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DAVID HARE:
BRITAIN'S PLAYWRIGHT OF POPULAR DISSENT

By

Lane A. Glenn

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ABSTRACT

DAVID HARE:
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By

Lane A. Glenn

The English playwright David Hare graduated from Britain's Fringe Theatre movement of the late 1960s and '70s, a haven for young, experimental, revolutionary playwrights, to popular acclaim and public subsidization at the Royal National Theatre in London in the 1990s. However, he has maintained his position as one of England's most outspoken critics of public institutions and social customs.

The purpose of this disseratation is to explore the evolution of Hare's theatrical work, concentrating on his produced plays from 1979-1993. The focus era coincides with the years of Margaret Thatcher's terms of office as Prime Minister of Great Britain, and is the time of the playwright's greatest change of style and growth of popularity, largely due to his criticism of "Thatcherite" Britain. By examining Hare's creative output during this period, the dissertation will provide a better understanding of the relationship between an artist and his subject matter, and a political playwright and his audiences over a period of time.

Research will be conducted in two parts. The first involves a thorough examination of Hare's plays over the last fifteen years (excluding screenplays and films). Each play will be analyzed according to 1) content, 2) structure, 3) style, and 4) critical reaction to production.

In each instance the play's content refers to the basic storyline of the play and the relationships between its characters, but more

importantly it refers to the play's political themes. The structure of each play refers to the dramatic composition of the text and its importance to the play's themes. The style of the play refers to the playwright's use of language, characterization, and allegory for thematic purposes. Critical reaction will be arrived at by canvassing reviews in newspapers and periodicals, examining production runs and attendance, and interviewing participants.

The second part of the research involves interviews with the playwright and others involved in his productions. These include: David Hare; Richard Eyre (Artistic Director of the National Theatre), Giles Croft (the National Theatre's Literary Manager); and critics Benedict Nightingale and Matt Wolf.

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Although he is intensely interested in the private lives of his fellow Englishmen, David Hare does not like to divulge much about his own past and present lifestyle. For him that would be extraneous to his job as an artist. "Going on television or being in *People* magazine is selling," says Hare, "we (writers) are not selling; we're doing something different, and we have to use different means. What is the writer's claim? That you speak only when you have something to say." (Bloom 34) What he *has* disclosed, however, though Hare himself shuns such analysis, may explain some of his political bent and social ideas.

David Hare was born on June 5, 1947 in St. Leonard's-on-Sea in Sussex, along the southeastern coast of England. Though he resists "psychologizing," or over-emphasising the importance of his early years, he admits his birth was "on the wave of postwar optimism. Everyone came home from the war and had children. Bang on the day I was born, the Marshall Plan was announced, and Europe became Europe." (Gussow 44) Like many of his contemporaries, this post-war period in British history has figured prominently in Hare's creative works. Plays like Plenty and A Map of the World, and films such as Licking Hitler and Wetherby, rely heavily on the disillusionment that resulted for many Britons when peacetime prosperity did not fulfill their expectations. But empty dreams are not all Hare perceives from those early years. According to him, the older members of his community were ready to return to life as usual, to "get on with it" after the war ended, while he maintained a

romantic fascination with it. "What really got me," he says, "was the flavor of the period. I liked the ingredients: sex and danger." (Gussow 44)

Hare's father was a ship's purser on a passenger liner that sailed between England, India, and Australia. The time his father spent away from home left Hare alone with his mother and sister. Surrounded by women as a child, Hare developed an appreciation for the noble qualities he found them to have. A noticeable trend in his writing from the very beginning is the presence of female protagonists. The playwright's first success, Slag, as well as Plenty, The Bay at Nice, Wrecked Eggs, The Secret Rapture, Wetherby, and Strapless all have strong women characters.

Paddy Woodworth, a critic for the *Irish Times*, has observed, "Women are central to the work of David Hare, in a way which is most unusual in a male writer for the stage and screen." (Woodworth 12) In a profile of the artist during the London run of The Secret Rapture, Michael Bloom noted, "Hare's fascination with heroines is the most obvious and least understood aspect of his writing." Hare's response was, "I've written about women a lot because my subject has often been goodness. The idea of men being good seems to me to be slightly silly." (Bloom 33)

As a youth, Hare attended Lancing College, a private high-church preparatory school, where for awhile he entertained ideas of entering the clergy. While at Lancing he nearly became a sacristan, and did take the position of Head Boy, an ironic role for an artist who would one day become a standard bearer for the anti-establishment crowd. As for the theological influence, Hare says, "I have long been exercised by religion. I felt that I had something over people: it made me a snooty, superior boy.

I could always not deal with my problems by referring to God, my comfort." (Grove 12)

While at Lancing, and later during his university days, Hare was conscious of his lower class upbringing and, he admits ashamedly, attempted to alter his position by changing to a more aristocratic accent. "I think it was contemptible that I wanted to belong to a smarter class," he says, "I was a very ambitious young man. I was born into the semi-detached world and was forced up through the system. I'm very good at spotting other class fakes because I was so ridiculed for my accent at Lancing. For a long time it scarred me." ("Lone Wolf" 12)

Following Lancing, Hare read English at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he received his MA. While he got his first taste of the theatre at Cambridge, the playwright discounts the importance of those years. "I did direct a couple of shows while I was there," he says, "Apart from that, I felt I was wasting my time." (Page 7)

He graduated from Cambridge with honors in 1968 and, together with the composer Tony Bicât, who continues to score some of Hare's films and plays, created the Portable Theatre, a travelling group of dramatic artists whose business it was to send highly political works to the suburbs and slums of English cities. It was a period of decentralization in London theatre--the Fringe was forming, running parallel to New York's Off-Broadway houses--and Hare's troupe was at the crest of the movement. "Portable was one of the first companies to move out of the cities," wrote Jonathan Myerson in a 1980 profile of Hare, "out of the estalished venues to find more open-minded audiences. They started by playing in people's front rooms, army camps and on plain floorboards; by the end, they were

playing in the very arts centres on the circuit that they had been instrumental in founding." (Myerson 26)

The Portable Theatre and similar groups at various times attracted theatre artists whose names today are synonymous with the Left, Labour, or the Avant-garde. One such artist was the playwright Howard Brenton, with whom Hare has written a number of plays. The oft-told anecdote of their meeting in 1968 goes something like this: The Portable Theatre was performing Inside Out, a Kafka adaptation, at a London venue, and only one audience member showed up--Brenton. Hare and Bicât cancelled the show, took the writer to a nearby pub, and became fast friends. Within a year Hare directed a production of Brenton's Christie in Love, a show that made a name for both men.

