong that happens; however, witness theatre does not give them the option. This is where the tension builds since witness theatre asks for their testimony and the audience cannot give it. I will now go on to examine the work of Crimp, Churchill, tucker green, and Stephens and provide examples of how each playwright treats this audience-play relationship.

Martin Crimp's Postdramatic Texts

In the previous chapter, I analysed Crimp's *Dealing with Clair*, and how it was an important text in the feminist movement. In this Chapter, I will discuss this text and a few others of Crimp's plays as they represent postdramatic theatre. In Crimp's *Dealing with Clair*, the audience must work to piece together all the clues in order to understand Crimp's intention fully, this is how it represents a true postdramatic performance. This play encompasses the theme of men's abuse and the belittlement of women. It involves a young real estate agent, Clair, who is working hard to help a couple, Mike and Liz, sell their home. A mysterious man, James, makes a cash offer on the house and Clair becomes stuck in the middle between these two parties. This play does not reveal the characters' baser actions to the audience, they must discern the intentions of the characters through their own analysis. The stutters, pauses and overlapping speech adds to

the realistic nature of these situations. Also, it makes it harder for the audience to discern who has ill intentions and who is just innocently awkward in social situations.

> **Clair** The slabs.
>
> **Mike** Yes, I put down those slabs. (*pause)/* I'm afraid it's never had any fruit.
>
> **Clair** Well… (*Irrelevant.*)
>
> **Mike** I'm not sure what we'd do with it if it did. We're not gardeners, are you?
>
> **Clair** You're joking.
>
> *Both faint laugh.* [...]
>
> **Mike** (*pause)* So.[99]

Even though this may seem to be pushing back towards realism, audiences notice these literary constraints combined with other experimental techniques that remind them that they are being placed in the position of the witness instead of a passive assembly. By including awkward lengthy pauses and stutters, the audience is reminded that these actors are portraying characters meant to be organic people with their personalities and nuances. It heightens awareness that they are intended to analyse these characters to understand their baser intentions since the playwright will not reveal this information in an obvious way. Beneath the surface of the dialogue, the male characters behave in inappropriate ways that make the female characters uncomfortable.

Churchill's Postdramatic Texts

[99] Martin Crimp, *Dealing With Clair*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018) p.10-11.

Churchill, who emerged out of the feminist movement, incorporates techniques that require the audience to be witnesses in her work from the 90's onward, one of the many techniques she uses in her plays are literary constraints, which are used to explore the fragility of the human language. Literary constraints are postdramatic techniques because they further the audience-play relationship by asking the audience to piece together the playwright's clues to fully understand the play's message. In *Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp* by Elizabeth Angel Perez, there is a discussion revolving around how literary constraints are used-

> Literary constraints make it clear that textual essentialism – the fact that one may think a text contains its own truth and the author is the undisputable master of it all – is no longer acceptable: what gives the text its *ontos* is the act of reading, and the act of reading is easily guessed to be not within the text but, rather, in its "without".[100]

Another language game that contemporary playwrights use are stutters, pauses, and overlapping speech. Including this in actors' lines forces the audience to pay closer attention to the characters body language and the overall tension that is present during a scene. Angel-Perez describes Churchill's and Crimp's style as 'a kind of theatre playfully able to reveal humanity's inhumanity and the linguistic and ethical disaster of modernity'.[101] The focus on Churchill and Crimp's games with language is meant to remind the audience not to sit comfortably in passive

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[100] Elisabeth Angel-Perez, 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 79-95 (p. 80).

[101] Elisabeth Angel-Perez, 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 79-95 (p. 81).

engagement. Instead, they should understand that postdramatic performance is intended to identify a symbolic understanding of the world outside the space.

> [...] the emphasis on "perception", "appearance", and seemingly immediate "sensory" experience that is associated with postdramatic performance might be characterised as a kind of formal or reflexive turn, inasmuch as they relate to the connection between the "components" of theatrical presentation and the reconfigured relationship with the audience, or the turn against representation, sometimes seemingly at the expense of (thematic) reference to phenomena in the "external" world'. [102]

Carroll, Giles and Jürs-Munby describe the incorporation of literary constraints and other sensory additions in postdramatic performance as a way to remind their audience of the surrounding theatre space. Similarly, Angelaki challenges 'modern spectators [...] to take the journey into the new realms of the dramatic medium, not as passive bystanders, but as active participants'.[103] Literary constraints are utilised containing an ambiguous message without an exact resolution or explanation. Playwrights use this method to tell their audience the deeper meaning of the story by 'exiling the truth of the text into something exterior to the text'.[104] The addition of literary constraints allows for a playwright to still hold control over the meaning of their text without explicitly telling their audience what it is.

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[102] Jerome Carroll, Steven Giles and Karen Jürs-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* (New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 15.
[103] Vicky Angelaki, *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), p.8.
[104] Elisabeth Angel-Perez, 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 79-95 (p. 81).

Another way that playwrights experiment with plays to engage their audience further is to change the language. Contemporary strategies, such as utilising language games, were first seen in the 80s by Churchill; however, it is more common now in the twenty-first century. For example, Churchill is known for her use of literary constraints in *Blue Heart (1997)* and (as already mentioned in the previous section) *Serious Money*. Churchill utilises rhymes in her script as a play on Jacobean Drama. However, the games she plays with language and rhyming are used as a metaphor for the chaos of the play. With her more experimental work, like *Blue Heart*, rhythmic chaotic actions lead the audience on a path to their discovery instead of telling them directly. These methods of Churchill's, which include integrating the audience into the performance, are successful because they do not force the message into the minds of the audience. Her techniques also include language games; she overlaps her dialogue, makes her lines rhyme, and sometimes adds a rhythm to her text. Churchill also tampers with time; her plays can often exist outside of reality or not be bound to the rules of science and logic. For example, Churchill's play, *Blue Heart*, is indeterminate and obscure. *Blue Heart* contains two distinct plays in one: *Hearts Desire* and *Blue Kettle*. Churchill has used the term anti-plays to describe *Blue Heart* (the term was first coined by Peter Handke, an Austrian playwright who wrote *Publikumsbeschimpfung* or *Offending the Audience (1966)*). This pair of plays makes her audience co-authors. It forces the audience to work to assemble meaning from the text. Churchill includes her audience in this performance by incorporating ambiguous dialogue and strange circumstances that are not meant to mirror real life. Churchill still controls the overall meaning of her text, even if it is ambiguous. The inclusion of literary constraints and ambiguous dialogue force the audience to do more work to understand the hidden theme.

In the book, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity,* Cristina Delgado-Garcia reevaluates whether it is the playwright or the audience that holds control over a performance's message. Writing practices, such as literary constraints, create an effect that forces the audience to embody the text. Delgado-Garcia explains that this could only happen purposely, as it must be reinforced throughout the script 'using writing techniques that generate a sense of personal distinctiveness, self-expression, and social interaction'[105]. These playwriting techniques include a lack of direction in the text, forcing the production director to make the performance their own. Embodying these methods as a playwright gives more power to the audience and the creative team producing the play because there are no concrete conclusions. However, Delgado-Garcia analyses how contemporary playwrights have begun to take on contrasting roles. Playwrights allow their scripts to be molded differently by the directors who decide to perform their art. For example, in one of Churchill's plays, *Love and Information (2012),* the audience members are given complete control over the interpretation of the contrasting scenes. The entire play is composed of mismatched scenes that do not require to be played in any specific order. One scene, between two unnamed characters, discusses "God's Voice".

A And he definitely said do it.

B He said do it.

A In words.

B In words and inside me in knowing it was the right thing to do.

A In your heart?

[105] Cristina Delgado-Garcia, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, Incorporated, 2015), p. 5.

B Right through my whole being.

A In your toes?

B Yes in my toes, will you stop now?[106]

This scene never tells the audience what this "god" told the person to do or if it was good or bad. The actor's role when delivering these lines could either be to keep the answer ambiguous or add emphasis to suggest a specific meaning. However, the playwright leaves the message to the director and audience, engaging them to interpret it themselves.

Churchill's *Blue Heart* begins with *Heart's Desire*. The actors continuously reset repeatedly, reciting the same lines and motions. Eventually, something strange or terrible happens, and they reset again, only changing a small detail so that they have a different outcome. The role of the audience is to watch for patterns, to see if they can find any reasons for the characters resetting.

Maisie That'll be her.

Alice Do you want to go?

Brian *goes off. A ten foot tall bird enters.*

Reset to after "situations".

Brian It's not occasion occasion deliberately ruin it forty years stupid nasty.

Doorbell rings.

Maisie That'll be her.

Alice Do you want to go?

---

[106] Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information*, (London:Nick Hern Books, 2012) p. 30.

Silence. They don't answer the door and they wait in silence a longer time than you think you can get away with.

Reset to after "nasty".[107]

The characters in *Hearts Desire* are seemingly stuck in a loop, where every action has a different outcome. After about three circles in the script, the reader or audience can assume that this will go on for the performance's entirety. These characters are doomed to repeat their day, only to reach an additional fate each time. This loop causes the play to lack character arcs because every time the play begins to develop, it resets. The people in this world never learn from their mistakes, and even though the script changes what the actors do to see if it will cause a different outcome. They are stuck anxiously waiting for their daughter to return home yet are punished whenever their toxic behaviour shows through. Furthermore, Churchill leaves her audience hanging. The question as to why this family is doomed to repeat this event over and over is not answered. However, it seems to be symbolic of the chaos that can live under the surface of family life, but this is a conclusion that the audience must decipher themselves.

The second play, *Blue Kettle*, follows a young man who scams older women into thinking that he is their long-lost son. This play got its name from the unique addition that the words "blue" and "kettle" come to swamp the dialogue.

Derek What did you think I'd be, blue I was a kettle boy?

Mother Blue you was a little blue you liked buses.

Derek Did I blue to blue a bus?

[107] Caryl Churchill, *Hearts Desire* , (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997) p. 31-32.

[...]

Mrs Oliver Kettle, are you my son or not?

Derek Blue blue to have blue a mistake. There's been a kettle in the documentation.[108]

The progression of the play shows the characters including the words "blue" and "kettle" in everyday conversation more frequently. By the end of the performance, the characters' lines are only the letters found in those two words, '**Derek** K, t see bl'.[109] *Blue Kettle* is a carefully structured text, however the text becomes more and more chaotic. Churchill incorporates this literary constraint because she wants her audience to be frequently attentive and analytical of the performance. Calling *Blue Heart* an anti-play fits because it subverts all rules of theatricality, such as plot and character. *Blue Kettle*, specifically, does tell a linear story, however the plot gets swamped by the words blue and kettle. On the other hand, *Hearts Desire* does not follow a linear structure because every time the plot seems about to develop, it resets.

As previously mentioned, postdramatic theatre is a style of performance that does not abide by previous rules of drama; there should be a lack of structure. Thus, Churchill's plays from the 2000s and onwards all contribute to the push towards the postdramatic. Both texts in *Blue Heart* aim to engage the audience so that they can never predict what will happen next; thus, they try and put the pieces together in their way, so they make sense. The audience of *Heart's Desire* becomes engaged in these characters' lives because it is evident that they are doomed to relive their day continually. When outrageous and unrealistic actions occur throughout the play, it seems that each character's mind is playing scenes in their head. For

[108] Caryl Churchill, *Blue Kettle*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997) p.61, 66-67.
[109] Caryl Churchill,*Blue Kettle*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997) p. 68.

example, there is a moment in one of the many different scenarios where the parents receive a phone call saying that their daughter had been in a terrible accident and died; right after the call, the scene restarts, and the daughter is unharmed. As for *Blue Kettle*, the manipulation and lies from Derek cause the characters to abandon everyday language and instead only say 'blue' or 'kettle'. This language game could be a metaphor for anxiety forcing the mind to panic. The central theme consistent in both texts seems to revolve around family, and that it is far more complicated than some may recognise. However, like most postdramatic performances, this is something the audience must decide for themselves.

Tucker green's Postdramatic Texts

debbie tucker green work uses rhyming, rhythm or some other form of language that splits audiences onto unique paths of revelation. Her plays tend not to use realism; it is made very clear to the audience that they are in a performance space from the moment they enter, and it should not be forgotten. Witness theatre is meant to push the audience members to feel like they are watching a real event and thus feel empathetic towards the characters. When contemporary theatre utilises literary constraints, it 'is simultaneously a way of exposing the necrosis and failure of verbal language and a means of overcoming this loss and bereavement'[110].

In *Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays*, Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard explain the intentions behind this type of theatre. They begin by claiming that tucker green has written plays in which the audience play a vital role.

[110] Elisabeth Angel-Perez, 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 79-95 (p. 81).

Without the audience being live in person to witness the political and traumatic events, the play loses a tension that completes the overall intention. She does this by interrogating 'how reality is represented and constructed through the media leading to the desensitisation of the viewer to images of horror'.[111] tucker green responds to the trauma that her generation of Black British people have witnessed. This retaliation against those who have racially profiled against herself or other Black individuals 'coincides [s] with trends in Contemporary British playwriting in an age of terror while also tapping into current feminist concerns and discourses'.[112] Many of her texts reflect and comment upon specific events. For example, her play *truth and reconciliation (2011)* recalls the crisis after Apartheid in South Africa. However, another one of her plays, *hang (2015)*, never claims to be based on true events. Tucker green does not reflect on the events directly, instead, he engages with a topic that the audience might find difficult. In *hang*, a woman whose family was murdered gets to decide how she wants the killer to die. The language overlaps, and the characters speak over one another. None of the characters are named and are never referred to on stage by any name.

> **One** …Does your husband know you're here? /I mean – I know it's none of my – but I am concerned if you feel you have to shoulder all of / this on your – [...]
>
> **Three** I've *told* them. /I've *discussed* with my husband. /I've *told* my family. /(*dry*)If that's okay with you?
>
> **One** And… Are you in agreement? You and / your –

[111]Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 148).

[112] Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 145).

Three You're right. It is none of / your –

One It's none of my business I / know.[113]

This dialogue works with the audience's need to interpret the work themselves, rather than tucker green telling them what it means. This audience plays a crucial role in witnessing the intimate events that are portrayed in this performance. They are in the position of the witness to this woman's trauma and how the awkward police officers act around her. tucker green 'breaks away from the familiar traditions of social realism [...] by focusing on the emotional aftermath of these instances of violence, abuse and murder'.[114]

Another play by tucker green, *ear for eye (2018),* also places her audience in the role of the witness. An audience that is likely to be predominantly white, is put in an uncomfortable position where they are forced to witness many different Black British people, including families, discuss racial injustice and if progress has been made. In the second act, a Caucasian academic and their African American student argue over a recent mass shooting. It is an aggressive scene where the female student constantly tries to explain their point of view and is repeatedly shut down by their male superior.

Male [...] A male child –

Female a boy –

Male he is "a boy". Well observed well done

Female I –

[113] Debbie tucker green, *hang*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015), p. 11-12.

[114] Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 145).

