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0521258553 - Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights

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Strategies of Political Theatre

Post-War British Playwrights

This volume provides a theoretical framework for some of the most important playwriting in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. Examining representative plays by Arnold Wesker, John Arden, Trevor Griffiths, Howard Barker, Howard Brenton, Edward Bond, David Hare, John McGrath and Caryl Churchill, the author analyses their respective strategies for persuading audiences of the need for a radical restructuring of society. The book begins with a discussion of the way that theatre has been used to convey a political message. Each chapter is then devoted to an exploration of the engagement with left-wing political theatre of an individual playwright, including a detailed analysis of one of their major plays. Despite political change since the 1980s, political playwriting continues to be a significant element in contemporary playwriting, but in a very changed form.

MICHAEL PATTERSON is Professor of Theatre at De Montfort University, Leicester. He is a major British authority on German theatre, especially twentieth-century political theatre in Germany. He is author of *German Theatre Today*; *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900–1933*; *Peter Stein*; *The First German Theatre*; and *German Theatre: A Bibliography*, and is editor of *Georg Büchner: Collected Plays*. He has published numerous articles on German Naturalist theatre, Reinhardt, Pirandello, Brecht, concentration camp theatre, Kroetz and East German theatre.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typefaces Trump Mediaeval 9.25/14 pt. and Schadow BT *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 25855 3 hardback

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For Kerry, Jamie and Gráinne

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Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is due to the following for permission to use copyright material: A. Alvarez; André Deutsch, London; the BBC; Faber and Faber, London; *The Independent*, London; John Calder, London; Jonathan Cape, London; Lawrence and Wishart, London; Macmillan, Basingstoke; Methuen, London; *Modern Drama*, University of Toronto; Monthly Review Press, New York; *The New Statesman*, London; Nick Hern Books, London; Peters, Fraser and Dunlop, London; *Plays and Players*, London; Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main; Theatre Quarterly Publications, London; Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London; Arnold Wesker. Every effort has been made to trace the holders of copyright material. Will those whom I have failed to contact please accept my acknowledgment.

I should also like to thank the following for their help and advice: Professor Judy Simons, Colin Chambers, and Frances Rankin-Hutera.

Finally I wish to acknowledge the generous financial assistance provided by the Arts and Humanities Research Board and by the Faculty of Humanities of De Montfort University Leicester.

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Brief chronology, 1953–1989

- 1953** Joan Littlewood opens Theatre Workshop at Stratford East
- 1954** English Stage Company founded by Ronald Duncan and Neville Blond. Brendan Behan's first play, *The Quare Fellow*, staged by Joan Littlewood at Stratford East
- 1955** Anthony Eden replaces Winston Churchill as Prime Minister
Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) performed at Arts Theatre, London
- 1956** The Suez crisis. Soviet troops enter Hungary
First season of English Stage Company (now with George Devine) at Royal Court Theatre includes premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Visit to London of Berliner Ensemble with Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Mother Courage*. Death of Brecht. Peter Brook directs Paul Scofield in *Hamlet*
- 1957** Harold Macmillan replaces Anthony Eden as Prime Minister
John Osborne's *The Entertainer* staged at Royal Court, directed by Tony Richardson. Samuel Beckett: *Endgame*
- 1958** Founding of European Common Market. First march by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to Aldermaston
Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* flops after one week.
Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* performed at Stratford East before transferring to the West End

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Brief chronology, 1953–1989

John Arden: *Live Like Pigs* staged at Royal Court

Shelagh Delaney: *A Taste of Honey*

Arnold Wesker: *Chicken Soup with Barley* staged at Royal Court

1959 The Mermaid Theatre opens

John Arden: *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, directed by Lindsay Anderson

Arnold Wesker: *Roots*, directed by John Dexter

Arnold Wesker: *The Kitchen*

1960 John F. Kennedy elected US President

Centre 42 founded. Harold Pinter: *The Caretaker*

John Arden: *The Happy Haven*, directed by William Gaskill

Arnold Wesker: *I'm Talking About Jerusalem*, directed by John Dexter at the Royal Court

1961 US invasion of Cuba (Bay of Pigs). Berlin Wall erected

Peter Hall as artistic director of the Stratford Memorial Theatre, leases Aldwych and founds the Royal Shakespeare Company. John Osborne: *Luther*

1962 Cuban missile crisis. First success of the Beatles

Peter Brook's Theatre of Cruelty season. Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Edward Bond: *The Pope's Wedding*