In addition to his work with the Portable Theatre, Hare was invited by Christopher Hampton to take on the role of Literary Manager at the Royal Court Theatre in 1969. He looks back on his Royal Court days, earning £7.10s a week to plow through dozens of hopeful manuscripts, with a mixture of disdain and grudging admiration for his former colleagues. "What struck me and cheered me there from the first day," Hare says, "was finding a group of people who assumed, without a moment's self-doubt, that the dominant culture of the day was garbage, because the values of the society were rotten; that, in particular, literary affairs in this country are largely in the hands of a sold-out right-wing middle class who can't write; and that therefore in artistic matters you must, at whatever cost, trust your own experience and believe nothing you read in newspapers." (Hare "Time of Unease" 141)

His political fervor was curtailed, however, by what Hare and others perceived to be a lack of ideological passion on the part of the Royal

Court's coterie of directors. At the time a rancorous issue, the playwright reflects on the artistic differences that split the Royal Court with more understanding now. "I believe that the Court in the early seventies was primarily an aesthetic theatre, not a political one," he says, "And the reason why it then lost the loyalty of so many writers in the following years was because it finally refused to move into the field of English politics, although it was presenting excellent political work about the Third World. A direct confrontation finally occurred between those who wanted the Court to be a socialist theatre and those who wanted it to be a humanist theatre and, no question, the humanists won." (Hare "Time of Unease" 142)

Even if his stint as the Royal Court's literary manager and, for one year, resident dramatist, was not all Hare had expected, there is no doubt it provided him with the much-needed opportunity to see his work, and the works of his colleagues, produced by a reputable company. Among the plays Hare saw staged were Brenton's Revenge at the Court's Theatre Upstairs, his own Slag and What Happened to Blake, and Lay By, a collaborative piece written by Hare, Brenton, Brian Clark, Trevor Griffiths, Steven Poliakoff, Hugh Stoddart, and Snoo Wilson.

Though Hare views his first few attempts at playwriting as pure satire, dialogue that seems to him written by someone else, the genesis of his later talent can be seen in his earliest work. Besides thematic motifs, Hare's plays share structural similarities and categories of form with many of his contemporaries. Like most late twentieth century dramatists to some degree, Hare belongs to an age of writing that may be termed post-realistic. Playwrights in this era have a full range of form and structure to draw on, from the well-made plays of the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries, to the absurdist plays of the 1950s, and various semi-realistic and anti-realistic styles in between.

Additionally, British writers following the Second World War have been influenced by the heavy subsidization of their theatres, allowing greater room for experimentation. This artistic freedom was further expanded when theatrical censorship was abolished in Britain in September of 1968. Until that time British theatre had been monitored first by the royal Master of Revels, then by the Lord Chamberlain, to ensure that offensive language and situations never reached the stage. Finally most writers of this era, especially those like Hare who have crossed successfully back and forth between both mediums, have been affected by cinema and television.

The product of these influences--post-realism, subsidization, artistic freedom, and film--has been a cross-fertilization and hybridization of form and structure. John Russell Brown observes, "Since the 1950s there have been no accepted patterns for dramatists to follow. Plays are larger, longer, smaller, shorter, slower, quicker than they have ever been. They are more silent, with whole scenes without words, and more noisy, more theatrical, more intellectual, more surprising; they are also less consistent in themselves. A new writer is seldom told that he is breaking the rules; some critics would say that performance is the only reliable test for a play-script." (Brown 31)

Accordingly, Hare's work does not fit easily into the categories of "comedy," "tragedy," "farce," or "well-made play." Rather, there is a great deal of humor in their pathos and woe in the silliest satire. Along with the blending of forms, there is a fracturing of structure that is part episodic and part cinematic, grown out of a distaste for living room family dramas

and a need for practical concerns of theatrical performance. His plays are not divided simply into two or three acts, but into several disparate scenes within each act, often covering a period of weeks, months, or even years. None of them, with the exception of his two one-act dramas, The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs, take place in a single location. Since it is financially and logistically almost impossible to provide full representations of the variety of settings his plays require *on the stage,* they are written with suggestive scenery or a bare stage in mind.

Hare's first major play, produced at the Hampstead Theatre Club in April of 1970, then at the Royal Court in May of 1971, was Slag, a farcical treatment of a year in the lives of three schoolmistresses who run Brackenhurst School for girls. The women bond in sisterly love, argue politics and pedagogy, and play absurd games with one another while their school attendance dwindles from eleven girls to none. Each of the characters is a thinly-disguised symbol for a political faction, and their conflict can be seen as a revolution of sorts. Roger Cornish, in an early literary biography of Hare, notes, "There is little linear plot development. Instead, the play is best seen as presenting a revolutionary conflict in which conservative England (represented by Ann) competes with Maoist radicalism (Joanne) for the loyalty of the common masses (Elise)." (Cornish 236.) Critical reaction was tepid. Stanley Kauffmann's review in the *New Republic* was typical. "Slag is unfocused and even boring," Kaufmann wrote, "but it is attractively articulate and theatrically at home...The best aspect of the play is that Hare has taken a conventional comedy about a public school staff and converted it *internally* into a macabre fantasy without much altering externals." (Kauffman 32)

Even more polemical, though less successful than Slag, was Hare's next attempt, The Great Exhibition. Produced at the Hampstead Theatre in February of 1972, The Great Exhibtion derives its name from its pathetic leading character, a world-weary, washed-out Labour MP who has failed at his career and his marriage and, in a last attempt at gaining notoriety, decides to become a flasher on Clapham Common. The play has its comical moments and provides an interesting variety of incongruous relationships, however critics and audiences felt overwhelmed by meaning and robbed of entertainment. As Michael Billington put it in his review for *The Guardian*, "I'll say this for Mr. Hare: he certainly lets you know what he dislikes. The encyclopaedic list includes parliamentary democracy, privileged middle-class despair, unfeeling upper-class arrogance, fake hippiedom, verbal culture, Ibsenite drama, avant-garde posturing, and George Orwell. But the problem is that a play has to be founded on something more than a rejection of all that has gone before unless it is to dwindle into peevishness." (Billington 12)

With all of its pointed disgruntledness, however, The Great Exhibition still marks a stylistic beginning for Hare. Though the objects of the playwright's scorn in this work are many, these targets are not presented in an impersonalized, Brechtian way, or in the Portable school's method of emotionalizing and propagandizing an issue. Instead Hare employs a man and a woman (at times *two* men and *two* women) whose intimate relationship involves the subjects he wishes to cover. This approach, over the next several years, becomes a plotline mainstay of Hare's plays.