> **Male** almost teenage and-but y'know a father leaving is damaging to a boy. At twelve. Damage, damage / done.
>
> **Female** But I think –
>
> **Male** studies say the studies say –
>
> **Female** but I think / that –
>
> **Male** the studies say – and I didn't come to you to ask you what you thought, y'know – er, you've come here to ask me, I'm here – you're there. You came – I was here. Yes? [115]

As Vicky Angelaki notes in *Politics for the Middle Classes: Contemporary Audiences and the Violence of Now*, this creates an uneasy and charged environment for the spectators, one that-

> establish[es] relationships rather than transactions, of allowing ourselves, as spectators, to become convinced that the theatre has the right, authority and perspective to tell us something about our lives today[…].[116]

Agreeing to this role as an audience member demands that you let go of a sense of security while watching.

The ongoing politically controversial topic of black people dying by gunfire is dealt with another one of tucker green's plays, *random (2008)*. This text is told from the point of view of a young black British girl who has lost her brother due to police violence. The text includes three

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[115] Debbie tucker green, *ear for eye,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018) p. 83.

[116] Vicky Angelaki, 'Politics for the Middle Classes: Contemporary Audiences and the Violence of Now', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 57-78 (p. 60).

characters, the daughter and her two parents. There is an emotional quote from which the play gets its name,

> ‘Random don't happen to everybody.
>
> So.
>
> How come
>
> ‘random’ haveta happen to him?
>
> This shit ent fair’[117].

The idea of a random killing is untrue; there is nothing random about the fate of young Black British youth in this play. This text demands that the audience witnesses these events that create a complex and empathetic response. Furthermore, the use of slang in tucker green’s text, even though this technique is not unique to contemporary theatre, is an interesting addition. Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte discuss tucker green’s use of slang in *Racial Violence, Witnessing and Emancipated Spectatorship in The Colour of Justice, Fallout and random*. The ‘black urban vernacular’ that is constant through the monologue focuses on the racial divide between the audience members. The language tucker green uses makes white audiences ‘aware of their racialized identity by “bringing [them] up against their prejudices”’[118]. tucker green does not refrain from using her own language into her play even though her audience may not understand it. The audience must witness the lives of other communities, even when they may speak in a different dialect. In this way, she approaches the material in a way like State of the Nation

[117] Debbie tucker green, *random*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2008), p. 49.

[118] Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte, ‘Racial Violence, Witnessing and Emancipated Spectatorship in The Colour of Justice , Fallout and random’ in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 96-120 (p. 110).

playwrights. However, the difference is that State of the Nation Theatre proposes solutions or summarises the argument while witness theatre does not. I will go into further detail on how tucker green confronts the audience in 'Chapter III: Experimental Peril in Contemporary British Theatre'.

In *stoning mary (2005)*, the events that transpire do not often (if ever) occur in European culture. tucker green adds slang to her characters' language to make the audience aware that the performance represents the community, which includes their language and slang. Young black audience members will instantly recognise the language being spoken on stage and relate to it. In contrast, for white audiences, the language made them aware of their racialised identity by bringing them up against their prejudices. In the play, tucker green combines three presumed 'third world stories into a white culture' and 'imported civil war and fascist horror into an English setting'[119] The characters in *stoning mary* are all white, thus forcing her white audience to witness how it would be if these events happened to them. The play puts our representatives into the situation more usually occupied by people we dismiss, because their culture, ethnicity or geographical location is different. Witness theatre addresses our morals and asks each audience member what they would do if they witnessed these actions. Another aspect of this responsibility that is forced onto the audience is sharing this space with the actors and other witnesses. Amongst the characters in this play, there are two sisters, one that is on death row to be stoned for killing her parents' killer. The older sister mocks and bullies her younger sister during many different scenes, but the younger sister eventually stands up for herself. Towards the end of the play, there is a powerful scene when the audience is finally told what the younger sister did to be put on death row.

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[119] Michael Billington, 'Stoning Mary' in *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/apr/06/theatre1> [accessed 1 April 2021]

‘**Older Sister** butchu killed / a –[...]you killed a man.

Younger Sister And I’m gonna be stoned down for it.

Older Sister You killed a man who was a boy.

Younger Sister … That *boy* was a soldier.

Beat.

Older Sister That soldier was a child –

Younger Sister that *child* killed my parents. *Our* parents, *ourn*.… I done somethin. Least I done somethin. I done somethin – I did. I did. I did – I done somethin’.[120]

At this point in the play, the audience has witnessed the actions of the soldier and the sister. tucker green leaves it up to her witnesses to decide who to empathise with. At this point in the play, we have met the girls’ parents and the child soldier, all of which get the story told from their point of view and without explicit judgement from the playwright. Here, there is a distinction from State of the Nation, which is all about the playwright making a judgement. Tucker green asks her audience to make the choice here without implementing a bias in the script. Even though this play takes place ‘in some abstract no-man's land’, these actions that transpire on stage have real-life equivalents.

Sometimes, tucker green’s work deals directly with historical events. In *truth and reconciliation,* the audience is aware that the events depicted represent what many families went through during Apartheid. To accurately perform a story of a tragic historical event, there needs to be a responsibility ‘to the truth of what happens during an event and to being part of its

[120] Debbie tucker green, *stoning mary*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), p.63-64.

continuing circulation in history'[121] In one scene set in Rwanda in 2005, a widow and her son and father sit with her husband's killer to receive some closure. However, the assailant makes it ever the more difficult for the family to find peace.

Man He called you.

Widow You can stop / now.

Man He called for you –

Widow stop / now

Man he called your name

Widow this is not him –

Man he called –

Widow this is not / *him*

Man he called your –

Widow no.

Man Stella… Stella.[122]

This play represents events that have happened, which heightens the tension because the audience knows they are witnessing something that they cannot change.

Clark Baim, in *Staging the Personal: A Guide to Safe and Ethical Practice*, argues that politically historical performances were being written because 'authors and artists were

[121] Patrick Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 89.
[122] Debbie tucker green, *truth and reconciliation*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), p. 60-61.

becoming increasingly interested in using their work to foment political and social change'.[123] In *truth and reconciliation*, the audience is shown specific counties and the year the scene takes place. In each scene, the audience must observe victims of violence and genocide and each procession of victims must confront their assailants. In many parts of the world the intention of these meetings was to resolve conflicts. However, it was a painful experience for the victims and their families to speak directly to their aggressors. For example, the last scene is between one of the innocent fallen victims, a child, and a soldier who killed them. The soldier is haunted by this ghost by having her confront him about why he killed her.

> **Child** 'I was running away. Everyone was running away. I counted sixteen. Live rounds. Amongst the other live rounds around me. My stones were no match.[124]

By the end of the scene, the child compels her attacker to show her mother where her body is buried, and he agrees. The intensity of this performance and the audience's knowledge that it is based on real events engage the audience in an empathetic response.

This scene echoes one in *stoning mary*. In that play, the child soldier threatens the wife and husband, who assume that he is there to rob them. However, he is there to commit an act of violence.

> **Husband** There is nothing – there's nothing – there is nothing else –
>
> **Wife** no. No.

[123] Clark Baim, *Staging the Personal: A Guide to Safe and Ethical Practice*, (Birmingham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), p. 34.
[124] Debbie tucker green, *truth and reconciliation*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), p. 77.

Husband There is nothing else we can do …Is there. Is there? Is there.

Child

Husband

Beat.

Child Beg.[125]

The connection to *truth and reconciliation* happens here-

Woman A I raised my son – not to lose him to yours's fuckin cause. [...]

Woman I came here – on my own – that's what kind of woman / I am.

Woman A You could've / stopped it.

Woman That I came here at all – is what kind of woman / I am.

Woman A She could've stopped / him.

Man A You could've / stopped him.

Woman A And saved a lot of mourning mothers in the meantime.

Woman I'm a mother in mourning –

Woman A your own fault.[126]

Both texts alert the audience to the universality of the events portrayed. It shows a predominantly white audience that they are not immune from these horrors. However, the audience must watch

[125] Debbie tucker green, *stoning mary*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), p.41.
[126] Debbie tucker green, *truth and reconciliation*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011) p. 67-68.

without intervening. Tucker green's plays confront the audience knowing that they cannot do anything to change what has happened, which creates even more tension.

Simon Stephens' Postdramatic texts

Simon Stephens' *Pornography* also deals with real life events, in this case the London bombings on the 7th of July 2005. This play tells the individual stories of people living in Britain; mostly, personal details are shared with the audience. The audience is aware that the story counts down to the bombings, which resulted in the death of fifty-two people. The play's title comes off as abrasive at first before watching the performance; however, the intention becomes apparent after the first scene of the play. Some scenes do involve sex, and one shows characters watching pornography, however it is a metaphor for how the audience is forced to view the victims' live countdown to their fate. Michael Billington comments-

> this, I presume, is the real pornography that vindicates Stephens's title; one that views people in the mass rather than as individuals fulfilling, as here, their own sad, strange, tragi-comic personal destinies[127].

Stephens wants us to follow the stories and get lost in them just as the individuals at the time did. No one knew what would happen on the seventh of July, and the playwright also wanted us to forget what doom was overshadowing all of this. There was a moment, in the prologue, where the lack of realism revealed itself,

[127] Michael Billington, 'Pornography', in *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/aug/07/michael-billington-review-pornography> [accessed 9 March 2021].

> I am going to keep this short and to the point, because it's all been said before by far more eloquent people than me.
>
> But our words have no impact upon you, therefore I'm going to talk to you in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood.
>
> *Images of hell.*[128]

This presentation Stephens gives before the characters reveal themselves is meant to force the audience to realise that this performance is intended to educate and reveal the horrors of that day. He uses literary constraints in a similar way to tucker green, adding stutters and repetition. This is found in moments where the character's mind is on display for the audience.

> Where were you? Where were you? Which shops? What were you doing? What were you doing there? What were you buying? What are you going to paint? I want to know what you need paint for. I want to know what you want to paint. I want to know where you've been.[129]

Here, we hear the woman's repressed thoughts. It seems that she barely even lets herself unpack these thoughts before moving to the next. This is another example of how playwrights incorporate language games to make it obvious to the audience that the play is realistic. Even though this play reflects a real-life event, Stephens utilises many techniques to make this

[128] Simon Stephens, *Pornography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 3.
[129] Simon Stephens, *Pornography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 5.

apparent. Firstly, he adds in his stage directions that he would like images of hell to be shown in the background of some scenes. The audience is aware of the fate that will meet each of the characters by the end of the performance. The background images strengthen that notion. Stephens notes that 'this play can be performed by any number of actors. It can be performed in any order'.[130] But, as a review of the play states, 'numbering each monologue, rather than naming [..] presents the illusion of countdown to the explosion'.[131] Secondly, the natural language matches the tone of the whole performance, which is meant to represent how the days leading up to the bombing went normally just as any other day would. Sometimes the language is meant to portray internal dialogue; other times, it is an everyday conversation. Overall, *Pornography* is a postdramatic text because it includes 'a thoroughgoing reconfiguration of the relationship between stage and audience, predominantly in ways that aim at generating audience [...] involvement'.[132] The audience is meant to piece together scenes which are presented as monologues and decipher what the playwright is trying to tell them.

Conclusion

Postdramatic theatre is defined as a general trend which began to dissect the relationship between play and audience. The plays discussed in this chapter are postdramatic because of how they include the audience. Furthermore, the subtlety of the way the playwrights present their message make them postdramatic as well. Crimp's *Dealing with Clair* includes ambiguous

[130] Simon Stephens, *Pornography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 2.
[131] Selma Ari De Rossi, 'Pornography- by Simon Stephens', *Current Issues in Drama, Theatre and Performance* <https://currentissuesjames.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2016/11/10/pornography-by-simon-stephens/> [acessed 22 Sep 2021].
[132] Jerome Carroll, Steven Giles and Karen Jürs-Munby, *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* (New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 4.

dialogue that forces the audience to piece together the clues to come to the play's overall theme. Other postdramatic playwrights, such as Churchill and tucker green relinquish authority to the audience and include many different techniques, such as literary constraints. Literary constraints can be defined as any language “rule” that a play follows throughout, such as the use of the words “blue” and “kettle” in *Blue Kettle*. This unique use of language forces the audience to analyse the performance, since the playwright will not summarise the theme for them. The spectators are not meant to decipher the hidden message on their own. Another postdramatic technique is the role of the witness, which has the overall intention of making the audience spectators to trauma presented on stage. Witness theatre can be a reflection of general reasons for trauma, or it can be an interpretation of real-life events, such as *truth and reconciliation* and *Pornography* do. What will be discussed in the following chapter is the inclusion of traumatised characters and how that translates into the audience-play relationship.

Chapter III: Traumatised Characters

State of the Nation playwrights tended to create clear character arcs (see, for example, Susan in *Plenty*). This is to maintain structure and development, so a story does not remain stagnant and so that there is a resolution that makes an audience feel closure for the characters' lives that they invested in. However, contemporary playwrights have experimented with these existing structures to change the rules of what we know to be true. Some British theatre, such as Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* and Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*, have been criticised for lacking character. However, according to Cristina Delgado-García in *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, these plays do not limit character personalities; instead, they 'warrant rethinking'.[133]

When a play lacks characters, the scenes can become personal to the audience members since they do not separate them as individuals. However, Delgado-García argues that focusing on what a text lacks, such as character, means you miss out on what the text is truly creating. These plays focus more on 'identity and its politics' rather than character personalities.[134] However, what we notice now is a removal of a character arc and any form of resolution for the audience's comfort. Delgado-García argues that there is a 'widespread acknowledgement that theatrical character lies at the intersection of aesthetic and philosophical inquiries about subjectivity'.[135] Audiences relate to characters due to their own experiences and how they personally perceive the

[133] Cristina Delgado-García, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), p. 1.
[134]Cristina Delgado-García, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), p. 6.
[135]Cristina Delgado-García, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), p. 9.

character and themselves. This allows contrasting personalities from their viewers to engage in this interaction.

Churchill: Far Away and *Escaped Alone*

Churchill's *Love and Information*, which was first introduced in the previous section, 'Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness', relinquishes control to the audience because of the vague dialogue Churchill implemented. *Love and Information* is a contemporary play that encompasses many different techniques, and for this reason, it will be used as an example throughout this dissertation. In this chapter, this play is used as an example for a lack of character development. I will explain where there seems to be a lack of character in this play and why this technique is used. In a scene titled *Ex*, unnamed characters speak to each other and reminisce on their past relationship.

> I sometimes go past that coffee shop.
>
> Which one?
>
> The one where we kept trying to say goodbye.
>
> I think I've blotted that whole day out.
>
> We were really happy.
>
> Or sad, we used to cry.
>
> Did we?
>
> Sometimes.[136]

[136] Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012) p.38.

The exclusion of characters ensures that her audience feels connected to the problems presented in the scenes rather than the people performing them. This method of connecting to your audience must be reinforced throughout the script 'using writing techniques that generate a sense of personal distinctiveness, self-expression, and social interaction'.[137] The characters are unnamed, and there are no directions included in the script. Thus, the playwright's intention behind the dialogue is up to the audience to determine. The characters in this specific script could be different for every scene, or the director could use actors multiple times. This is what Churchill includes in the stage instructions at the beginning of the play text, which furthers the notion that the progression of story is not an important factor for this performance.