Arnold Wesker: *Chips with Everything*, directed by John Dexter at the Royal Court

1963 President Kennedy assassinated. Alec Douglas-Home replaces Macmillan as Prime Minister

The National Theatre opens at the Old Vic

John Arden: *The Workhouse Donkey*

Joan Littlewood: *Oh What A Lovely War*

Brief chronology, 1953–1989

- 1964** Harold Wilson becomes first Labour Prime Minister since 1951. Lyndon B. Johnson elected US President
 Peter Brook's productions of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*. John Osborne: *Inadmissible Evidence*
 John Arden: *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* premiered at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre
- 1965** Intensification of the Vietnam War. Anti-war demonstrations in USA. Race riots in Los Angeles
 Death of George Devine. Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*. CAST (Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre) and the People Show founded. Theatre in Education initiated. John Osborne: *A Patriot for Me*. Frank Marcus: *The Killing of Sister George*
 Edward Bond: *Saved*
 David Mercer: *Ride a Cock Horse*
- 1966** Wilson announces 'standstill' in wages and prices. Mao Tse-tung: *Quotations of Chairman Mao*
 Peter Brook's *US at Aldwych*. Raymond Williams: *Modern Tragedy*
 John McGrath: *Events while Guarding the Bofors Gun*
 Arnold Wesker: *Their Very Own and Golden City*
- 1967** Pound devalued. 50,000 demonstrate against Vietnam War in Washington. Six-Day War between Israel and Arab nations
 Joe Orton murdered. Alan Ayckbourn's first success with *Relatively Speaking*. Peter Nichols: *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*
- 1968** Assassination of Martin Luther King. Student revolt in Paris: the so-called *événements*. Riots in Chicago during Democratic convention. Russians invade Czechoslovakia. Restriction of black immigration into Britain

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Brief chronology, 1953–1989

Abolition of Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship. David Hare founds Portable Theatre with Tony Bicat. Charles Marowitz opens the Open Space Theatre. Red Ladder and Welfare State founded.

John Arden: *The Hero Rises Up*

Peter Barnes: *The Ruling Class*

Edward Bond: *Early Morning*

Edward Bond: *Narrow Road to the Deep North*

John McGrath: *Bakke's Night of Fame*

Alan Plater: *Close the Coalhouse Door*

1969 Nixon becomes US President. British troops sent into Northern Ireland in response to sectarian violence

Trevor Nunn takes over Royal Shakespeare Company from Peter Hall

Howard Brenton: *Christie in Love*

Howard Brenton: *Gum and Goo*

Peter Nichols: *The National Health*

John Spurling: *Macrune's Guevara*

1970 Conservative government returned to power, led by Edward Heath. First time 18-year-olds able to vote. US National Guard shoots four student protesters against Vietnam War. Marxist President elected in Chile. Women's Liberation Group and Gay Liberation Front founded

Peter Brook directs *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. David Storey: *Home*

Trevor Griffiths: *Occupations*

David Hare: *Slag*

John McGrath: *Random Happenings in the Hebrides*

David Mercer: *After Haggerty*

Arnold Wesker: *The Friends*

Brief chronology, 1953–1989

- 1971** Fighting in Vietnam spills over into Laos and Cambodia. Introduction of internment in Northern Ireland; violence escalates
 Founding of 7:84 and General Will. Harold Pinter's *Old Times*
 Edward Bond: *Lear*
 Howard Brenton: *Scott of the Antarctic*
 David Edgar: *The National Interest*
 David Edgar: *Tedderella*
 Trevor Griffiths: *Thermidor*
 Portable Theatre: *Lay-By*
- 1972** Beginning of the Watergate affair. Britain imposes direct rule on Northern Ireland
 John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy: *The Island of the Mighty*
 John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy: *The Ballygombeen Bequest*
 Howard Barker: *Alpha Alpha*
 Howard Brenton: *Hitler Dances*
 Howard Brenton, David Edgar and David Hare: *England's Ireland* performed in Amsterdam
 Caryl Churchill: *Owners*
 Trevor Griffiths: *Sam, Sam*
 David Hare: *The Great Exhibition*
 John McGrath: *Serjeant Musgrave Dances On*
 Arnold Wesker: *The Old Ones*
- 1973** Britain joins the Common Market. Arab oil embargo; fuel crisis. Chilean president overthrown by military coup
 Peter Hall takes over National Theatre from Laurence Olivier
 Edward Bond: *The Sea*
 Edward Bond: *Bingo*

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Howard Brenton: *Magnificence*