Still, the early seventies for Hare was a period of experimentation--trial and error of dramatic form and content. Part of his testing of the theatrical waters involved collaboration with Howard Brenton. By the

time the two men combined their talents in 1973 to write Brassneck, they had already worked together as a playwright-director team at the Portable, the Royal Court, and several lesser-known houses in the London area, and had collaborated, along with other Fringers, on Lay-By.

Brassneck, which is Midlands slang for "criminal nerve", combined the cumulative experience and techniques of Hare and Brenton garnered from these beginnings in the Fringe movement. It was performed in September of 1973 at the Nottingham Playhouse, a larger, better-equipped stage than the two men had been used to using. This, perhaps, accounts for the complexity of the production. The play requires multiple locales and thirty parts.

Brassneck chronicles the lives of three generations of the Bagley family, beginning with the patriarch, who kills his wife during the Blitzkrieg in order to collect on her insurance and become a wealthy investment businessman. Roderick, the nephew representing the next generation, nearly loses the family wealth and prestige when he is jailed for bribery and fixed building contracts, but in the end the Bagleys are secured by Roderick's son, a nightclub owner who finds them all a new line of work: the lucrative heroin trade.

Brassneck is an obvious indictment against laissez-faire capitalism, and a vitriolic one at that. Neither major political party escapes unscathed from the corrupt world of the play. Like many of Hare's subsequent solo works, Brassneck manages to criticize not only the Conservative Party detested by Leftist playwrights, but their own socialist Labour Party as well. While the Bagleys remain political independents, shifting loyalties when it is most profitable, the politicians and businessmen

who help launch them on their meteoric rise to wealth and prominence represent both ends of the political spectrum.

At least one critic, Peter Ansorge writing for *Plays and Players*, cited the play as the first major Fringe production to take place before a mainstream audience. (Ansorge 19) But how could such a stab at the establishment succeed in a prominent commercial venue? The answer may lie in the combination of elements Hare and Brenton were able to achieve by combining their talents. "Brassneck was a clear instance of a play which did catch on with a far wider audience than normally went to the theatre," Hare told Ansorge, "It worked on the lowest common denominator. Howard and I stopped short at exactly the point where we began to diverge politically in our approach to the subject. Brassneck is as far as Howard and I can go in agreement. The play ends with the simple statement that these are 'the last days of capitalism'. On how exactly the system will be transformed, how the future would shape, we couldn't agree." (Ansorge 20)

In a somewhat Shavian way, then, the play presents problems, suggests culprits all around, then leaves potential solutions to the audience. The play's equal distribution of responsibility was noticed by several critics. Writing for *The Guardian*, Michael Billington asserted, "What I like about the play is the way it interweaves family, civic, and national issues...What lifts the play above agitprop is that it indicts left as well as right. Labour councillors and MPs are shown to be as susceptible as anyone else to the creeping magnetism of power." (Billington)

His next play, Knuckle, brought Hare to the West End for the first time, performing at the Comedy Theatre in March of 1974. According to the majority of critics, it also marked several other important "firsts" for the

playwright, especially in the area of character development. The principle character taints found in Brassneck--aggressive capitalism and unashamed self-promotion--are community ills encouraged by societies that reward victors and survivors and scorn victims. Beginning with Knuckle in 1974 and continuing through many of his subsequent plays, it is the perspective of the victims Hare seeks to portray. To do this, Hare created his first "good" women characters, Jenny Wilbur and Sarah Delafield.

Knuckle is a curious mixture of the 1950s cliché private eye film genre and social critique. The Humphrey Bogart-like hero, Curly Delafield, long ago turned his back on his father's "respectable" stockbroking trade and defiantly became an international munitions seller. He has returned from abroad to his Guildford home to help track down Sarah, his missing sister, who may have been murdered. His investigation leads him through a series of cinematically flowing scenes set in typical thriller locations--seedy barrooms, warehouses, and slums, a police station and a hospital. He meets various despicable characters who may have had a hand in his sister's disappearance, and one virtuous woman, Jenny, who tries to help him piece together the puzzle. He discovers that his father's absorption in his business and neglect of his sister's emotional state may have led to her suicide. It is likely she threw herself into the ocean to escape a world too preoccupied with profit and advancement to care about people. But the lure of money and respectability held out by his father's profession distract him from pursuing justice. In the end, Jenny receives a letter from the mysterious sister who is apparently still alive, searching Europe for tolerably good company. Curly must return to his arms trade and leave behind the untainted Jenny.

On the surface the detective fiction of Knuckle can be compared to Mickey Spillane or Raymond Chandler. The dialogue is telling:

JENNY: I was waiting for you to uncurl your lip.

CURLY: That's the way I keep it. Catches crumbs. (Hare 16)

But there is more than pulp thriller to Hare's tale. "I have no snobbery about thrillers," Hare has explained, "From childhood they have been the form of literature I have understood best, and my enthusiasm is indiscriminate...If I have a preference at all, it is for those who work against the form to make it do something to which it is not apparently suited." (Hare History Plays 10)

And, while his hero and heroine often banter on in sarcastically witty exchanges, they are equally prone to revealing deep thoughts about the human condition. After a meeting with his robber baron father, Curly tells Jenny despairingly, "I will tell you the horror of the world. The horror of the world is there are no excuses left. There was a time when men who ruined other men could claim they were ignorant, or simple, or believed in God, or life was very hard, or we didn't know what we were doing: but now everybody knows the tricks, the same shabby hands have been played over and over, and men who persist in the old ways of running their countries or their lives--those men now do it in the full knowledge of what they're doing. So that at last greed and selfishness and cruelty stand exposed in a great white light. Men are bad because they want to be." (Hare 80)

While Knuckle, like Brassneck before it, is a condemnation of ruthless capitalism, Hare insists the newer work is more useful and optimistic. "Knuckle is an almost obscenely constructive play!" he told one interviewer, "It says something about it being impossible to live within this

system without doing yourself moral damage. That's a huge claim." He further adds, "The reason I don't find the play pessimistic is because it also contains the most admirable person I've ever drawn, this girl who is meant to be a good person. The whole play deals with moral values, and concludes that there *is* such a thing as moral value. That seems to me quite cheerful." (Trussler 118)