Churchill's pair of plays *Blue Heart*, which has also been discussed as an example for postdramatic writing in 'Chapter II', includes the technique of absolving character from the performance. Right at the start of the play, the structure and loss of character development is revealed to the audience

> **Alice** *enters in coat with bag.*
>
> **Alice** Tell her I'm sorry and I'll phone later to tell her where I am.
>
> *Exit* **Alice**.
>
> **Brian** Was that the front door? Alice? Alice.
>
> **Maisie** I don't think you –

[137]Cristina Delgado-García, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), p. 5.

> *Reset to top,* **Alice** *in room as before,* **Maisie** *as before,* **Brian** *enters putting on old cardigan.*[138]

The characters in *Blue Heart* never grow and learn from their mistakes, thus there is no possibility for a character arc.

A later play, *Far Away* (2000), is set in a post-apocalyptic world and the audience must witness these traumatised characters continue working and living their lives as normal. Matthew Cheney, wrote in a review -

> 'These dystopias are not fun; they do not inspire hope in the human condition, they do not let us revel in mass destruction and imagine ourselves as plucky survivors. They are screams against fate. The world of these stories will not *be destroyed*; it *is* destroyed already when the curtain first rises, whether the characters know it or not'.[139]

Far Away revolves around a young girl, Joan, and her family who seem to live in a strange catastrophic world where normal civilians enact violence and torture against one another. In the first scene, Joan is a small child who follows after her uncle when she hears a scream in the night, and her aunt, Harper, tries frantically to cover for her uncle's illicit actions.

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[138] Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997), p.7.
[139] Matthew Cheney, 'Dystopia on Stage: Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*', in *tor.com* <https://www.tor.com/2011/04/14/dystopia-on-stage-caryl-churchills-far-away/>

> **Harper**: [...] I'm going to tell you what's going on. Your uncle is helping these people. He's helping them escape. [...] Your uncle's going to take them all into the shed and then they'll be all right.
>
> **Joan**: They had blood on their faces.
>
> **Harper**: That's from before. That's because they were attacked by the people your uncle's saving them from.
>
> **Joan**: There was blood on the ground.
>
> **Harper**: One of them was injured very badly but your uncle bandaged him up[140].

This scene is symbolic of society's naive attitude towards war or outside threats. Her aunt could simulate the news or media's response to society's questions about disastrous happenings. However, as outlined in the play, the characters in this world are complicit in the cycle of war, torture, and trauma. But even though the adults in this scene are violent and aggressive, they try to keep the children innocent in the occurrence. Harper lies to Joan to keep her safe from the truth but as Joan reveals that she saw a lot more than she said to start, Harper reverts to the lies she told her at first and devises another lie as to why her uncle may be killing children in the backyard.

The following scene in *Far Away* shows Joan, who is now an adult woman, and her coworker, making hats for prisoners. This is a metaphor of the way war and veterans are glorified and romanticized because they are making beautiful and extravagant hats for prisoners to be burned alive in. The audience is now aware that this post-apocalyptic world has morals that differ from present day life, however, the subject of the scene is still shocking. This scene is

[140] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*, (London:Nick Hern Books, 2000), p. 18.

paradoxical, the hats are a distraction that ends up reinforcing the degrading nature toward the prisoners. This scene shows a famous stage direction written by Churchill that describes how many prisoners should be cast to do the parade procession with extravagant hats. She writes that 'five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?'[141]. In the last scene, humanity is at war with animals. The characters go back and forth between saying they hate crocodiles to saying they hate a specific race of people.

> **Todd**: I never liked cats [...]
>
> **Harper**: Did you know they've been killing babies? [...] They jump in the cots when nobody's looking.
>
> **Todd**: But some cats are still ok.
>
> **Harper**: I don't think so.
>
> **Todd**: I know a cat up the road.
>
> **Harper**: No, you must be careful of that[142].

This is reminiscent of how politicians use 'us and them' tactics to give the impression that some races of people are evil and 'animalistic'. This last scene is meant to resonate with the audience in any way that they may connect with it. For example, have they said hurtful things such as this before, or have they been hurt by these phrases that were said by someone else? Furthermore, Churchill does not give her audience the satisfaction of a conclusion or any form of resolution.

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[141] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*, (London:Nick Hern Books, 2000), p. 30.
[142] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*, (London:Nick Hern Books, 2000), p. 36-37.

This performance, with its 'suggestion and ambiguity, [is] utterly lacking in resolution' which would prove to be frustrating 'in the hands of a less skilled writer'[143].

Escaped Alone (2016) is also set in a post-apocalyptic world. The characters also have commonalities because they try to distract themselves from their harsh realities. *Escaped Alone* features four women of 'at least seventy'[144] who sit outside Sally's backyard and have disturbing conversations that occur over a couple summer afternoons.

> **Sally** she'd say the answer and it was always right
>
> **Mrs J** I could always make change quick with the shillings and pence
>
> **Vi** we'd be the ones got it wrong
>
> **Lena** easier now it's decimal
>
> **Sally** always right.
>
> **Lena** And Vera
>
> **Mrs J** Four hundred thousand tons of rock paid for by senior executives split off the hillside to smash through the roofs, each fragment onto the designated child's head. Villages were buried and new communities of survivors underground developed skills of feeding off the dead where possible and communicating with taps and groans.[145]

[143] Matthew Cheney, 'Dystopia on Stage: Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*', in *tor.com* <https://www.tor.com/2011/04/14/dystopia-on-stage-caryl-churchills-far-away/>

[144] Caryl Churchill, *Escaped Alone*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 4.

[145] Caryl Churchill, *Escaped Alone*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 7-8.

In the first scene, the women begin with seemingly normal conversation. However, a monologue by Mrs. J reveals the true nature of their lives. This is the moment in the play where the lack of security reveals itself to the audience. The whole first scene, up until that moment, the audience would have no reason to believe this play is anything, but a realistic story set in realism A similar moment occurs in *Far Away*-

> **Joan** I went out.
>
> **Harper** When? just now?
>
> **Joan** Just now.
>
> **Harper** [...] How did you get out? I didn't hear the door.
>
> **Joan** I went out the window. [...]
>
> **Harper** Well that's enough adventures for one night. You'll sleep now. Off you go. Look at you, you're asleep on your feet.
>
> **Joan** There was a reason. [...] I saw my uncle. [...] He was pushing someone. He was bundling someone into a shed. [...]
>
> **Harper** Well I have to tell you, when you've been married as long as I have. There are things people get up to, it's natural, it's nothing bad, that's just friends of his your uncle was having a little party with. [...]
>
> **Joan** If it's a party, why was there so much blood?[146]

Up until this moment in the play, the audience most likely believes Harper, after all, Joan is just a child. However, after Harper continues to get caught up in her lies, Joan's story of what she

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[146] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*, (London, Nick Hern Books, 2000), p. 11-15

witnessed becomes more and more believable. When Joan reveals that she saw blood, this is when the audience realises that what Joan saw was nightmarish and horrid, nothing like her aunt is explaining. Churchill builds suspense in her opening scenes to shock the audience and keep their attention. She waits to reveal the true nature of the play until the audience has already gotten a little comfortable, however, for the remainder of the performance, the audience is left on the edge of their seats, trying to discern what will happen next.

tucker green: random and *truth and reconciliation*

Tucker green is a playwright who engages her audience in her texts by immersing them in the trauma her characters go through. In some of her plays, she imitates real life circumstances to make it more real for her audience. Her plays tell her audience a story of fear and neglect that has been put on Black and minority individuals from the rest of the world. A notable difference between tucker green and Churchill is also how they interact with their audience. For instance, Churchill puts her audience in the role of an investigator. Her plays are complex and require piecing together, which keeps her audience engaged and critical of the story. However, tucker green places her audience in the role of the witness. The audience is forced to observe, listen, and understand the injustice that is being portrayed on stage. The audience cannot help the characters or speak up on their behalf because of the theatrical convention that the audience must remain silent for a performance. Throughout the play, tucker green implicitly asks her audience what they would do if they were in this circumstance in real life.

Angelaki argues that if theatre wishes to strengthen its relationship with its viewers, then they must engage in a 'flexible ground of intercommunication'[147]. There are still political plays that do not remain unbiased towards the playwright's political views, such as tucker green's *truth and reconciliation* and *random* (That were first mentioned in Chapter II); however, the audience plays a large role in the performance. For example, in *truth and reconciliation,* tucker green writes with emotion from the point of view of the families, which makes it obvious which side of the issue she wants her audience to empathise with. A mother who has lost her child at the hands of soldiers expresses her pain for how her government has handled the situation.

> I have twenty-two years of not knowing to wonder on. And live with. With no body to bury. They have had twenty-two years knowing. And not saying. *Twenty-two*.[148]

The audience has an important role in tucker green's performances, which is to witness. In *random*, the actress has a desperate conversation with the audience, and continuously implicitly seeks a response from her witnesses, however no one that is watching ever responds to her. In *truth and reconciliation,* there are characters who take on the role of the assailant, however in *random*, the blame is directed towards the audience. The theatrical conventions that force an audience into silence is something that tucker green plays with here.

> Baby women

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[147] Vicky Angelaki, 'Politics for the Middle Classes: Contemporary Audiences and the Violence of Now', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 57-78 (p. 60).

[148] debbie tucker green, *truth and reconciliation* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), p. 41.

see me

upset

ask brazen as brazen baby women do

'Is it true he was your brother?'

(Beat.)

'Nah man – wrong'

she say

'if it was some skank little hoodrat then – '

That would be alright?

(Beat.)[149]

The pause after the actress asks, 'that would be alright?', creates tension in the theatre because her question goes unanswered. It is a metaphor for the way that society ignores Black people that deal with these tragedies in real life.

tucker green's characters follow a linear storyline and have their own choices they make which can either benefit them or traumatise them further. An example of this can be found in tucker green's *hang*,

Three I want him hung./(*Beat.*)/ I want him hung. /…That's my decision./*Beat.*.That was my decision. *Beat./*And I was never good at maths. Never any good at maths. /And I hope whoever hangs him is as shit at maths as I was. /That was my decision when I walked into the room. And that is my decision, now.

[149] debbie tucker green, random, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2008), p.39.

One …Okay. /Okay./*Beat./*You're sure – ?

Three I'm sure.[150]

The lack of character name is an aspect that makes the audience pay more attention to the overall trauma rather than the character's individuality. This experience is not unique to this one individual. Unnamed characters are used to encompass all similar experiences into one story, so the audience gets a sense that this play is about the collective rather than a singular and non-recurring moment. Similar to all of tucker green's plays, rather than giving her audience the impression that her plays are just stories, she recounts traumatic events which have occurred to force her audience to witness them, so they do not go forgotten.

Martin Crimp: Men Asleep.

The use of abstract settings in contemporary British theatre is another technique that is being further implemented today, which was first seen in post-WW2 British plays. This was a method of Beckett's performances. Contemporary theatre is now turning away from the realistic, physical interpretations of turmoil that came after Beckett. Instead, today's playwrights, such as Martin Crimp, utilise unnatural language and mental settings rather than tangible ones. One of Crimp's recent plays, *Men Asleep (2019)* , plays with relationships, language and setting at the same time. This play is performed by two couples, one in their fifties and another in the twenties. The setting is not included in the stage directions, rather it is implied from the dialogue that they

[150] Debbie tucker green, *hang*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015), p.58-59

are at the older couple's home. However, the dialogue is strange and sometimes violent and confusing, which makes the world that these characters live in very dystopian.

> **Julia** (*amused*) You look like you want to hit me.
>
> **Tilman** I do not want to hit you.
>
> **Julia** What is it you want to do to me then, Tilman?
>
> **Tilman** Because you know nothing about Josefine.
>
> **Julia** So what is it you want to do? Oh? – nothing? – so what is there to know?
>
> **Tilman** Exactly: we are employers – employers keep their distance.
>
> **Julia** And if she wants to talk to me? – to take me to a bar and talk to me?
>
> **Tilman** She does not want to talk to you. She does not want to take you to a bar and talk to you – and even if she *does* take you to a bar and talk to you she has nothing to talk to you *about*.[151]

The characters often speak without responding to what was said to them. Furthermore, these characters remain symbolically trapped in this space, sometimes expressing their desire to leave, but never do. This also leads to the theory that these characters are not merely having a professional overnight gathering for work. Rather, that they are stuck with one another, similarly to how they express how they are 'stuck' in boring careers.

> **Paul** I want to hear about the furniture.
>
> **Tilman** The furniture is boring.

[151] Martin Crimp, *Men Asleep*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2019), p.117,118.

Paul I don't believe that.

Tilman The furniture thing is really really boring but okay – sure – if you work in an office you probably sit in one of our chairs. And you probably work at one of our tables. [...] Your chairs here for example are not well-made. That's why you have a slight stoop. Your back has not been well supported. The stoop is slight now – sure – but if you go on sitting in chairs like this it will get more pronounced, and eventually you'll find you'll fold over and kind of collapse into yourself. [...] The fact is, that the human head is incredibly heavy. [...] It's not just the weight of the head, it's the weight – well you know this better than I do – it's the weight of everything in it. [...] I'm boring – sorry – look at me: I'm like furniture.[152]

Each of the characters in *Men Asleep* seems to represent either an emotion or a fear. For example, the character of Tilman encompasses feelings of dread and anxiety. The entire premise for this play is how all these different personalities interact with one another. However, it is also symbolic of how different emotions can become disordered and trapped in one's mind if not handled in a healthy way. As previously mentioned, Crimp's texts usually encompass similar themes, one of fear and worry, and take place in a nightmarish atmosphere. Elisabeth Angel-Perez explains that Crimp's method of writing is defined as 'belonging to the category of the "drama-in-the-head" and as taking place in a "mental space, not a physical one"'. The audience is transported inside the main character's mind, characterised as 'a new place where nothing

[152] Martin Crimp, *Men Asleep*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2019), p.103-105.

takes place'[153]. A strange game is played between the playwright and the audience, keeping the viewer engaged and always questioning.

Simon Stephens, David Eldridge and Robert Holman's A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky

Simon Stephens, David Eldridge, and Robert Holman's production of *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky* is set in a post-apocalyptic world. This play tells the story of a family of four generations that come together on a farm in England. The family used to be broken and uncommunicative, however, given the unfortunate news, they find ways to get along. The first scene reveals the uncomfortable fate that everyone will face in two weeks. Even though the characters' personalities could be relatable, their specific situation is not one that the audience would ever have experience with. They are now traumatised by the information that they will all perish together in a short amount of time, thus they behave as such. The play does not give much context before it reveals the traumatic circumstances-

> A cosmic string is going to tear the Universe into a thousand pieces. It's a pearl necklace of black holes. It will slice through everything we know like a cheese cutter. [...] I've always known I was insignificant. The world is a tiny place. We're not important.[154]

[153] Elisabeth Angel-Perez, 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 79-95 (p. 83).

[154] David Eldridge, Robert Holman and Simon Stephens, *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 5.