Howard Brenton and David Hare: *Brassneck*

David Edgar and Howard Brenton: *A Fart for Europe*

Trevor Griffiths: *The Party*

John McGrath: *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*

- 1974** Worldwide inflation. Wilson replaces Heath, after Heath had failed to rally the nation against the miners in the so-called 'Winter of Discontent'. Violence in Northern Ireland spreads to Britain: terrorist bomb in Houses of Parliament. Nixon forced to resign over Watergate, replaced by Gerald Ford

Joint Stock and Women's Theatre Group founded

Howard Brenton: *The Churchill Play*

David Edgar: *Dick Deterred*

David Hare: *Knuckle*

John McGrath: *The Imperial Policeman*

Arnold Wesker: *The Wedding Feast* performed in Stockholm

- 1975** Margaret Thatcher succeeds Heath as leader of Conservatives. Fall of Saigon

Opening of the Riverside Studios, Hammersmith. Harold

Pinter's *No Man's Land*. Stephen Poliakoff: *City Sugar*

John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy: *The Non-Stop Connolly Show*

Howard Barker: *Claw*

Howard Barker: *Stripwell*

Edward Bond: *The Fool*

Caryl Churchill: *Objections to Sex and Violence*

Trevor Griffiths: *Comedians*

David Hare: *Fanshen*

David Hare: *Teeth 'n' Smiles*

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replaces Wilson as Prime Minister. Blacks riot in South Africa. Jimmy Carter elected US President

The National Theatre opens on the South Bank. Gay Sweatshop founded

Howard Brenton: *Weapons of Happiness*Caryl Churchill: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*Caryl Churchill: *Vinegar Tom*David Edgar: *Destiny*Arnold Wesker: *The Merchant* performed in Stockholm**1977** US protests about harassment of Czech dissidentsRobert Bolt: *State of Revolution*Caryl Churchill: *Traps*David Edgar: *Wreckers***1978** Marxist guerrillas seize power in NicaraguaHarold Pinter: *Betrayal*Howard Barker: *The Hang of the Gaol*Edward Bond: *The Bundle*Edward Bond: *The Woman*Howard Brenton, David Hare and Trevor Griffiths: *Deeds*David Edgar: *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*David Hare: *Plenty*David Mercer: *Cousin Vladimir***1979** Margaret Thatcher wins general election, pursues monetarist policiesEdward Bond: *The Worlds*Caryl Churchill: *Cloud Nine*

Brief chronology, 1953–1989

- 1980** Reagan elected US President. Start of Iran–Iraq War
 Death of David Mercer
 Howard Brenton: *The Romans in Britain*
 David Edgar: *Nicholas Nickleby* (adaptation)
- 1981** Greenham Common Peace Camp starts
 John McGrath publishes *A Good Night Out*. Samuel Beckett: *Catastrophe*
 Howard Barker: *No End of Blame*
- 1982** Falklands conflict
 The Royal Shakespeare Company moves to the Barbican
 Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*
 Trevor Griffiths: *Oi! for England*
 David Hare: *A Map of the World* performed in Adelaide
- 1983** Thatcher re-elected with landslide victory
 Caryl Churchill: *Fen*
 Sarah Daniels: *Masterpieces*
 David Edgar: *Maydays*
- 1984** Reagan re-elected. Thatcher confronts unions, especially in the long-lasting miners' strike
 Arts Council 'Glory of the Garden' policy
 Caryl Churchill: *Softcops*
 John McGrath: *Imperial Policeman*
 Harold Pinter: *One for the Road*
 Stephen Poliakoff: *Breaking the Silence*
- 1985** Gorbachev becomes Soviet leader, initiates *perestroika*, a liberalization of the USSR
 Edward Bond: *War Plays*
 David Hare and Howard Brenton: *Pravda*

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- 1986** David Rudkin: *The Saxon Shore*
- 1987** Thatcher re-elected for third term
 Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*
 David Edgar: *Entertaining Strangers* performed at the National Theatre
- 1988** Passing of so-called Clause 28, banning the promotion of homosexuality in schools. End of conflict between Iraq and Iran
 Howard Barker: *The Bite of the Night*
 Howard Brenton: *Greenland*
 David Hare: *The Secret Rapture*
 Harold Pinter: *Mountain Language*
 Timberlake Wertenbaker: *Our Country's Good*
- 1989** George Bush elected US President. Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. Dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Vaclav Havel becomes President of the Czech Republic
 Caryl Churchill: *Icecream*