Though Brassneck and especially Knuckle had begun to earn Hare a name with mainstream audiences, for his next work in 1975 he returned to the Fringe to collaborate with the Portable Theatre on an adaptation of William S. Hinton's first-hand account of the Chinese Revolution, Fanshen. Why the abrupt change of pace? "I think like everybody I was sick to death with writing about England--with writing about this decadent corner of the globe. The excitement of Fanshen was to write about a society and to cover a period of time in which one felt that people's lives were being materially and spiritually improved, in a culture that was completely different to anything we knew about. We wanted to write a positive work using positive material." (Trussler 119)

Essentially, Fanshen chronicles events in the lives of the peasants of Long Bow, a small Chinese village, during the Revolution from 1945 to 1949. The villagers, who for generations have served the landowners as serfs in an archaic feudal system, are forced by the tide of events succeeding the Second World War to question their relationships to each other, to their masters, and to their system of government. As they overthrow the system that oppressed them for so long, they are faced with the difficult problems of finding a new method of governing themselves to replace it. For the people of Long Bow, and the rest of

China, Communism is the answer--a redistribution of wealth in a more equitable manner.

The evolution of Fanshen was unlike that of any other play Hare had written. Taking his original inspiration from Hinton's book, the playwright then composed his own version of the events, adapting them for European audiences and placing his own emphasis on the politics of history. Then the play was revised after meetings with Hinton and workshops with the Portable Theatre. In a discussion after a revival performance of the play in 1980, Hare disclosed, "We originally did five weeks' workshop on the six hundred pages (of Hinton's book), trying all sorts of different approaches to this apparently intractable material. Just in sheer stage-time the book was enormous, but also the problems of presentation seemed to us insuperable. So we tried various kinds of slogan theatre, various ways of telescoping the material, various arts of story-telling, various exercises to do with how to tell the essence of a story in the shortest possible time...The way the play emerged was finally fixed first of all by the two directors and me deciding a scenario and then by me deciding which of the many plays inside Hinton's book I was going to write. And the play Fanshen is very different from the book *Fanshen;* both its aims and the play's selection from the book, its route through the book, make it a very different kind of project. It was a personal response to certain themes inside the book, notably the questions how does any democracy know it's a good democracy, how do the led look after the leadership, how do the ruled rule the rulers?" (Hare "After Fanshen" 297-298)

Though the important themes Hare pointed out are recurrent ones in his work, Fanshen represents a departure in style, a return to earlier

methods of production, including bare staging and Brechtian techniques. With the many locales offered by the play and the large number of characters (played by actors doubling and tripling parts) compounded by the difficulties of mounting the show to tour the provinces, Fanshen the play had to employ a highly symbolic style of staging. Representational scenery, narration, and painted signs solved most of the play's visual challenges.

Still, there was danger of this sort of approach contradicting some of Hare's beliefs about political theatre. In a lecture at Cambridge in 1978, Hare told his audience, "Why do we have to endure the demeaning repetition of slogans which are seen not as transitional aids to understanding, but as ultimate solutions to men's problems? Why the insulting insistence in so much political theatre that a few gimcrack mottoes of the left will sort out the deep problems of reaction in modern England? Why the urge to caricature? Why the deadly stiffness of limb? Brecht uncoils the great sleeping length of his mind to give us in everything but the greatest of his writing exactly the impression, the godlike feeling that the questions have been answered before the play has begun." (Hare Licking Hitler 63)

Whether Hare and Portable Theatre avoided all of these potential hazards of political theatre is debatable. Writing for the London *Times* after the play's premiere performance, Irving Wardle said, "What holds the attention and banishes any sense of propaganda is the spartan clarity of the story-telling. No actor plays less than three parts, but with simple costume changes and facial transformation, there is never any doubt of who is who. They come forward at the beginning and announce their names and what they possess. Their following scenes are established with

a handful of beautifully exact props. There is, of course, no central figure; and the emphasis goes exclusively to events and opinions." (Wardle)

Other critics agreed. One even went so far as to say, "Fanshen, written with Joint Stock was one of the classic achievments of political theatre." (Itzin 330) In its various incarnations, however, first as a bare bones touring production, then a BBC made for television movie, and then in revivals in New York and London in the early 1980s, Fanshen has received less glowing praise. Commenting on the New York SoHo Rep production of 1983, John Simon wrote, "There is minimal plot in the conventional sense, but the social iniquities of China do have their dramatic aspect even in--especially in--simple telling, and, in the unemotionally Brechtian style, Hare does accomplish a thing or two. But the dramatic effect of town meetings, trials, redistributions and re-redistributions of wealth does pall after a while. The failure of the village Communists to resist the bourgeois temptations once in power; the coming of a work team to straighten out the village, and their falling, in turn, into error; the fallibility of the odd top-level functionary even--all this becomes, finally, schematic and predictable, as are the humble and patient ways with which, through mutual and self-criticism, all gets ironed out in the end--or so we are led to believe." (Simon 76-77)

After *Fanshen* Hare wrote what he has admitted was his only clearly autobiographical piece of work, Teeth 'n' Smiles. Meant as a sort of swan song for the 1960s, Teeth 'n' Smiles takes place in 1969 during the May Ball at Jesus College, Cambridge. Combining drama and music, the play is about a declining counter-culture rock band playing an unwanted performance at one of England's most reactionary institutions.

The play's setting and characters are things Hare experienced first hand during his own school days. "I think it's so boring and dishonest when writers dress up their own experience," Hare said in an interview just prior to the play's opening, "They think that by changing a few details they distance themselves...So I thought, if you were going to write about something you'd experienced, it was much better to be honest and not change *any* of the critical details. Like I *did* go to Jesus College, Cambridge, and there *were* rock groups visiting at the time. Everything on the surface is documentarily accurate." (McFerran 15)

True to Hare's memory of the time, neither the band nor the students at the university are portrayed in a particularly flattering way. The musicians are all worn thin from lives of excess. Their lead singer, Maggie, is a promiscuous, substance abusing alcoholic who is taken to jail at the end of the play for drug possession. Peyote, the bass guitarist, is to blame for her arrest since he hid the drugs in her bag. Arthur, the group's songwriter, was educated at Cambridge and is enjoying the opportunity to spit in the face of his establishment past, and the band's manager, Saraffian, meets the group on the road with the intention of closing down the whole operation since they are no longer profitable for him.