This is obviously not a normal situation; thus the audience knows this play will not be set in realism. However, there is still structure and a sense of realism to this play as it continues, it is only in a later scene when a character claims she is falling apart and pulls out a tooth and a fingernail when we feel uneasy as an audience member or a reader.

> **Nicola** I'm falling apart.
>
> **Nicola** *opens her mouth and takes out a tooth.*
>
> My teeth are falling out.
>
> *She pulls off a finger nail.*
>
> My finger nails are coming away. I've got bruises everywhere[155].

This is when it is very clear that there is a lack of security. These characters are encompassed by their trauma. They know the world is ending and are not driven by the intention of maintaining their long-term health. Rather, they are driven by their need for a resolution between themselves and their loved ones. Even though this is a play set during an apocalypse, the theme of family and love is at the forefront of the conversation. As Michael Billington says that 'together, the writers have created less an apocalypse drama than a family saga that explores loveless marriage, fraternal rivalry and the undisclosed hurts of everyday life'[156].

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[155] David Eldridge, Robert Holman and Simon Stephens, *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 40.

[156]Michael Billington, 'A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky', in *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/aug/07/michael-billington-review-pornography> [accessed 9 March 2021].

The characters are aware of what will be the earth's downfall, and the difference between this family and the characters in other post-apocalyptic plays that have been previously discussed is that they do not live in denial. Most of them have faced the fact that they are all going to die together, and they admit that they are frightened as well. Only one of the characters, Margaret Benton, the oldest in the play and the mother of five boys, has some denial, '**William** Do you think I will see the end, Mother? **Margaret** I hope so. If the end comes'.[157] Other than Margaret, the rest of the family understands that they must treat these next two weeks as their last. They reconcile old relationships among themselves and prepare for the end. One specific relationship that the characters are working on mending is between a father, daughter, and the son that she left her father with six years ago.

> **Jake** Where are you going to be?
>
> **Nicola** When? *A slight pause.* I'll be in London. *A slight pause.* [...]
>
> **Jake** Come with Roy and me to Mill Farm, Nicola. *A slight pause.*
>
> **Nicola** I don't want to see him die. *A slight pause.*
>
> **Jake** He doesn't admit it but he's very frightened about what's going to happen. He wants you to be there with him, Nicola. I very much want you to be there, too. We're going to get a train at the end of next week.[158]

This moment shows the audience that many of the family members are putting aside their differences so that they can find peace when the world ends. Many of them are planning to all

[157] David Eldridge, Robert Holman and Simon Stephens, *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 30.
[158] David Eldridge, Robert Holman and Simon Stephens, *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 39.

come together and be on their old family property so they can watch the stars explode in the sky together. These raw emotions are rare in everyday life since many of us do not have to cope with the world ending. However, this shows the audience how reconciliation with family can be healing and that we can all make these decisions without the pressure of an apocalypse. The play involves the audience in the consideration of these issues, although it does so without drawing a clear conclusion. The characters' aim is to just be together, eating jam and cheese and watching all the stars explode in the sky. This play, unlike some previously mentioned, includes a character arc even though the character's fate is sealed. These characters admit their faults, some make amends with each other, and others cannot cope with knowing the world is ending and commit suicide. However, these characters are not the same ones that we meet in the beginning. *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky* has deep character depth and storyline, however, similar to other contemporary texts, it does not give the audience the satisfaction of a smooth and happy ending. The audience is left with an emotional last scene between the family, some of whom are meeting for the first time, who all just sit in silence and watch the stars begin to explode before the whole stage goes black.

Jez Butterworth: Jerusalem

Jerusalem (2009) by Jez Butterworth follows the life of a man named Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, who lives in a trailer in the woods of Wiltshire, England. This character is the definition of flawed, he believes he is the most popular man in his town; however, it is for the wrong reasons. Although, this play is unique for the way that the character can be perceived by the

audience. On one hand, he is hated by most that he meets and is constantly having to avoid persecution. He drinks excessively, does drugs, and commits vandalism.

> **Lee** Here, Johnny. They had a meeting about you. [...] The Johnny Byron Crisis Meeting. In the village hall.
>
> **Johnny**[...] Yeah, I know about it. Actually – (*Belches.*) [...] I went along. [...] This one mum, Kelly Wetherley, she's up there, red in the face, microphone, saying, 'Johnny Byron is a filthy menace, Johnny Byron is a disgrace to Flintock, and I swear to Christ I was shagging her only last June. [...] I can't help it if they can't forget me'[159].

On the other hand, some commend him for his defiance, viewing him as a hero for standing up for what he believes in and not letting anyone knock him down. He is a hero who believes in this folklore surrounding the woodlands, where the local government is trying to build estates. Byron claims that the woodlands are home to ancient giants and that he only wishes to protect their home. This aspect of the character is easy to empathise with, the audience may believe his claims and root for his success.

Anna Harpin discusses the plays 'attention to England, folklore, heritage and catastrophe [that] harnesses strategies of tragedy to explore the kind of life and land we are preparing for the next generation'[160]. She explains how the aspect surrounding Byron's protection of the woodlands encompasses themes of climate change and this is what makes Byron an unexpected

[159] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 33-34.

[160] Anna Harpin, 'Land of hope and glory: Jez Butterworth's tragic landscapes', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:1 (2011), 61-73 (p. 70).

hero. Rooster can be seen as making a last stand for an idea of old England that respected customs, history, and the environment.

> **Johnny** Cohorts! Beloved spongers! /*Cheers. /*Make merry. For tonight, like a flaming flock of snakes, [...] we will rise up and ride on Salisbury, Marlborough, Devizes, Calne, until the whole plain of Wiltshire dances to the tune of our misrule./*Cheers*.
>
> God damn the Kennet and Avon. Fuck the New Estate!
>
> **All** Hear, hear! Fuck the New Estate! [...]
>
> **Johnny** This [...] is a historic day. For today, I, Rooster Byron, and my band of educationally subnormal outcasts shall swoop and raze your poxy village to dust.[...] In a thousand years, Englanders will awake this day and bow their heads and wonder at the genius, guts and guile of the Flintock Rebellion.[161]

Butterworth does not explicitly tell the audience which side of his main character is right or wrong, he lets them decide for themselves. However, even Johnny himself cannot decide if he thinks of himself as a hero or as a degenerate. He is stuck constantly contradicting himself. The events that surround Johnny's life have left him traumatized and unable to make sense of his life. Some of his stories are whimsical, such as when he met the giant that built Stonehenge, 'I never jumped Stonehenge. But I once met a giant that built Stonehenge'.[162] Other stories come across as distressful and traumatising-

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[161] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 52-53.

[162] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 56-57

> **Johnny** [...] last week was a bad week. I had a run-in with four Nigerians in Marlborough town centre. Four traffic wardens. [...] They start shouting. Saying I pissed on their car. [...] Upshot was, they bundled me in the back and all sat on me. Drove me to this flat on the outskirts of town. I was held captive for a week.
>
> **Dawn** You were kidnapped by traffic wardens.
>
> **Johnny** They tied me up in the basement.[163]

It is hard to discern when Johnny is being serious or when he is overexaggerating. He tells stories that sound untrue but says so with such confidence that his friends find it hard to call his bluff. The text suggests that Byron is more admirable than what he seems at first and has many examples of him behaving in heroic and commendable ways. However, he behaves in such an egotistical manner that makes him come across as an individual who will say anything to get what he wants. The ending of the play is where the audience could be split between the two different ways of reading this character. The audience is left to wonder, or decide on their own, if Byron was a hero or a tragic loser.

> *He stops in the middle, by the drum. Closes his eyes. And begins to incant.*
>
> [...] Rise up! Rise up [...] Come, you drunken spirits. Come, you battalions. You fields of ghosts who walk these green plains still. Come, you giants!
>
> *Relentlessly he beats the drum. Faster. Faster. Staring out. He pounds on and on until the final blow rings out and…*

[163] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 67-68.

Blackout[164].

Depending on how the audience interprets Byron's character arc, he could have two contrasting endings. Either he ultimately receives the punishment that was coming his way all along, or the folklore is true, and the giants came to his aid. This side of the character could be seen as the most mature of all the characters in this play because he is the only one with a sense of what will be lost if he is cleared away. All in all, it is up to the audience how they view his character, either as a hero or as a narcissist.

Conclusion

Contemporary theatre tends to refrain from following a linear timeline and a character arc. The discussed texts in this chapter follow a unique trend for writing their characters. Either they lack a character arc, such as with many of Churchill's plays, or their characters can be perceived in a multitude of ways, such as with *Jerusalem*. Furthermore, traumatised characters can be presented to the audience as a collective community of people rather than a specific individual, such as in tucker green's plays. Cristina Delgado-García has made notes of the different ways that playwrights have been incorporating their characters to better include the audience. She explained how a lack of character arc does not also mean there is a lack of character. On the contrary, this forces the characters to be even deeper because the audience can then relate to them more.

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[164] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p.108-109.

Chapter IV: Living in Another's World: Drama-In-The-Head

The plays that will be discussed in this chapter extend the idea of witnessing, by portraying the internal state of the characters. This style of performance is called drama-in-the-head, which places the theatre space inside the mind of the character, thus giving the audience a look inside their personal thoughts and emotions. As previously mentioned, Crimp coined the term 'drama-in-the-head'. The playwrights I will mention who portray these points of view are Anthony Neilson, Simon Stephens, David Greig and Caryl Churchill. The audience witnesses a deep and personal aspect of the characters inner thoughts, which further creates an empathetic reaction. Some of the drama-in-the-head texts that will be mentioned below incorporate themes that give the first-person point of view of living with mental illness, such as a dissociative disorder, PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Others simply provide the audience with a perspective that they are not familiar with, but one that deserves more recognition, such as living on the autism spectrum. The playwrights use these internal states as a metaphor for the dissociated and fragmented world we live in.

Drama-in-the-head performances immerse the audience into the mind of the character(s) by immersing the theatre space as well. All the plays discussed below transform the performance space to reflect what the world would look like if the audience saw through the eyes of the character in question. I will give specific examples on how each play does this further into the chapter. The playwrights give the audience the experience of being that person, thus they must gather information and decipher what the character's fears and desires are based on their surroundings. Furthermore, many drama-in-the-head productions involve some type of trauma, the audience must witness this new perspective, which results in a deeper empathetic connection between the two parties. Like witness theatre, the audience is not called to action by the

playwright, rather they are only asked to understand and to be a spectator. Even when the characters seem desperate for help, the audience knows that they cannot intervene, which makes the act of witnessing even more impactful.

In *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson* by Trish Reid, Reid explains that Neilson intends to 'offer nuanced explorations of the problematic intersection [...] between the subjective and the inter-subjective'.[165] Nielsen understands that for a play on mental illness to not be problematic, it must stay clear of realism. One must write the play from the point of view of the individual in question to not separate the other 'normal' characters from the latter. Neilson writes plays that feature mental illness to invite his audience to-

> not only to question the limitations of normative representations of sanity and insanity, but also to consider how the theatre might be used more effectively to evoke the depth and complexity of interior landscapes of all kinds.[166]

Theatre is a tool that gathers groups together to witness performances. Neilson realises that this can be used to teach valuable lessons, such as how people unlike ourselves exist in the world and that she should not be categorizing people based on their lived experience. These lessons are different from types of messages told by other contemporary playwrights such as debbie tucker green, who writes political plays based on her experience as a Black British woman. Neilson has mentioned that he would be interested in writing political plays, but that he is used to dealing with 'something emotional and find[ing] the theatrical shape that will allow [him] to draw people

[165] Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 74
[166] Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 74.

inside so they can inhabit that feeling'.[167] He claims that he is not moved to use this strategy with a political text. Nevertheless, Neilson writes plays that showcase mental illness to bring awareness to how playwrights can write these types of characters in their plays without labeling them as 'other' or 'different'. Showing this side of mental illness to an audience-

> complicates our sense of the presumed 'unknowability' of the experience [of] madness and in so doing it asks us to reflect on how and why some subjective experiences come to matter while others are seen as in need of correction or erasure.[168]

This quote from Reid perfectly captures why drama-in-the-head theatre is so important. Society is afraid of the unknown, and if mental illness continues to be censored in media, we will never be able to accept these things in ourselves. The hope is that these struggles can be witnessed by audience members who can begin to change their viewpoints. Anyone who struggles with metal health should be supported rather than neglected. Neilson makes sure to correctly portray these experiences in a lighthearted way in his play, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia (2007)*.

Anthony Neilson's Drama-in-the-Head

Neilson's play *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, is centered around a woman, Lisa, who struggles with dissociative and bipolar disorder. The audience follows her point of view as she delves deep into the world of Dissocia. In this deranged and unbalanced world, the audience is

[167] Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 151.
[168] Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 78.

sent to discover all the dark corners inside her mind. First, there are aspects of horrific violence and despair, quickly followed by the colourful and hilarious world of Dissocia. She learns that this world she is trapped in is threatened by the Black Dog King, which refers to what Winston Churchill used to call his depression. Right away, she meets up with a pair of 'insecurity' guards who behave in comical ways. However, they also relay the information to Lisa that the Black Dog King constantly threatens Dissocia with acts of war, so they must always be prepared.

> **Lisa** *ends up on one of the* Guard*'s shoulders, as cannons blast streamers all over her, the Dissocians arrayed around her Broadway-style. The jollity ends quite abruptly.*
>
> **Oathtaker** Right. I'm off for a shit.
>
> *But suddenly a siren starts up, and a mechanised voice:*
>
> **Mechanised Voice** Incoming attack – assume safety posture! Incoming attack – assume safety posture!
>
> *Everyone starts running around in a panic, stuffing pieces of material into their mouths.*[169]

This scene shows just how jarring this play can be for an audience to witness. The audience is forced to pay very close attention to this performance or risk missing something. With how intense and chaotic this play is, the audience may begin to forget that all these occurrences are only happening in her head. However, moments included in the text remind the audience that Lisa's disorder is still symbolic of the world we live in.

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[169] Anthony Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, (Bloomsbury, London: 2007) p. 27.

Ticket We have one purpose!

Laughter And yet we fight amongst ourselves!

Ticket We must remember what we are – citizens of Dissocia, every one! We were born from the very stuff of courage! If we do not fight – we are less than nothing!

Laughter Now is the time – here and now – that we fulfil our destiny! Now is the time that we fight!

Ticket For the honour of our Divine Queen Sarah – !

Laughter And the greater good – of Dissocia!

Ticket Are you with us?![170]

This last scene in the first act of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* is a warzone. Neilson most likely includes this scene of violence to portray how Lisa feels under attack, probably by her own mental illness. However, the audience is quickly thrown when the second act begins. It features Lisa in a hospital where her life consists of nurses trying to get her to take her medication day after day. The scenes are short and bare a striking contrast from the lively and chaotic world in Act one. The audience can assume, from the contrast of act one to act two, that the real world counterpart is not favorable to Lisa. Lisa is depleted of any stimulation, and since the audience is watching through Lisa's eyes, they feel this loss as well. One can then defer from this contrast that she must prefer to succumb to her delusions rather than hear the judgement of her family and the people who are meant to support her. This aspect is very clear in the following scene:

Night. **Lisa** *is asleep. She looks at peace. In her arms she holds a small polar bear.*

[170] Anthony Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, (Bloomsbury, London: 2007) p. 72.

We hear music at last.

Coloured lights play on her face, swirling around her head.

Dissocia still exists, caged within her head.

There is little doubt that she will return to her kingdom.

The music ends.

Lights down.[171]

This is the last scene in the play, which brings the audience back around and shows them Lisa's fragmented reality. She seems happy living in her mind; even if someone could help her, it does not seem like Lisa consents to the treatment.

When writing *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, Neilson strove to humanise those with mental illnesses and show the reasons behind their actions. For context, someone who has a dissociative disorder 'may feel disconnected from [them]selves and the world around [them], feel detached from [their] body or feel as though the world around [them] is unreal'.[172] Neilson shows the contrast from when Lisa is taking her medication to when she is off of it between Act one and Act two, which shows the audience why Lisa would be drawn back into her delusions. Act one is a whimsical world that has bright lights, lively music, adventures, and vibrant characters. On the other side, Act two is the exact opposite, with dull colours. The absence of these high-spirited qualities starves not only Lisa for stimulation but the audience as well. The progression of events, beginning with Lisa's exploration through the world of Dissocia, followed by the hospitalisation is important because it helps the audience compare the two states of

[171] Anthony Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, (Bloomsbury, London: 2007) p. 89.

[172] 'Dissociation and dissociative disorders' in *Mind* <https://www mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/dissociation-and-dissociative-disorders/about-dissociation/> [accessed 25 September 2021].

consciousness. Furthermore, there is more action and storytelling in the first act compared to the second, which also starves the audience for substance alongside Lisa. This contrast of 'slow[ing] the action down to a point where the revelation is effectively de-dramatized' forces 'our experience [to] become analogous with Lisa's'.[173] This helps the audience understand dissociative disorders because we feel connected to the play's heroine. Neilson wants his audience to understand what Lisa wants, which is to feel free and joyful, which is why she cannot let go of the wonderful world of Dissocia. In other plays by Neilson, he also strives to immerse the audience in the mind of his characters.

Realism (2006) by Neilson is another drama-in-the-head performance that puts the audience inside the mind of a central character, Stuart. This play is similar to Neilson's other works, such as *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, because he is searching for 'a way of writing that somehow moves the way the mind moves.'[174] Stuart, struggles with his mental health, and throughout the play, the audience is shown precisely what it would look like if all his thoughts and feelings were projected visually and tangibly. The setting for *Realism* is in Stuart's own living room, however, it is realistically set inside his mind. Doing so blurs the distinction between what is real and what is a part of Stuart's trauma. The first scene shows a seemingly normal conversation between Stuart and his roommate. From the audience's point of view, the play seems realistic. However, it is not until the end of scene one when the lack of realism reveals itself.

[173] Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 79.
[174] Anthony Neilson, Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 85.

Stuart *goes to the fridge, opens it. He takes out a tin of cat food and prises back the lid. He fills a bowl with food. Some of it drops onto the floor. At the top of his voice he shouts:*

Here, kitty kitty kitty kitty!

He considers staying awake, but then walks back towards his bedroom.

On the way, his **Mother** *appears. He stops.*

Mother Have you seen the sky?

Stuart What do you mean?

Mother It's full of bombers.

Stuart Where from?

Mother Israel? *[At the time of writing, in 2006, Israel had invaded Lebanon. Substitute a more topical/timeless reference if necessary.]*

Pause. **Stuart** *continues on his way.*

Mother *takes a seat at the dining table.*

Stuart *climbs back into bed.*

Lights fade. Music – during which **Father** *enters, carrying a morning paper. He takes a seat at the dining table, handing part of the paper to* **Mother**. *They read.*[175]

This sudden realisation from Stuart comes to him as his mother's voice. However, the audience is now aware that his mother and father are not actually in his apartment telling him about bombers in the sky. This is Stuart's own anxiety and ADHD that materialises itself at random times and reminds the audience that what they are witnessing is the central character's personal

[175]Anthony Neilson, *Realism*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 9.

thoughts and feelings. Stuart is also accompanied by other characters that do not seem to belong and only aim to upset him, such as the character Mullet, who is a metaphor for Stuart's anxiety and depression.

> **Mullet** What's happened to you, man? [...] What's happened to the guy who was going to build a rocket and fly to fucking Mars? I mean, look at yourself. What do you see?
>
> **Stuart** A fat fucking shite.
>
> **Mullet** A fat fucking shite. And how do you feel?
>
> **Stuart** Like shite.
>
> **Mullet** Like shite. And what are you going to do about it?
>
> **Stuart** Fuck all.
>
> **Mullet** You're going to do fuck all. You could have gone out to play footie but you're going to sit around the house all day moping and why?[176]

These toxic characters are so demeaning to the main character, it shows the audience a physical representation of what it looks like when allowing a space for these negative feelings and emotions. In Stuart's world, time is relative and subjective to what he is thinking about at the time. Neilson shows how everyday life does not follow the structure of linear time. Trish Reid explains this as Neilson criticizing 'the idea of objective or neutral time as something outside or independent of human experience, something that can be accurately measured.'[177] The way humans portray time seems to either stretch or fly by depending on the environment you are in.

[176] Anthony Neilson, *Realism*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 13-14.
[177] Anthony Neilson, Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, (London : Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) p. 88.

Yes, real time can be measured, however that is not the topic of *Realism*, it is subjective time. An example of this can be found in the script where there is a block of text that only contains stage directions and no dialogue.

> *He takes out a packet of bread. He snaps off two pieces and pushes them into the toaster. He takes some milk out of the fridge. He smells the milk. /The sound of children playing The sound of the water boiling in the kettle becomes the sound of horses galloping. It reaches a crescendo … then stops.*
>
> *He pours the hot water into the mug. /Smoke is beginning to rise from the toaster. The bread is trapped in there.*
>
> **Stuart** *tries to get the toaster to eject the toast but it isn't working. He's beginning to panic.*
>
> **Mullet** *appears behind the couch. He looks like a child from the seventies. He is hyperactive and extremely irritating.*
>
> **Mullet** (*in an annoying sing-song voice*)Stewpot! Stewpot! Stewpot![178]

This scene begins as Stuart simply makes tea and toast, however, as he becomes dazed, the audience witnesses the results. The audience knows that his subjective time slows and speeds up because the sounds of the kettle boiling water turns into the sound of horses galloping. While time passes, he forgets about the toast, and it begins to burn. Time then speeds up to mimic his panic. This performance is quite relatable to nearly every audience because it is simply meant to portray an example of a lazy Saturday and how one's own mental state can mix into real life.

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[178] Anthony Neilson, *Realism*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 11.

However, not all of drama-in-the-head is relatable. Sometimes the playwright wishes to show their audience trauma that they would hopefully never have to experience.

Simon Stephen's Drama-in-the-Head

Not all performances of drama-in-the-head portray the mind in similar ways. Contrasting from Neilson, Simon Stephens uses drama-in-the-head to raise awareness for people with an autism spectrum disorder. There is not much in the theatre world that informs the public about the autism spectrum. So, in this way, his work can relate to Neilson because they have similar intentions. Simon Stephens wishes to disseminate knowledge on what it is like for a person who lives with an autism spectrum condition.

> Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication.[179]

Simon Stephens' play, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime (2012)*, based on Mark Haddon's novel, lets the viewers into the mind of its central character, Christopher, showing how his mind works in both stressful and typical scenarios. The play interrupts the illusion of fantasy by breaking the fourth wall and having a narrator speak directly to the audience. Contrary to other characters, Christopher also speaks back to the narrator, while the narrator also has the

[179] 'What is Autism' in *Autism Speaks* <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism> [accessed 25 September 2021].

ability to speak on behalf of Christopher. The play portrays Christopher's mind in overwhelming situations, and during these moments, the audience hears pre-recorded voices that could be interpreted as Christopher's mind and thoughts. In the script, these lines are labeled to be Siobhan's, his teacher. These lines of advice come to Christopher as his own memory of their conversations.

> **Siobhan** I find people confusing. This is for two main reasons. The first main reason is that people do a lot of talking without using any words. Siobhan says that if you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things. It can mean, 'I want to do sex with you.' I never said that.
>
> **Christopher** Yes you did.
>
> **Siobhan** I didn't use those words Christopher.
>
> **Christopher** You did on 12 September last year. At first break.[180]

Christopher talks to himself in stressful situations to calm himself down. This is when his teacher's voice materialises as his own thoughts. For example, in one scene, he travels to a train station and tries to ground himself by reading all the material that is present at the station. He mentions that he doesn't like crowded spaces, and this overwhelming amount of information must be overstimulating for him. Christopher has a moment when he hears the voice of Siobhan and it helps him calm down and find where he needs to go.

[180] Simon Stephens, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, (Bloomsbury, London: 2012) p. 6.

> In your head imagine a big red line across the floor. It starts at your feet and goes through the tunnel. And walk along the line. And count the rhythm in your head because that helps doesn't it? Like when you're doing music or when you're doing drumming. Left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right.[181]

These moments when Christopher is overstimulated could also be shown through the lighting, music, and stage directions. In the National Theatre production (2014) the director, Marianne Elliott, utilised different effects using lights that formed a grid on the floor. This production had a team of individuals who had experience working with people who are on the autism spectrum, which gives credibility to the performance. For instance, Robyn Steward is an Autism Consultant for the show and has a diagnosis of Asperger's as well, which is also considered to be under the umbrella of ASD. She discussed how-

> The multi-sensory approach of the production means that you can explain to somebody who doesn't know much about autism what being on the autism spectrum is like.[182]

The movement directors of the same National Theatre production, Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham also said that they 'couldn't really take a shortcut to Asperger's acting [...] and everyone made sure that we didn't just play to what we felt was a type'. Obviously, the performance's stage directions are not an exact replica of how everyone with autism experiences these moments, however it is meant to bring awareness to the viewers what it is like for someone in

[181] Simon Stephens, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, (Bloomsbury, London: 2012) p. 59.
[182] Robyn Steward, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time - working on the spectrum' *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2bV75ITXJw> [accessed 26 September 2021].

the real world. The specific production elements of the performance are meant to immerse the audience into Christopher's mind so that we are also experiencing everything like he is. For example, the scene where Christopher travels to Paddington station for the first time is portrayed as a very traumatic and frightening place. The director, Marianne Elliot, talks about how

> Christopher has never been outside of his street on his own, so when he actually does go on his journey, everything he encounters is new and frightening and very perplexing. I think this is a metaphor because it's about all of us encountering things that we find overwhelming and confusing and feeling that fear, but driving through anyway.[183]

These scenes help the audience understand how the mind of a person with ASD works and compare it to similar experiences that we have had as well. However, drama-in-the-head theatre is quite broad as everyone has different experiences that can be portrayed on stage. Other playwrights, such as David Greig, use their drama-in-the-head performances to portray how the mind works under different circumstances, such as trauma and PTSD.

David Greig's Drama-in-the-Head

The first two examples of drama-in-the-head plays show us the internal workings of people who are diagnosed with mental conditions. David Greg's *The Events (2013)* shows the effect of an external event on the mental state of its character. This play brings into light the question of forgiveness and if there are any actions that cannot be forgiven. *The Events* revolves

[183] Marianne Elliot, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time - working on the spectrum' *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2bV75ITXJw> [accessed 26 September 2021].

around the main character, Claire, who is a part of a community choir. This group were victims of an event where a gunman released his anger on participants of the choir during a rehearsal by opening fire and killing some of them. Claire is struggling with post-traumatic stress caused by 'the event', as the characters refer to it-

> **Claire** When I was hiding in the music room –And the boy burst in –And I knew I was going to die. [...] I felt something. A feeling I've never had before, a feeling of tearing, of something pulling away from its moorings suddenly and in its wake – an overwhelming absence. It was a feeling as precise and as physical as any feeling I've ever had. And the moment I felt it, I knew what it was.
>
> **The Boy** What was it?
>
> **Claire** It was my soul leaving my body
>
> **The Boy** When did your soul come back?
>
> **Claire** It hasn't.[184]

This play was written as a response to the killings perpetrated in Sweden by Anders Brevik. Thus, it is based on true events, which makes the audience take on the role of the witness as well. Claire feels guilt for surviving the event when others did not. According to David Gordon's review-

[184] David Greig, *The Events*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 15-16.

> Greig's play is an uncompromising look at what humans go through in order to carry on in the face of hardship, exploring the subject matter in a way that is touching without being overly sentimental.[185]

The event makes Claire radically uncertain about everything, which is encompassed by the nature of the performance. The scenes are complicated and confusing at times, which reflects Claire's reality. The audience must piece together the sections of this performance to make sense of it, as Claire does.

The play is performed entirely by two actors and a choir (which is different for every performance). One actor plays Claire and the other plays every single other character. This choice can make it hard to follow who Clair is talking to, her father, one of the other survivors or the perpetrator himself. However, this confusing stylistic choice is how Clair is experiencing her trauma. We as an audience can determine that the reason one actor plays all other roles, including the shooter, is because this is Claire's reality. She sees the shooter's face in everyone, especially every man that she talks to, this is a representation of her PTDS taking shape in her mind. This fact is not told to the audience directly, however, knowing that we are seeing the world through Claire's eyes, we can piece this together as the play goes on. Greig wants the audience to understand Claire's complicated feelings, and thus the play must be complicated as well if we are to truly understand her. We are told intimate information about Claire through her own internal monologue, and we only ever escape her mind when the boy speaks on his own.

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[185] David Gordon, 'Two actors and a choir bring David Greig's drama about finding compassion in an indefensible act to New York Theatre Workshop' in *Theatre Mania* <https://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/the-events_71700.html> [accessed 6 April 2021]

Some scenes feature her speaking about an infant and her trauma that surrounds men, since the perpetrator of her trauma was a man.

> **Claire** Look, a baby /Newborn. /Wet hair /a pair of grey blue eyes.
> And such a pair of lungs. /Look, a baby /warm and damp …/grasping
> searching blindly for a mother /for a breast to suck. /It's a boy. /I wind back time.
> To the moment of his birth, /His mother holds him,
> The nurse takes him out of the room to clean him. /I am the nurse.
> I put my hand over his face. /I hold it there until he's limp.
> Shh. I say. It's OK. It's OK. It's OK. /I bring him to his mother. /And his father.
> Look, a baby /Still quiet /Cradled. /He must have been born dead
> Poor thing, born dead. /It was a boy.[186]

This style of play, that includes chaos and witnessing an internal struggle with such a difficult event that occurred, helps the audience truly understand the situation. The audience empathises with her and is offered an insight into just how uncomfortable she is. Witnessing a person's internal struggle with such trauma forces the audience into a deeper understanding of an event such as this. The space that the audience is in looks much like a choir room would, which is symbolic of the room that Claire was in when the shooter threatened her. Her PTSD forces her to constantly be reminded of the event and make it inescapable, and since the audience views the world from her point of view, this is also what we experience. However, these details are not told to us directly, the audience must figure this out on their own by piecing together the details.

[186] David Greig, *The Events*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 35-36.