Besides being a portrait of youth culture in the sixties, the play takes on added meaning seen in the context of class conscious England. Hare explains, "The rock groups were fantastically aggressive and they hated having to play those dates, and they were extremely rude to the audience, and by and large their audiences disliked them very much too. It was an extraordinary clash of two worlds: these May balls with people dressed up and performing a complete parody of life that was over

many, many years ago, and into that crashed these rock bands, like travelling trouble on the move." (McFerran 15)

Much of the dialogue of the play reflects this class conflict. Neither side seems to understand the lifestyle of the other, nor does anyone seem prepared to make the attempt. Arthur's distaste for university life is summed up in his assessment of the undergraduates as "Rich complacent self-loving self-regarding self-righteous phoney half-baked politically immature neurotic evil-minded little shits," and in his categorization of school officials and, by extension, all authority figures, as tyrants who "invent a few rules that don't mean anything so that you can ruin your health trying to change them. Then overnight they re-draft them because they didn't really matter in the first place. One day it's a revolution to say fuck on the bus. Next day it's the only way to get a ticket. That's how the system works." (Hare Teeth 'n' Smiles 22)

The play ends with a song from Maggie called "Last Orders," in which the passengers aboard the doomed S.S. Titanic are encouraged to place their last calls for drinks and dance the last number of the evening while their vessel sinks beneath them. This is seemingly Hare's way of expressing the feelings of the youths of the era who felt they had little control over events they were involved in.

Reaction to Teeth 'n' Smiles was mainly positive with a few reservations. In his review for The Guardian, Michael Billington wrote, "As a piece of drama, it lacks the cohesiveness and inner rhythm of his last original work, *Knuckle*; but as a piece of theatre it is abundantly alive and should go straight to the heart of a generation hovering uneasily between youth and early middle age." (Billington) In his piece for The Observer, Robert Cushman said, "Mr. Hare has a dashing way with one-

liners and a rarer gift for building a gag over a period...The band are apt to remark caustically that (Maggie's depression) is no more than a pose that has got into the bone, and Mr. Hare seems three-quarters inclined to agree with them. Alternately crying up Maggie's anguish and laughing it down, he ends up with what he probably most wants to avoid: sentimentality." (Cushman)

The playwright's own insight into this facet of his writing--genuine feeling versus histrionic sentimentality--is extremely important to an understanding not only of his work to this point, but to all that follows. Of Maggie's predicament Hare said, "In Teeth 'n' Smiles a girl chooses to go to prison because it will give her an experience of suffering which is bound in her eyes to be more worthwhile than the life she could lead outside: not one English critic could bring himself to mention this central event in the play, its plausibility, its implications. It was beyond their scope to engage with such an idea." (Hare Licking Hitler 68)

To Hare, Maggie's willingness to be incarcerated, the eagerness with which she invites separation from the free world, is not an individual abnormality, but a societal ill. Her community has somehow not provided her what she needs to lead a normal, sane life and she is in search of some sort of balm. What has emerged, then, from both Knuckle and Teeth 'n' Smiles, two very different plays, is a recognizable character type: a woman who is essentially good, but who, because of environmental forces, is driven to actions of despair. For Sarah Delafield this meant staging her own murder in order to flee her family and friends and find a new life. Maggie chose music and mind-altering substances then, when these failed, elected to be imprisoned, kept away from the world.

In each of these instances there is an indictment, sometimes obvious, sometimes implied, against both the immediate tormentors who drove these women to their desperate actions, and against the larger community--Guildford, Cambridge, London, or all of England. It is a combination of elements Hare brought together most successfully in his next play, Plenty.

Between Teeth 'n' Smiles and Plenty Hare had the opportunity to work on a television play for the BBC, Licking Hitler. Set at the height of the Second World War, Licking Hitler is about a romance formed between a man and a woman working for a propaganda unit of the British government to undermine German morale. Not particularly well received, the film nonetheless helped focus the playwright's attention on an era which, he has admitted, he has always been fascinated with. It also allowed him the opportunity to join other contemporary British writers in pondering his countrymen's reactions to the war.

Plenty premiered only a few months after Licking Hitler was aired. It combines ruminations on the war, found in the film, with the plight of desperate characters, like those in Knuckle and Teeth 'n' Smiles, and incisive social commentary. The plot revolves around a single central character, Susan Traherne, who as a teenager worked for British intelligence in occupied France during the Second World War. The play begins in England in 1962, Susan's present life of unfulfilled expectations and relationships gone awry, then moves back in time to the wartime France of 1943, when her world was still young and hopeful and full of excitement.

In the earliest scenes Susan aids a British agent who has just parachuted into St. Benoit on a reconnaissance mission. Her youthful

energy is unflagging--she is brave, quick-thinking, and passionate--a bold contrast to the cynical, withdrawn person she becomes later in life. Thinking she has found someone to confide in, Susan reaches out tentatively for compassion from the mysterious agent (identities were kept in the strictest confidence). For a moment these strangers in a strange land seem to connect, and this fleeting bond leads Susan to an obsession with the romance of the period she cannot shake when the war ends. Consequently, she continues to dwell in the past.

Subsequent scenes depict Susan in a string of poor relationships, trying desperately to find a tolerable niche in life. Two years after the war she takes a holiday abroad with a married wartime colleague in the hopes of recapturing some hint of her former happiness. When her beau unexpectedly dies on her in Brussels she becomes attached to the Foreign Office attaché who helps her arrange his funeral. This odd beginning turns into a shaky marriage and constant quarrels over the depths of Susan's suffering and her husband's inability to understand her.

As the events of the play progress back toward 1962 Susan becomes more and more unable to cope with her mundane life as the wife of a government official. Just as her husband is preparing to commit her to an asylum to prevent a serious breakdown she leaves him and is contacted by the agent she met in France nineteen years before. After a liason in a shoddy hotel room during which they both admit the desolation and disappointment of their lives since the war, they each go their separate ways, alone.