As previously mentioned, not all performances that fall under the umbrella of drama-in-the-head are alike. In fact, many of them contrast in many ways since there are many ways to portray the human experience through a specific person's mind. Some of the others that I have analysed have been similar to what people today may be able to relate to. However, Churchill is a playwright that will constantly be going against the grain of normality. Churchill is a playwright who is talented in writing many types of plays, which is why she is continuously mentioned in this dissertation. Her drama-in-the-head plays feature situations that the audience may not personally relate to and must further dissect the play as it unfolds in front of them.

Churchill's Drama-in-the-Head

Something that people cannot directly relate to is trauma resulting from living in a post-apocalyptic world. In Churchill's, *Escaped Alone (2016),* a group of older women repress their agony and, in dramatic detail, give monologues explaining the reality of their situation. These monologues are mostly only directed towards the audience and are not revealed to the other characters. They ultimately go back to the group and continue discussing trivial matters to distract themselves. These monologues are portrayed as being the characters personal thoughts and feelings. As a group, the women refrain from bringing up difficult topics, so the audience is given a look inside their minds to hear what they are afraid of.

> **Mrs J** Planes with sick passengers were diverted to Antarctica. Some got into bed with their dead, others locked the doors and ran till they fell down. Volunteers and conscripts over seven nursed the sick and collected bodies. Governments cleansed infected areas

and made deals with allies to bomb each other's capitals. Presidents committed suicide. The last survivors had immunity and the virus mutated, exterminating plankton.[187]

They all describe a terrifying post-apocalyptic world that they live in, however the audience is only aware of this through the monologues. Since the women never speak of these things as a group, there is never any other details given that would make the audience believe that their reality is not like ours. For a while, the only character giving the audience information about this post-apocalyptic world is Mrs. J, however, as the play proceeds, we learn more information from the other characters.

Lena I sat on the bed this morning and didn't stand up till lunchtime. The air was too thick. It's hard to move, it's hard to see why you'd move.
It's not so bad in the afternoon, I got myself here. I don't like it here. I've no interest. Why talk about that? Why move your mouth and do talking? Why see anyone? Why know about anyone? /It was half past three and all this time later it's twenty-five to four.
If I think about a place I could be where there's something nice like the sea that would be worse because the sea would be the same as an empty room so it's better to be in the empty room because then there's fewer things to mean nothing at all.
I'd rather hear something bad than something good. I'd rather hear nothing.
It's still just the same. /It's just the same. /It's the same.[188]

[187] Caryl Churchill, *Escaped Alone*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 28-29.

[188] Caryl Churchill, *Escaped Alone*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 32.

The women all share similar feelings of loneliness and dread for their new lives, however none of them confide in each other. The audience witnesses these intrusions into the women's personal thoughts, which, similar to tucker green's plays, forces them to empathise with them. As I mentioned, living in a post-apocalyptic world is not an experience that an audience could relate to. However, the fact that these women repress their depression and anxieties about the world they all live in reflects real life. Like all the other performances that have been discussed, *Escaped Alone* also immerses the audience into the mind of each character. Although, Churchill does this in a slightly different way. The seemingly "realistic" world that all the women live in is also ever so slightly strange. The sky is too blue, and the yard is too green and colorful, especially for England. It seems to be a metaphor for how the women fake their contentment when they chat with one another, it furthers the idea that they would rather live in ignorant bliss than face their realities. However, once the women's true feelings are revealed to the audience, one by one, we are teleported inside each woman's internal anxieties during their monologues. The stage goes dark except for a single light on the individual, as well as a large red square that lights up the darkness. As the play progresses and more women have their thoughts on display for the audience, more squares light up until it forms a long tunnel. This tunnel is symbolic of how their anxieties are never ending and we become trapped with them in this terrifying reality. This play could teach an audience that they should not suffer in silence like the women. Instead, if they opened, maybe they would discover that many others feel the same way.

Conclusion

Playwrights use the technique of drama-in-the-head to allow their audience to witness and experience the inside of the human mind. All the plays that have been discussed show the audience a representation of the inner world of these characters. For example, In *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, the world is colorful and full of exciting and terrifying action in the first act, but once Lisa takes her medication, the set turns grey and dull. This is symbolic that her dissociative mental state is her only form of stimulation, which the audience then witnesses and thus empathise with her past relapses. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the audience views the world from the point of view of Christopher, who has ASD. The entire performance gives the audience perspective on what the world is like through the eyes of a person with this type of mind and shows just how imaginative and sometimes overstimulating different environments can be. This is shown through the choreographic staging and the grid-like floor that lights up when Christopher counts his steps.

Furthermore, in a play that shows how traumatic moments can affect the brain, such as in *The Events*, the audience must piece together the confusing script themselves to understand the metaphor behind it all. The entire space, including where the audience sits, is set up to look just like the room in which Claire faced the shooter. Her mind is trapped in that moment, and she is constantly reliving it, so the audience does as well. In all these plays, the world is changed by the mental state of the character, like in *Realism* too. All of Stuart's seemingly normal thoughts are on display and the audience discovers that they are shown a representation of his chaotic and random thoughts as if they were really happening. When he spaces out and imagines insane scenarios or nitpicking himself and all his bad habits, these things are brought to life by characters such as Mullet, who materialises out of nowhere just to criticise him. Through all these strange occurrences, the audience concludes that these happenings are just representations

of his anxiety and depression, which a typical audience can relate to. However, not all experiences are relatable, like with *Escaped Alone*. The women in this play live in a post-apocalyptic world, however, they never confide in their neighbors for help with their mental health. The set and staging are a representation of their blissful ignorance towards their nightmarish reality. The audience is placed, one by one, inside the minds of each one of these women, who reveal what the world is really like. The stage goes from a strange and almost forceful “normal”, to a dark and never ending tunnel of these women’s fate. Drama-in-the-head is a type of performance that literally places the audience inside the mind of the characters and, by trapping them in the realities of these individuals, forces an empathetic reaction. The audience witnesses what it is like to live with a dissociative disorder, autism, PTSD, depression, and anxiety through the perspective of these characters. The audience must witness to understand instead of being told by the playwright what action to take next. The audience must not intervene and instead, move on to their piece together with their discoveries alone. Other forms of contemporary playwriting offer their audience other ways of witnessing, especially if the subject matter is controversial. These techniques provoke the audience. This forces them to have an emotional reaction to the subject matter and thus has more of an effect on the audience.

Chapter V: Testing the Audience

As previously discussed, plays that incorporate a first-person point of view of the inside of characters' minds can be labeled as drama-in-the-head. The playwright's intention is to have the audience witness the event by immersing them in the character's thoughts and feelings. Some of these plays chose this mode of storytelling to show audience members how people manage during times of crisis, such as Churchill's *Escaped Alone*. Others aim to bring awareness to how people with other conditions view the world. Contrasting with this form of theatre, there is a less delicate way to raise awareness in your audience members, which can be labeled as provoking discussion. Contemporary playwrights use destabilising techniques to force their audience to witness uncomfortable situations. It is still not a straightforward message because the playwright does not inform the audience what the message is directly. However, the act of witnessing asks the audience to piece together the clues so that they can be a part of a shared communal response.

In this chapter, I will reintroduce two plays, *Dealing with Clair* and *stoning mary*, and also introduce a play for the first time, Ella Hickson's *The Writer.* These plays all have techniques in common, they confront the audience and create tense environments that have the potential to start arguments amongst audience members. As mentioned briefly in *Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness*, Peter Handke coined the term 'anti-play' to describe his work, *Offending the Audience*. Although this text is not directly offensive or provoking, it did break down the barriers between the character and the audience. In *Offending the Audience*, the performers speak directly to the audience and tell them that they are the subject of the work. Handke's intention for this was to make his audience want to 'see all plays more consciously and

with a different consciousness.'[189] He describes his technique as wanting to make 'people aware of the world of the theatre - not of the outside world.'[190] Handke's intention, in *Offending the Audience*, was to

> encircle the audience so that they'd want to free themselves by heckling; they might feel naked and get involved. [...] The idea was to have the spectators in the orchestra thrown back upon themselves. What mattered to me was making them feel like going to the theatre more.[191]

Contemporary theatre that is discussed in this dissertation, encompasses similar themes. Playwrights such as Churchill, tucker green, and Stephens wish to keep their audience more invested in the message rather than being able to 'turn off their brain' for an evening of entertainment. However, these contemporary techniques work to test their audience rather than offend them. Intentions range from teaching lessons without enacting large scale change, to engaging through potential discord. However, in each case audience is included in the performance and asked to witness rather than become passive to the actions presented to them.

This intention to provoke the audience isn't new. The contemporary use of the outdated technique of 'aggro effects' (Howard Brenton's method of aggravating the audience) is now instead used to test and involve the audience. Playwrights that test their audience and force them into discourse use suggestive material and confrontation techniques to split the audience into

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[189] Jonathan A. Neufeld, 'Aesthetic Disobedience', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 73.2 (2015), 115-125 (p.117).
[190] Artur Joseph, Peter Handke and E. B. Ashton, 'Nauseated by Language: From and Interview with Peter Handke', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 15.1 (1970), 57–61 (p. 57).
[191] Artur Joseph, Peter Handke and E. B. Ashton, 'Nauseated by Language: From and Interview with Peter Handke', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 15.1 (1970), 57–61 (p. 58).

different sides of the argument. A playwright may choose to do this purposely to engage their audience in a discussion. Whether it be positive or negative, the intention is that it is productive. These performances are meant to be engaging to force the audience to witness certain events instead of sitting back and accepting what they see. The topic of audience relationship is one that has some discussion, and the subject of forming an argument among your audience may intertwine with that as well. This will be the topic of conversation that is further dissected in this section. The first text that will provide an example of how a performance can test the audience will be *The Writer*. This play keeps the audience engaged because it is constantly in contradiction with itself. The audience never knows what will happen next, which forces them to reflect on their own reactions to what happens on stage and how it differs from what is presented.

Ella Hickson: The Writer

The Writer (2018) by Ella Hickson keeps the audience constantly questioning the reality of the performance. In a review, Susannah Clapp explains that 'each episode argues with the previous one'.[192] Hickson gives several perspectives on the same topic to remain unbiased and allow her audience to come to their conclusion on their own. This technique productively pulls the rug out from under the audience with each scene. When the play opens, there is a slight pause after a bit of dialogue between a female actor and a male actor. This is when the writer and director first reveal themselves to the audience-

[192]Susannah Clapp, 'The week in theatre: The Writer; Absolute Hell – review', *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/apr/29/the-writer-almeida-review-ella-hickson-absolute-hell-national-theatre-rodney-ackland> [accessed 18 May 2021].

> **Writer** *and* **Director** *enter. They should be older and slightly less attractive versions of their stage selves. The actor that previously played the* **Writer** *becomes* **Female Actor**, *the actor that previously played the* **Director** *becomes* **Male Actor**.
>
> *Everyone gets chairs.*
>
> *All four sit silently for a second – they look to one another – who will start to speak.*[193]

Hickson's central character, the writer, is a fiercely independent woman. She wants to write a play that changes people's minds, she claims that she wants 'the world to change shape'.[194] However, the writer's wishes get tossed around by the director and each scene challenges the one before it. For example, the character of the writer explains the patriarchal aspect of theatre and how women are constantly being viewed on stage.

> There was this one show where [...] a woman pours a glass of water down her front, she's wearing a white T-shirt [...] it's this real power move, she sexually intimidates the guy by doing it. When you watched it on stage, she just looked humiliated. [...]She committed like hell but a couple of hundred people staring at your tits, you can't be master of that. It's looking that does it. I walk on stage; first thing people think is – how old is she? How hot is she? How fuckable is she? You walk on stage – they think – what's he got to say? What's he going to *do*?[195]

[193] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 30.
[194] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 19.
[195] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 22-23.

This quote from The Writer tells the audience how she wants to write plays that are not centered around making women sex objects for the viewing pleasure of the audience. However, scene three titled *The Provocation,* entails a lesbian relationship with naked women on stage. The stage directions read

> *What follows should be an attempt at staging female experience, the director should be aware of avoiding the inherently patriarchal nature of theatre:*
> *Female characters should do – they are not having things done to them. Bodies are for action, not titillation or decoration. There should be no looking. The protagonist should own the space*.[196]

There are a few contradictions that occur, this is just one example of one. In the previous scene, the writer discusses the impossibilities of a woman owning her naked body on stage when hundreds of people are deciding how sexually attractive they find you. The two sides of the argument is whether or not a woman can be viewed in an empowering way while she is naked. She intends to engage her audience in discussion, keeping them on their toes because they are never sure where the next scene will go.

Once each scene settles, the audience becomes comfortable thinking that the playwright is taking a position that they can side with. However, Hickson destroys this comfortability as soon as the next scene begins. For example, scene four, which is between the writer and the director, depicts the director explaining that her forest scene is not "good theatre".

[196] Ella Hickson, *The Writer,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 57.

> **Director** I'm not trying to stop you. I admire the wackiness. I don't dislike the unconventionality. I'm not even, saying cut it out – although if you did it would be –
>
> *She turns away.*
>
> Anyway – I – I'm just saying it really needs an ending. A revolution isn't worth very much if it has no practical implication. Is it? There's thirty grand of production costs at stake that need to be recouped and currently it feels unfinished.[197]

When the director explains that the writer's play would benefit from an ending, the audience may begin to become comfortable again. They may believe the next scene will be an edited version that the director approves of, which will end comfortably in a resolution. However, it turns out to be a misogynistic and seemingly expensive version of scene two between the female actor and the male actor. Furthermore, the director decided to change the heterosexual relationship into a lesbian one. Since the audience is meant to get the sense that the director made these changes instead of the writer, an element of a voyeuristic male gaze is implemented. This is furthered once the relationship becomes sexualised. The women have sex once, and then a second time, but with a dildo.

> **Girlfriend** *lies back – she disappears to us.* **Writer** *arranges herself – puts it in, braces herself against the sofa – there's no connection, the concentration is all logistical – and focused on the groin area.*
>
> **Writer** *gets going. We don't hear anything from the* **Girlfriend**.

[197] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 68.

Silence from the **Girlfriend** *The* **Writer** *starts enjoying it. She's really going for it – there's something strangely aggressive about it – she's in the zone, it's all her, the* **Girlfriend** *has all but evaporated. The* **Writer** *comes. The* **Girlfriend** *does not.*[198]

This scene takes the audience by surprise because Hickson does not make it obvious that the writer would allow the director to change her play in this way. It creates a heteronormative power dynamic of submissiveness and dominance. Furthermore, this scene is the last one in the play, thus the audience is left without a clear conclusion.

The **Writer** *watches the* **Girlfriend** *nibble on the cookie with childish delight.*

Someone at the pub this evening told this fucking insane story about Picasso, when he was painting *Guernica*, he was up this ladder and he was in the middle of painting and these two women that he was fucking at the same time were having a fight at the bottom of the ladder, they were wrestling, they drew blood. And he just keeps painting, the whole time [...] whilst these two women are ripping flesh off each other beneath him. Mental. Do you want a biscuit?