The final scene of the play is a return to France in August of 1944, just after the liberation by the Allies. Susan meets a French farmer on a sunny hillside and they discuss optimistically the future in such a fortunate

world. The last ironic words of the play, perhaps the most easily recognized of any of Hare's dialogue, are Susan's. With hope and excitement in her voice she tells the farmer, "My friend. There will be days and days and days like this." (Hare Plenty 87)

Plenty is meant to operate on two levels: the intimate, personal level of Susan and those that surround her, and the larger, more complicated level of British society during and after the war. Susan is a microcosm of her country and her experiences reflect those of many Britons in the first years of peace. Hare commented, "Plenty is inspired by a belief that people literally died in vain. That the upsurge of radical feeling was a genuine outcome of their experiences and not an accident, that the material and emotional plenty of that last period of affluence was wasted, and that the British have drawn a mantle of lies and coldness over the war. We are afraid to show our emotions." (Grant "Peace and *Plenty*" 15)

For Hare, Plenty marked the end of one era of his career as a playwright and the beginning of another. Stylistically the play was a departure from what had gone before. While much of his early Fringe work involved overt political broadsides, in Plenty he found a more subtle approach, characterized less by class wars and group struggles and more by the internal conflict of the play's female protagonist. This did not mean he was abandoning his position as social commentator, merely that he was taking a different approach. At the time he said, "A play is a performance. So if a play is to be a weapon in the class struggle, then the weapon is not going to be the things you are saying: it is the interaction of what you are saying and what the audience is thinking. The play is in the air." (Hare "The Play is in the Air" 30)

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the play's central figure, Susan Traherne, is the first full embodiment of the Hare heroine. There exists an easily discernible evolution of the women in Hare's plays from the near allegorical girls' school teachers in Slag, Ann, Joanne, and Elise, to the playwright's first attempts at sympathetic treatment of women in Knuckle and Teeth 'n' Smiles, Sarah Delafield (who never actually appears on the stage), Jenny, and Maggie, to Plenty's tortured soul, Susan. The result is a unique, intelligent, sympathetic character with a full range of emotions and experiences; one that audiences may pity, yet still criticize for her actions. For Hare, the nebulous quality of the character was important. In an introduction to the printed text of the play he wrote, "I planned a play in twelve scenes, in which there would be twelve dramatic actions. each of these actions is intended to be ambiguous, and it is up to the audience to decide what they feel about each event. For example, in Scene Three, there will be some who feel that Susan does the kindest possible thing in sparing her lover's wife the knowledge of the circumstances of his death; but others may feel that the manner in which she disposes of the corpse is a little heartless. Again, in Scene Four you may feel that the way she gets rid of her boyfriend is stylish, and almost exemplary in its lack of hurtfulness; or you may feel it is crude and dishonest. This ambiguity is central to the idea of the play. The audience is asked to make its own mind up about each of the actions. In the act of judging, the audience learns something about its own values. It is therefore important that a balance of sympathy is maintained throughout the evening, and that the actress playing Susan puts the case for her as strongly as she can. The case against her makes itself, or is made by the other characters." (Hare Plenty 87-88)

The heroine appears in various guises quite often in Hare's plays after Plenty. Wetherby (a screenplay), The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs (complementary one acts), The Secret Rapture, and Strapless (a screenplay) all have such characters. In each instance they are fully recognizable human beings whose actions invite thought and questioning, not immediate judgement. He often uses these figures to achieve a balance of two elements that become a hallmark of his work: the juxtaposition of public and private lives to simultaneously present dramatic interpersonal conflict and relevant social analysis and criticism.

The most important achievement of Plenty, though, was a measure of *popular* success Hare had not attained before. It was the first of his plays to open at the Royal National Theatre, where it began a relationship with Britain's preeminent subsidized theatre that continues to the present day. Every play Hare has produced since has appeared at the National, and all but one have opened on one of the theatre's three stages. The play made it across the Atlantic, first to Washington's Arena Theatre, then to the New York Shakespeare Festival, becoming the first of Hare's plays to receive a major New York production, and it was eventually turned into a film starring Meryl Streep.

By the beginning of the 1980s, then, after more than a decade of playwrighting, collaboration, and directing, David Hare had developed an approach to his work that would distinguish his plays well into the '90s and help establish him as Britain's playwright of popular dissent. Characteristically his plays are about the private and public lives of a few individuals, whose internal and external conflicts are meant to create good drama while disclosing facets of British life Hare finds distasteful. They very often contain a strong female protagonist whose ambiguous

behavior may lead to sympathy or contempt, and they are infused with a sense of British history that doesn't glorify the past, but nostalgically views it as an imperfect model for the future.

The final catalyst for his writing since the early eighties, which Hare and other liberal-minded, socially conscious artists would have to wait only a few more years after the production of Plenty to discover, was the election in 1979 of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party. Perhaps more than any other single person or event, the Thatcher Government would influence not only Hare's work, but that of nearly every playwright in Britain for years to come.

A Map of the World

A Map of the World, finished in 1982, followed a two year period in which David Hare neither wrote nor produced any new work. He had recognized a trend in his writing and wanted to reinvigorate it before moving on. "I had spent a lot of years writing about the decline of England," he said, "It was a genre. After *Plenty*, in 1978, I felt that I had said what I wanted to say on that. I was concerned that I should not make a career of saying the same things over again. So for a while I said nothing. At the time I thought I was finished. I became convinced that I would never have a play on again." (Lewis 8)

Hare's temporary hiatus was relieved, however, when he was approached to write a new work for an Australian arts festival. As he explains, "I had been asked by Jim Sharman to contribute something to the 1982 Adelaide Festival, and implicit in his invitation was the hope that I might be moved to write about Australia. He even gave me a title--*The Dead Heart*. But my exploratory trip, although highly enjoyable, did not get me writing. On the way back my plane landed in Bombay, and...I decided to go into town for a few days. As soon as I walked into my hotel, I knew I had found my setting." (Hare "Introduction to the Asian Plays" xiii)

His setting turned out to be Bombay itself, though in context it could as easily have been Dhaka, Kathmandu, Mogadishu, Managua, or a host of other destitute but ambitious third world capitals. The play Hare found the inspiration to write, A Map of the World, is a many-faceted work that explores Western perceptions of third world crises, the nature and role of

art and the artist, and the complicated throes of sexual politics. Since it was begun when Margaret Thatcher was relatively new to office, there are no direct discernible critiques of her administration in the play, but there is certainly the ongoing disgruntledness and dissatisfaction with Britain's leading Right-wing faction.

The two most notable aspects of A Map of the World are its thematic content and structure. Like nearly all of Hare's plays it is episodic, divided into a series of scenes that span an extended period of time. The way the playwright manipulates time, however, is intriguing.