A flash of the image of Picasso's Guernica covers the stage.

Writer *stares – horrified, haunted.*

Curtain down.

End.[199]

[198] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 78.
[199] Ella Hickson, *The Writer*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), p. 88

We see the aggressive sex scene between the two, then the Girlfriend unaware of how uncomfortable she made the Writer. This closing scene leaves the audience without a sense of closure from the uncomfortable scene that just took place. However, once the next scene begins, the contradiction reveals itself and the audience becomes uncomfortable all over again. Hickson is being dialectical, she forms her play from contradicting viewpoints. However, instead of summarising the argument herself, she allows her audience to witness the characters struggle with the arguments in the play. In another play that I would describe as a Testing the Audience piece, Martin Crimp displays misogyny and how terrifying the world is for women. *Dealing with Clair* is a text I have discussed in another chapter as a feminist text; however, in this next section, I will explain different aspects of it and how it also fits as a Testing the Audience as well.

Martin Crimp: Dealing with Clair

Martin Crimp is a playwright who chooses a style and a subject matter that destabilises the audience's relation to the text. He writes plays that put his audience in uncomfortable situations and forces them to pick a side. His play, *Dealing with Clair*, which I previously introduced in *Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness* is a postmodern text because of how it includes and affects the audience. However, it also fits within the category of testing the audience because it is confrontational. The male characters present in the performance behave in sly ways which some unpleasant men may be able to see in themselves and in the way they behave around women. It brings to light the misconception that rapists and predators are strangers hiding in alleyways and make themselves obviously known from the start. The men in

this play are a husband and a client, and they make slow and steady advances which can make the women believe they are overthinking things if they begin to feel uncomfortable by their approaches.

> **Clair** *stands exactly as in the previous scene, in front of a tall window, her back turned.*
>
> **Mike** *stands on the other side of the room, looking at her.*
>
> *After a long silence, she senses his look and turns. Both smile.*[200]

Even though, in the beginning, the characters' interactions seem awkward at worst, the subtle discomfort worsens as the play continues. The client, James and his advancement towards Clair is the most unnerving aspect of the performance. He is aware that she lives alone and by the train as well, which creates an uncomfortable position for Clair.

> **James** I'm pretty certain you have one of those beds, don't you, that folds up into a sofa. Is that right? [...]
>
> **Clair** (*not unamused*) No, I'm afraid you're completely wrong.
>
> **James** Because there are times when I think it must be rather terrible to live on your own.
>
> **Clair** What makes you think I live on my own? *(pause)* Why should it be so terrible? – I like being on my own.
>
> **James** It has its advantages.[201]

[200] Martin Crimp, *Dealing with Clair* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018) p.10.
[201] Martin Crimp, *Dealing with Clair* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018) p.47.

Dealing with Clair affects the audience by subtly confronting those that may not agree with Crimp's message. Such as some male audience members if they relate too much to the male characters. The men on stage seem innocent and justified in their behavior, some audience members may believe they are just being friendly and that the female characters are only acting timid. However, the end of the play shows the audience that the women's uneasy feelings were justified.

> *Darkness. The sound of a high-speed train approaching. As it reaches maximum the light comes up to reveal* **James** *talking on the phone in* **Clair***'s flat at night.*
>
> **James** I *beg* your pardon? /You're going to put down the phone unless you can speak to your daughter? I'm *sorry*? Because how will you speak to her if you put down the phone *what*? /I thought I'd made my position vis-à-vis your daughter very clear but if you have any doubts, any lingering doubts, then you should speak to Clair because look. (*Change of tone.*) Look. Look, here she is now.
>
> *He turns and smiles as if someone has entered the room and focuses on this point with extreme stillness.* [...]
>
> Yes, here she is now. /Look at her. /She's clean. /She's dry. /She's… radiant.
>
> *With a sudden gesture he holds the receiver out at arm's length to the imagined* **Clair** *and remains rigid in this position to the end of the scene. Crescendo of approaching train.*
>
> She's patting her hair with a towel./She wants to speak to you.[202]

[202] Martin Crimp, *Dealing with Clair* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018) p.78-79.

From the uncomfortable conversations alone, one should be able to infer that the men were inappropriate and were portraying signs of being aggressors. However, after witnessing the final scene, it is made obvious to the audience that Clair's uneasiness towards James was justified. *Dealing with Clair* is meant to spark an argument or a discussion among groups that witness the performance together. Similarly, in *The Writer* there are two distinct sides of the story that one's personality could fall under, however Hickson remains unbiased and lets her audience come to their own conclusion. Crimp wanted a similar outcome, for his audience to spark an inner monologue so that individuals could ask themselves if they exhibit the same toxic behavior, but Crimp does not remain unbiased. He does, however, put ambiguous clues throughout the play so the audience is forced to discover the message on their own. A similar approach can be found in tucker green's *stoning mary*, which I introduced in *Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness*. However, she also confronts her audience with controversial situations, which is what will be analysed in the following section.

debbie tucker green: stoning mary

In *stoning mary*, tucker green asks her audience how they would feel if all the issues that encompass Africa were to happen in western culture as well. Would these topics still be easy to ignore, or would they finally be forced to pay attention because the threat is closer to home? Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard bring up this topic in their section of *Breaking New Ground* by arguing that-

> *stoning mary* aims to restore th[e] bond [of perception and action] by presenting "human waste" in the context of a seemingly recognizable world of white characters which is rendered unrecognizable due to lack of empathy and cruelty to one another.[203]

A predominantly white audience will feel overwhelming discomfort being told that they have overlooked a large majority of the population due to geographic and ethnic differences. tucker green's stage directions state that *stoning mary* 'is set in the country it is performed in. All characters are white'.[204] Whether it is her intention or not, this discomfort engages the audience in self-reflection that is meant to compel them to empathise with this group of people who are suffering just as the characters in the play are suffering. tucker green utilises many different expressive approaches 'that open the possibility to push audiences towards action and responsibility by triggering our ability to respond in the face of calamity'.[205]

Stoning mary works to destabilise the audience by introducing them to uncomfortable and violent events. This play deals with several uncomfortable topics, such as a child being sentenced to death, an AIDS diagnosis, and another child acting violently because of experience in war as a soldier. These uncomfortable circumstances stir up the audience. For example, the first couple that the audience is introduced to is diagnosed with AIDS. Throughout the play, they fight about which one deserves the prescription that will keep them alive.

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[203] Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 151).

[204] Debbie tucker green, *stoning mary*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), p.2.

[205] Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard, 'Acting in/Action: Staging Human Rights in debbie tucker green's Royal Court Plays' in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 145-166 (p. 152).

> **Wife** 'It aint about that, no. Aint got nuthin to do with the practicalities of what you can provide is it? /… That we can afford one, when what we need is two …
>
> That we got – one – when what we need is … two. /That one prescription for life – ' [...]
>
> 'Cos I aint standin here sayin it's me insteada you – am I?
>
> Aint here sayin me over you am I?
>
> Not here sayin all the reasons why it shouldn't be you, am I?
>
> 'Should be me. Should be me.' /Not sayin that – not doin that.[206]

This subject alone is hard for an audience to witness. Also present for these scenes are the ego of both the wife and husband, who say what they're really thinking, such as **'**Steady as fuck – mumblin' and that his wife 'Won't speak up. She. Won't respond. Me'.[207] Having all these voices present on stage makes for a potentially overwhelming environment for the audience. However, this conveys the emotions of the characters and brings to light their contradicting emotions as well. The Wife and Husband are also conflicted and confused by their situation; thus, the environment reflects that for the audience. These scenes destabilise the audience with both the content and the overlapping dialogue. Another way that *stoning mary* works to destabilize the audience is with the relationship between the sisters. The text asks the audience to have an opinion and react to the younger sisters' impending death and the sisters' uncaring attitude toward it. However, the theatrical standard that forces the audience to sit quickly in a theatre and observe a performance instead of reacting creates tension.

[206] Debbie tucker green, *stoning mary*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), p.13.
[207] Debbie tucker green, *stoning mary*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), p.15.

Older Sister 12 people signed.

Younger Sister

Older Sister Put their pen to your petition. 12.

Younger Sister 12's after 10, right?

Older Sister After 11

Younger Sister which is after 10, right?

Older Sister

Younger Sister How many did I need?

Older Sister 6,000.

Younger Sister

Younger Sister

Pause.

Older Sister S'after a lotta tens / Mary.[208]

The fact that her petition only received twelve signatures means that not many people believe she should not be stoned to death. The audience cannot do anything to stop this in the moment, they can only witness what they know will happen at the end of the play.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at some of the plays that were introduced in *Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness*. These two plays, *Dealing with Clair* and *stoning*

[208] Debbie tucker green, *stoning mary*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), p.15.

mary work to destabilise their audience by confronting them with tense situations. They include controversial topics, such as violence against women, the AIDS epidemic and a young girl being sentenced to death by stoning. Furthermore, *The Writer* also works to keep the audience on their toes. Hickson ensured that her audience was never sitting in comfort so that they would stay engaged and piece together the show as it continues. These performances place the audience in the role of the witness and force them to feel the tension from their fellow audience members. The playwrights discussed create controversy surrounding their shows to allow audience members to converse about it, whether it be positive or negative, there is still a conversation about the text. In the next chapter, I will explain the concept of the-death-of-the-author and how playwrights have begun dissolving the audience into their text instead of providing clear and concise messages for the audiences to learn.

Chapter VI: Expired Playwriting: Anti-Intentionalists and the Death of the Author

Contemporary styles have begun to turn towards a contrasting form of predictability. One where the character's fate is sealed from the start, and it is apparent that there is no happy ending. The aspect of lacking character and character development in contemporary British theatre begins around the 90s with Churchill's postmodern plays. These stories tend to prioritise the relationship between audience and performance more than any other detail. This is what has been a main factor that helped theatre transition from politically charged realism in the 80s to what we see now with immersive techniques that incorporate traumatised characters among other techniques. This is not to say that all these methods are a contemporary occurrence or a British creation, however, these are the trends that theatre is utilising. Playwrights incorporate their viewers by introducing ambiguous text and allowing for their audience to interpret it in a way that they see fit. Furthermore, as discussed in many post-apocalyptic plays, the audience is meant to empathise with the characters and envision themselves in their place. Relating to characters that seem to have a traumatic storyline, or are just doomed to have an unhappy ending, playwrights also show us another vulnerable perspective from their characters. This has been labeled as drama-in-the head, which gives awareness to those who struggle with mental illness or another form of condition which changes their perspective of reality.

As previously discussed in 'Chapter III: Experimental Peril in Contemporary British Theatre', *Exit the Author* by Dan Rebellato details certain playwrights, such as Crimp, that, literally or metaphorically, kill themselves in their plays. He claims that 'these moments of [..] of creative and structural self-harm are [...] part of a wider pattern of playwrights variously

absenting themselves from their plays'.[209] What he means by 'absenting themselves' is that the playwrights seem to hand over control of the texts to the audience. Rebellato understands that this method of allowing one's script to be molded by various sources may not be a favorable one. He quotes David Hare from the late 90's, in which Hare shares his distaste for structuralism, which he described as '"downplay[ing] the individual's imagination and insist[ing] that the writer [is] only a pen"'.[210] In this sense, Hare feels that directors and production teams must consider the playwright's intended meaning. Rebellato does not agree that it is what the movement of structuralism intended, however he recognises Hare's argument as valid. He explains that Hare's argument indicates 'the sense in which the authority of the playwright has been seen to be in some sense compromised by theoretical arguments against intention'.[211] However, Rebellato is an anti-intentionalist and points out that some playwrights do not include their intention in their text. For instance, he explains that

> [...] the anti-intentionalist argument states that the intentions of an author are entirely irrelevant to the meaning of a text. And in this rather vague form, it has been enthusiastically adopted by several groups of people in and out of theatre.[212]

An anti-intentialist playwright himself, Rebellato recognises that sometimes the playwright's intention is not the most important aspect of theatre. When writing a death-of-the-author piece,

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[209] Dan Rebellato, 'Exit the Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p. 11).
[210] David Hare, Dan Rebellato, 'Exit the Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p. 18).
[211] Dan Rebellato, 'Exit the Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p.18-19).
[212] Dan Rebellato, 'Exit the Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p.18-19).

the inspiration comes from the audience engaging with the text so that they can have a different experience with the play. For example, this can be seen in Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis (2000)* since the script gives no indication of characters or stage directions. This performance was written as a long monologue with herself during a time where Kane was deeply struggling with her mental health. This play can be interpreted in many ways, and because of this, her legacy lives on through these "anti-intentionalist" scripts, even if she did not intend for it to be such.

Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis

In Kane's last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, there are no characters or even labels for who speaks certain lines to the audience. The artistic team that chooses to perform this script must create the world from the text as it is. Each performance of *4.48 Psychosis* is unique to each team that puts it on stage, and this is how I believe Kane continues to evolve and live on through her texts. However, Rebellato explains in that,

> While we absolutely must not [...] treat the play narrowly or naively just as Kane's suicide note, it was evident, watching the play at the press night [...] that the play was written precisely to be experienced by this audience on that particular evening, to offer, in places, an account of her actions, and so was, in part, a sort of suicide note.[213]

[213] Dan Rebellato, 'Exit the Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p.18-19).

In the text as it stands, Kane has removed herself from the conversation. Rebellato describes it as 'a kind of survival of death even in the most literal death of the author [...], but even here *4.48 Psychosis* remains as a kind of witness to the ability of writing to cheat mortality'.[214]

In a few lines of text in the *4.48 Psychosis*, the meaning behind the name of the play is revealed to be a depressing revolution.

> At 4.48
> when depression visits
> I shall hang myself
> to the sound of my lover's breathing.[215]

4.48 Psychosis destabilises the audience by asking them to respond to the questions asked by the speaker(s), however, they are bound by theatre constructs which keep the audience respectfully silent. This strategy of confronting the audience to create a tension because they are bound by theatre constructs can be linked back to the role of the witness, discussed in Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness. Both techniques ask their audience to observe and to understand rather than to explain themselves with excuses. tucker green's texts do this by directly asking the audience questions, knowing that they are unable to respond. *4.48 Psychosis* opens with tension such as this, which sets a precedent for the rest of the performance.

> *(A very long silence.)*

[214] Dan Rebellato, 'Exit the Author', in *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground,* ed. by Vicky Angelaki (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 9-31 (p.25).
[215] Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis,* (London:Methuen Drama, 2000) pg. 4.

But you have friends.

(A long silence.)

You have a lot of friends.

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive? *(A long silence.)*

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive? *(A long silence.)*

What do you offer? *(Silence.)*[216]

The inclusion of the pauses draws out the awkwardness to create even more tension for the audience. There are also moments with unexplained text. For example, there is a scene that only includes sporadic numbers displayed on the page.

100

91

84

81

72

69

58

44

42

37

38

28

21

12

7.[217]

There is no explanation here or any directions in the script given for how to perform this scene. However, the first performance, done by the Royal Court in June 2000, depicted this scene as part of a standard psychiatric test. This test has the patient count backwards from 100, and in this performance, it was staged in a set with giant tilted mirrors. The actor formed the numbers on a table, and what she was doing was visible in the mirrors to the audience.