The plot, as most critics were quick to point out, is awkward and a mere vehicle for the debates it contains. The play involves two men who meet at a UNESCO conference on world poverty in Bombay. Stephen Andrews is a journalist for a small left-wing magazine in London. He explains, "Mostly it's reviews. And domestic politics. But I'm the youngest, so my brief is the world." (Hare Asian Plays 168) This particular assignment has brought him face to face with a novelist whose work Stephen knows and detests. Victor Mehta is an Indian expatriate living in England who makes his living writing political satire--more particularly, harshly critical books about developing nations. He is attending the conference to present a speech about his research and writing.

The two men are diametrically opposed, near extreme ends of Left and Right political ideologies. It is likely their relationship would have ended after a few cross words in the lobby of the conference's hotel were it not for Peggy Whitton, an American actress who has gained their affection. Through Peggy, Mehta and Stephen find an arena in which to battle over their respective ideas.

When Mehta is approached by the UNESCO conference organizers and asked to preface his speech with a short prepared statement explaining the imaginative nature of fiction, so as not to offend some of the smaller countries he has written about, the novelist refuses on principle. The conference chairman, a Swede named Martinson, asks Mehta to tell his audience that "Fiction, by its very nature, must always be different from fact, so in a way a man who stands before you as a writer of fiction is already half-way towards admitting that a great deal of what he makes up and invents is as much with an eye to entertainment as it is to presenting literal historical truth." (Hare Asian Plays 187)

To Mehta, such capitulation would compromise his artistic integrity and, in his mind, the *facts* in the *fiction* he has written. As the argument over this decorous procedure intensifies, Stephen steps forward as the author of the contested disclaimer. To him, such an admission by Mehta would not harm his standing as a novelist and would allow the more important work of the conference on poverty to continue without the added pressure of ill feelings. Mehta's presence and presentation at the conference is important to many of the participants, but so are the dignity and cooperation of all the member countries. On an adventurous lark, Peggy offers herself, for the night, to whichever man proves his view to be correct.

In the debate that follows both men argue passionately and persuasively--it is Hare at his Shavian best, raising points and counterpoints to defend both sides--though in the end it is clear the playwright means for Stephen to emerge the winner. Still, the younger idealist bows out of his prize, the sought after Peggy, and chooses to leave the conference behind. In a seeming stroke of ill-fated *deus ex machina*, Stephen is killed

in a train crash on the way home, uniting all of the major characters of the play who, whether they agreed with him or not, have come to respect him.

This is the primary plot of A Map of the World. To further confuse matters, however, Hare has added a secondary storyline that affects the way an audience perceives the characters, themes, and actions at the Bombay conference. About twenty minutes into the play, just after Stephen and Mehta have met for the first time and fallen out over a dinner engagement with Peggy, the realistic scene onstage suddenly fragments as a director yells "Cut!", cameras roll into place, bright lights illuminate the set and a film crew suddenly floods the stage. In the next few moments it is discovered that what has actually been happening is the filming of a *movie* of the events in India, which took place several years before and were subsequently turned into a novel by Mehta, as an homage to his adversary, Stephen.

For the rest of the play scenes alternate between the cinematic "reality" of historic events and the present day lives of the actors in the film and the actual participants in the events. Peggy is at hand to advise the director, and Mehta shows up with the intention of cancelling production since it doesn't adhere to his version of the story.

On the surface the approach seems Pirandellian, *a la* Six Characters in Search of an Author. The difference here is that Hare uses the fluctuating reality style not to confuse the audience into wondering what is real and what is theatrical, but rather to give viewers a clear idea of how events are fragmented in memory and interpreted differently by different people, especially when they become fictionalized for mass consumption via film or text.

Primary emphasis in both time frames, however, is on the arguments presented at the UNESCO conference. The bulk of the play-within-a-movie, all of the first act and a good part of the second, is preparation for the final encounter between Mehta and Stephen. Each man wears his beliefs on his sleeve and the impending confrontation is obvious. In an early conversation with Elaine, a fellow journalist, Stephen emerges as the young idealist type who, when lacking genuine empathy, gropes very hard for stirrings of pity. Of the situation of the poor in Bombay he says, "It makes you so ill-tempered. You think you'll go for a stroll. 'I wouldn't leave the hotel if I were you, sir,' they say. 'The monsoon is coming.' With a great grin appearing on their faces as if the thought of it just suited them fine. 'Ah, good, the monsoon.' And you caught in it the best of all. I suppose it's the only revenge the poor have, that their land is uninhabitable by anyone but themselves. That we can't drink their water, or eat their food, or walk in their streets without getting mobbed, or endure their weather, or even, in fact, if we are truthful, contemplate their lives." (Hare Asian Plays 167)

Mehta, on the other hand, has no desire to identify and sympathize with the underpriveleged in his native India. Just off the plane, he succeeds where Stephen and Elaine failed--getting bar service in the hotel lobby. Showing either an extremely discriminating palate or a polished genteel facade, he asks for Pouilly Fuissé white wine, is told the bar stocks only Pouilly Fumé, and opts for champagne instead. When it arrives he deems it undrinkable and passes it along to Stephen and Elaine.

The timbre of his egotism is immediately apparent in the way he rises to Stephen's bait. The younger man goads Mehta about his previous work, including an unflattering piece written about journalists called *The Vermin Class*, and fishes for a preview of his remarks to the conference. Stephen doesn't agree with the novelist's positions on world governments and would like a frank discussion about them. Instead, Mehta responds flippantly with remarks like, "Of the Chinese leadership the only one I was able to bring myself to admire wholeheartedly was Chou En-lai...Because he alone among the leaders had the iron self-control not to use his position to publish his own poetry. Chairman Mao, unhappily, not so." Carrying the joke even further he adds he cannot admire Mao because "Like so many senior statesmen he ruined his credibility by marrying an actress. And what an actress! Madame Mao even claims that she was born beautiful but that in order to identify more closely with the majority of her people, she has managed to will herself ugly. So that even the hideous awfulness of her face is to be marked down as a revolutionary achievement!" (Hare Asian Plays 169)

The lightness with which Mehta treats world figures and events contrasts starkly with Stephen's seriousness, raising an issue that is present for the rest of the play: the experience and wisdom of the old versus the faith and energy of the young. For Mehta, it is a distinction that informs not only the lives of individuals, but of entire nations. He tells his new acquaintances, "All old civilizations are superior to younger ones...They are less subject to crazes. In younger countries there is no culture. The civilization is shallow. Nothing takes root. Even now gangs of crazy youths are sweeping through the streets of Sydney and New York pretending they are homosexual. But do you think they are homosexual really? Of

course not. It is the merest fashion. City fashion, that is all. In the old countries, in Paris, in London, when there is a stupid craze, only one person in fifty is affected, but in the young countries there is nothing to hold people back...A worthwhile civilization takes two thousand years to grow." (Hare Asian Plays 170)