[216] Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*, (London:Methuen Drama, 2000) p 3.

[217] Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*, (London:Methuen Drama, 2000) p 5.

This text by Kane is ambiguous, and we will never truly know her intentions for it. In this way, this text fits into the category of the death-of-the-author because she has completely relinquished control to her audience and any artistic team that performs her words. In other death-of-the-author texts, such as *Love and Information*, which has been previously discussed in Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness, Churchill's writes in a similar fashion. The way that both playwrights write an ambiguous text that relinquishes power to a director or actors to include their own artistic nuances is what makes them death-of-the-author plays.

Churchill's Love and Information

Many authors that take on the technique of expired playwriting do not include stage directions in their script, with the only exception being that they mention that the directors may do whatever they wish. For example, Forced Entertainment included these techniques to extend an invitation to the audience to devise the performance themselves. Churchill's *Love and Information (2012),* as previously introduced in Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness, is split into seven sections with no clear connection between them and no lines assigned to specific characters. The only direction that is given by Churchill is stated on the front page of the script.

> The sections should be played in the order given but the scenes can be played in any order within each section.
>
> There are random scenes, see at the end, which can happen any time.

> The characters are different in every scene. The only possible exception to this is the random Depression scenes, which could be the same two people, or the same depressed person with different others.[218]

I have previously discussed the way that Churchill relinquishes authority to her audience in this play. However, there are some common themes throughout the scenes. These themes revolve around relationships between family, friends, or couples and how we love one another. Other than these concepts, the play is rather open ended. Some scenes can be taken in a multitude of directions depending on how a director envisions the conversation. One scene titled *Remote* is between unnamed characters who seem to be possibly camping somewhere without reception.

> It's quiet here.
>
> I like it quiet.
>
> You can always cycle down and get a newspaper.
>
> It's all right. […]
>
> Don't you sometimes want a weather forecast?
>
> I want you to be happy here.
>
> I am happy here.[219]

[218] Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information*, (London:Nick Hern Books, 2012) p. 1.
[219] Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information*, (London:Nick Hern Books, 2012) p. 13.

This scene does not specify what the relationship is between the characters or if there are more than two people present. This is just one of the many examples in this play where depending on the director's vision, could be performed in various ways.

Similar to *Love and Information,* which does not include stage directions or character names, *Pornography* by Stephen's does the same. As previously mentioned in Chapter II: Postmodernism and the Role of the Witness, Stephens claims that 'this play can be performed by any number of actors. It can be performed in any order'.[220] This note given by the playwright is one of the only provided throughout the script, which is why it is important to dissect its qualities of being a death-of-the-author piece.

Simon Stephen's *Pornography*

Stephens' play, *Pornography,* which was first analysed as a post-dramatic performance, also includes aspects of the-death-of-the-author. *Pornography* encompasses the horror of the unknown into random scenes and monologues which aren't assigned to any specific characters. Given that this play is an account of the days leading up to the 7/7 bombings in London, portraying this performance as outlandish is fitting because of the nature of the events. It seems to represent how life goes by normally, including all the negativity and anxieties of everyday life, even when the audience is aware of their fate. The reason why Stephens does not include any specific characters is to focus the audience's attention on the event rather than the individual actors. The characters are now more aligned with the audience because they are not separated by titles. For example, they are no longer just characters in a play, they are a collective with the

[220] Simon Stephens, *Pornography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 2.

audience and are experiencing this event for the first time alongside their witnesses. The audience is meant to act as a collective group and feel connected to the actors because they all take on the role of being occupants of London before the terrorist attack. The second to last scene in the play accounts an individual who was walking to the tube on their way home from work-

> But it's clear by the time I get to the tube station that something is going wrong. Nobody says anything. But Hammersmith tube station is closed. Both stations actually. For all three lines. On each side of the roundabout.
> The traffic into town has stopped completely still.
> Posters warn me not to make any journeys unless they're completely necessary.
> I walk.[221]

The audience is aware of the reason behind the tube closure, but this individual is not. The ambiguous dialogue is a tool which is used to connect everyone's experiences of the days leading up to the bombing of 7/7. There is no name that is connected to these lines, which furthers the argument that the actors are not characters, they are anonymous speakers that represent all of London. Rather than making his characters be the forefront of the conversation, he includes his audience as well as the whole community into the performance.

Pornography, 4.48 Psychosis, and *Love and Information* all encompass similar trends in the writing of the script that makes them easily recognizable as a death-of-the-author text. However, a play with stage directions and character names can also fit this label. David Greig's *San Diego* is an example of this and will be discussed in the following subchapter.

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[221] Simon Stephens, *Pornography*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 60.

David Greig's *San Diego*

David Greg takes himself out of the process of the performance in his play, *San Diego (2010)*, which heightens the responsibility that is placed onto the audience. The technique of the-death-of-the-author forces the audience to take on the role of the playwright. Greg uses this technique in another one of his plays, *The Events*, which was first introduced in Chapter IV: Living in Another's World: Drama-In-The-Head. This play follows Claire, who struggles with PTSD from a traumatic event. The playwright, Greig, takes himself out of the equation and allows Claire and the audience to work together to make the story sensible. Claire takes on the role of the author and the audience sees the interpretation of the world through her eyes. However, because Claire suffers from PTSD, she also struggles to relay the information correctly to the audience, which makes it harder for them to put the pieces together. This allows the audience to perform the role of the playwright, which is the central technique used in *San Diego*.

In an interview between Greig and Clare Wallace, Greig details how he came up with the idea for *San Diego*. He was telling stories to his children and realised how he constantly adapted the story to fuel their interest. For example, if they were excited about a certain character he would continue their storyline, or if they seemed disinterested, that character would meet their demise. He realised that this is also how he should be treating the audience of his plays. Not in a way that he should treat them like children, but in a way that showed that they had authority over his text.

> I wished to show [my audience] what I had found out about the world and seek their approval, or disapprobation, or indeed to shock them or to show them something.[...] And suddenly, through this thing with the children that I never thought of as having anything to do with theatre, I realised that you could have a relationship with the audience, [...] where simply your collaborative engagement with them was on the joint project of story and adventure.[222]

This quote from Greig encompasses the reason he, and most likely other playwrights as well, include their audience in the performance. Having a relationship with your audience does not mean the playwright is unable to provide their own intention, but that their intention should be to "collaborate" with them as Greig says. In *San Diego*, Greig includes himself as a character in the script and is killed during the story. However, before he dies, he explores the world of the play. *San Diego* is loosely based on Greg's first trip to America and is structured in a way that makes the audience feel as if they are reading from his personal diary where he accounts his vacation. As the playwright continues living in his own play, he lands and interacts with other characters. He begins asking for directions on how to get around San Diego and is stabbed by an individual he wrote into the script.

> **Daniel** *takes out a knife.*
>
> **Daniel** *stabs* **David** *in the stomach.*
>
> **David** You can't stab me/ You can't.
>
> **Daniel** *kneels beside* **David**. *He kisses him lightly on the cheek.*

[222] David Greig, Clare Wallace, 'Collaborating with Audiences', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4.1 (2016), 243-254 (p. 243).

Daniel I'm sorry.

David I know.[223]

This is where the play takes a decisive step away from an apparent structure. The playwright wrote one of his own characters to stab him in the script, which is a break of the fourth wall that the audience is not expecting. It is already confusing having the playwright play himself as narrator of the performance, but it is even more unexpected to watch the playwright die on stage while the characters try and save him. Once the audience's interpreter is killed, another playwright figure is introduced towards the end. However, these "playwright figures" take on the same role as the audience. Greig includes three versions of himself, which are labeled David A, B and C. In this scene, they are also trying to make sense of the play alongside the audience.

David B The people witness their chief turn to enter the chamber.

Sarah It's dark. It's behind a door. And it contains… everything.

David A And it is the cockpit.

David B / David C God, yeah.

David A (**The Pilot** *IS THE CHIEF*)The Pilot is the chief.

Sarah Yes. Yes. He wears the crown.

David B He wears the crown.

David A OK. Good. Good. Let's look at the plane now

Let's look at the plane.

[223] David Greg, *San Diego,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 18.

> **David** *brings out a large model of an aeroplane and he takes off the roof of it to reveal the seating. They start to take the model apart.*[224]

These moments can pull the rug out from under the audience because they are inserted in the middle of scenes. However, this moment is a metaphor for his entire idea for including the audience in this performance. In reference to his quote, Greig aims to make this play a collaborative effort between him and the audience. He aims to show them something about the world and seek their judgment on that or even to shock them. After the scene where Greig takes himself out of the performance, he includes a monologue where he explains how this lack of security in the performance is an illusion and in fact, the audience members are now the ones in control. On the surface, the monologue accounts how people feel anxious and confused when they are in a plane, however it is a metaphor for the entire technique used in the performance.

> A person needs to know where they are, where they're going and what time it is
> But when people fly they feel like they've lost these moorings. They feel anxious, and this anxiety acts as a disincentive to air travel [...]. The safety of the ground is an illusion.[225]

This quote details how the audience may feel nervous once their interpreter is killed off and they are now granted the authority as playwright. However, from what the play tells us, security in structure is an illusion and an escape. In removing the author, Greig is removing the security of

[224] David Greg, *San Diego,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 77
[225] David Greg, *San Diego,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 82.

an apparent structure and the idea that someone else is in control of it. The author is killed, so the audience takes on that role. The play is as lost as the audience is and the author's authority cannot be relied on. Rather than the playwright telling the audience something they should learn, everyone is a part of the same process of interpretation.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed specific plays that encompass the technique of the-death-of-the-author. In *Exit the Author*, Rebellato describes the technique in some contemporary plays which takes the playwright out of the process of performance. Plays such as *4.48 Psychosis*, *Love and Information*, *Pornography*, and *San Diego* all aim to make their audience the most prominent factor in the play. There is a lack of structure in death-of-the-author plays, which further forces the audience to piece together different aspects of the performance for it to make sense. The author is given the responsibility as a playwright and is forced to work alongside the characters to make sense of the performance. Furthermore, some plays that are even more ambiguous force the director and actors to put in the effort to give the scene their own interpretation, such as in *Love and Information*. However, these plays are not too ambiguous to the point where they could be given an infinite number of meanings. They all stick to a general theme or message that can then be given more specific intention by the production team or the audience. Following that, the performance relinquishes authority to the audience to put together the remaining loose ends, which forces the audience members to engage with the text in a new and exciting way, as the role of the author themselves.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, there has been a discussion on the many different techniques of contemporary British theatre and the inclusion of the audience. First, background information was provided regarding historical and political changes that inspired the shift in theatre techniques. From the 1980s onward, a gradual transition from State of the Nation theatre to more ambiguous contemporary theatre occurred. Playwrights began to write in ways that coincide with their desire to establish a different relationship with the audience. They turn them into witnesses rather than analysts. Several plays include one or more techniques that all placed the audience in different roles. These techniques are as follows; the role of the witness, experimenting with peril, drama-in-the-head, provoking discussion, and the death of the author. This was part of a wider shift toward Postdramatic theatre, which originated out of modernism to recognise the audience's relationship with the performance.

The Role of the Witness

One of the first methods discussed was the role of the witness, which asks the audience not to watch the performance passively but to understand and engage as spectators. Playwrights such as debbie tucker green and Simon Stephens include their audience by forcing them to bear witness to the events placed in front of them. Doing so creates empathy in the audience, which compels them to give testimony to what they witnessed. This confronts the audience with their "unwillingness" to help. The "unwillingness" to help comes from the audience being unable to do so because of the theatrical constructs which force them to remain silent in the theatre. An example of this was found in tucker green's *random,* where the actress directly asks the audience

to respond to her; however, they do not, which creates further tension in the theatre caused by the deafening silence.

Traumatised Characters

Another approach is to create characters who have suffered trauma. the fact that these characters are damaged, sometimes to the point of no return, means they lack development because they are stuck in their trauma. Some of the many playwrights that do this are Churchill, tucker green, Crimp and Stephens. Including traumatised characters in a script allows the audience to build a deeper empathetic relationship with the performance. The characters are damaged, and the events surrounding the theme of the play are traumatic. *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth is another example of how playwrights use traumatised characters and how the author can make their progression more ambiguous. In *Jerusalem,* for example, either the central character is a tragic hero or a traumatised criminal.

Drama-in-the-Head

Writers have also dramatised the internal thought processes of characters; a technique I have termed Drama in the Head. This technique is successful in including the audience because it allows them to empathise with the character in question and see the world through the eyes of someone who has a mental illness, such as PTSD, or a disorder, such as ASD. One play used as an example was *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, which allows the audience to see the world as someone with ASD would. Through lighting, choreography and character

personalities, the audience understands how Christopher becomes overstimulated in certain situations. Another example is *The Events*, which is told from the point of view of a woman who has PTSD that stems from a traumatic event. She becomes the author, which makes the retelling of events becomes muddled with real-life; thus, the audience must piece together the clues to decipher what happened. Drama-in-the-head performances effectively immerse the audience into the central character's experience, where they must remain engaged to absorb the story's context.

Testing the Audience

Following drama-in-the-head is a chapter discussing how certain playwrights force their audience to watch provoking material. This technique is similar to in-yer-face because it shocks the audience with horrific scenes of gore and trauma. However, the intentions differ because provoking the audience does not mean the writer want to shock them; they wish to keep them on edge to remain engaged in the performance. For instance, *The Writer* effectively pulls the rug out from under the audience members because of how the scenes contradict one another. Furthermore, instead of ending the performance in a clear and structured conclusion, the play ends abruptly. The playwright forces the audience to gather all the information they obtained and piece them together to understand the performance entirely.

The Death of the Author

This dissertation ends with a chapter explaining the-death-of-the-author, which ultimately takes the playwright out of the performance. The author effectively removes themselves, literally

or metaphorically, and allows the director, actors, and audience members to decipher it independently. This technique makes the audience take on the role of the author. An example of the-death-of-the-author can be found in *San Diego*, where the playwright kills off his character in the script, and the audience is left without an interpreter. The playwright does this to include his audience in the play's writing; he wants it to be a collaborative effort. He relinquishes authority onto the audience; thus, they must decipher the playwright's underlying intentions. The playwright even includes versions of himself that come back into the performance to put the play back together.

Every technique of contemporary British theatre gives the audience a new responsibility and asks them to engage in the performance. The playwrights use different strategies to include the audience; however, they all have similar outcomes. Similarly, they also share the same quality of not directly telling their audience what they should learn from the performance. All the plays discussed place their audience in a specific role either as the witness, the investigator, the playwright, or any combination. The role of the witness asks the audience to bear witness to traumatic events on stage; similarly, playwrights include traumatised characters to create a stronger empathetic reaction from their audience. Furthermore, drama-in-the-head shows the audience the world from the point of view of their characters. At the same time, other playwrights engage their audience by provoking them and never allowing them to watch comfortably. Finally, the death-of-the author makes the audience take on the role of the playwright and engages in a collaborative effort to perform the play. The contemporary audience must accept these roles and immerse themselves in the performance process to fully understand the playwright's intentions.

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