Stephen, with all the fervency of his age, declares this an unmanageable outlook. He asks Mehta, "Do you say to those young countries, to so many countries represented in that room, countries with no traditions, no institutions, no civilization as we know it, no old ways of ordering themselves--what do you say? 'Sorry, things will take time...It may be bloody in your country at first, but this is an inevitable phase in a young civilization. You must endure dictatorship and bloodshed and barbarity...because you are young. There is nothing we can do for you." (Hare Asian Plays 171)

It is not long before Stephen and Mehta's argument becomes more personal, each man attacking not only the other's belief system, but his motives as well. Mehta tells the younger journalist, "So it is with you, you young men of Europe. You make us all uncomfortable by saying 'The poor! The poor!' But the poor are a convenience only, a prop you use to express your own discontent. Which is with yourself. I have known many men like you." (Hare Asian Plays 172) He adds that Stephen and others like him are only interested in events with political consequences, thereby limiting themselves. He labels Stephen a follower of Marx and proceeds to debunk that group, calling it, "The inflammation of the intellect among the young, the distortion. Every idea crammed through this tiny ideology, everything crammed through the eye of Marxism. Tssh! What nonsense it

all is. Socialism, a luxury of the wealthy. To the poor, a suicidal creed." (Hare Asian Plays 173)

Hare, an admitted socialist and active Labourite in Britain, has provided Mehta with some scathingly effective remarks against the playwright's chosen beliefs. He has also, however, given Stephen ample leverage to defend himself. Though Hare intentionally set out to write a play that wasn't about England, he could not resist a few barbed comments about the nature of his homeland. Stephen accuses Mehta of being hypocritical, saying, "How the right wing always appropriates good manners. Yes? They always have that. Form and decorum. A permanent excuse for not adressing themselves to what people actually say, because they can always turn their heads away if a sentence is not correctly formulated. You're like all those people who think that if you say 'Excuse me' at one end of a sentence and 'Thank you' at the other, you are entitled to be as rude as you like in between. English manners!"

When Mehta claims his Indian heritage as the source of his etiquette, Stephen drives the knife in deeper, telling the novelist, "How appropriate! That you, an Indian by birth, should be left desperately mimicking the manners of a country that died--died in its heart--over thirty, forty, fifty years ago. This sad, pathetic imitation, this room, this conference, these servants,--that all this goes on, like a ghost ship without passengers. The India of the rich! How I despise it!" (Hare Asian Plays 175-75)

In cursing so vehemently the "India of the rich" Stephen is implicating both Mehta's homeland and his own native England in the system of colonialism that Hare and other primarily Leftist thinkers have been trying to come to terms with for the past several decades. Since

the dismantling of England's enormous colonial holdings, including India, in the first part of the twentieth century, the citizens of Britain and its Commonwealth countries have had to drastically change the way they view themselves domestically and globally. Often they find they are torn in two directions, like Stephen and Mehta. Stephen deplores the colonial system and what it has left behind--countries with infantile, weak governments and populations divided starkly into masses of uneducated poor led by a few wealthy elitists--while Mehta, the product of one of these countries, finds the Englishness of his upper class heritage a civilizing influence.

It is at this point that Hare interrupts the action in India to reveal the scene as a movie facade. Mehta announces his intention to dine with Peggy Whitton and Stephen claims he has already engaged her company. She is brought in, Stephen becomes jealous and storms off with Peggy chasing him, leaving Mehta and Elaine alone. The dialogue changes drastically, becoming more dramatic, more "cinematic." Elaine, like some 1940s romantic movie heroine, tells Mehta, "What do you think the purpose of life is? We could be giants. Victor, I swear it's the truth. This mess, this stew of unhappiness...There's something inside every human being. Something suppressed. It's got to come out. I tell you, Victor; cut through to it. My friend, I beg you: let that something out." And suddenly the director yells, "Cut! All right, yes, print that." (Hare Asian Plays 178)

Elaine's pleas have no relation to what has been happening and are obviously the first of several stabs at the movie industry. The transition from acceptably real dialogue to histrionic clichés was abrupt and signaled by the action passing from stage to screen--Hare's way of

asserting that movies are less artistic and intellectual and more popular and emotional.

Immediately on hand is the real life Peggy Whitton, who scolds Angelis, the director of the film, for not adhering to the actual events as Mehta recorded them in his book. Angelis' reply is cynical and truthful. "This is not my forte," he tells Peggy, "I am an action director. Cars, fast movement, guns. For motives of tax, my employers are making a more cultural movie. I am told, in order to lose money..for reasons it is quite beyond me to understand. Leasebacks, kickbacks, greenbacks, I understand nothing. It was not even meant to be my assignment. Three weeks ago I was about to shoot *Pulveriser 3*. But suddenly instead my business is nuance." (Hare Asian Plays 179)

The two briefly banter the problems the film is having before Hare contrives a way for Angelis to leave the stage and Peggy to directly address the audience, preparing them for a return to the events in India. In the course of only a few pages, perhaps five minutes in production, Hare has stylistically tripped through three separate, recognizable levels of stage interaction. The first is the "acting" of the play Hare wrote, about two men arguing ideology in Bombay, represented by the interaction between Stephen, Mehta, Elaine, and Peggy. The second is the ostensibly "real" action of the movie crew working to reproduce these events on film. The older Peggy, Angelis and his workers are part of this level. Finally, there is Peggy's direct address that draws the audience back into the action of the past.

These three different levels appear in rotation throughout the rest of the play and suggest parallels between the two different time frames. In the past, Mehta is a novelist whose work is branded fact by some and

fiction by others, sometimes taken too seriously and sometimes misinterpreted and misrepresented. In the present this struggle between truth and fiction continues as his words are distorted into another medium, film, for the purpose of mass consumption. As events unfold in the Bombay scenes, their consequences in the future are slowly seen when the action centers on the movie company.

After Peggy's transitional speech the plot returns to Mehta and Stephen in India. The novelist has just been approached about making the disclaimer for his audience and is enraged. There is an argument between Mehta and Martinson, head of a Swedish delegation and organizer of the conference, with Peggy attempting to act as mediator.

Martinson attempts to reason with the author, pointing out that while his position on editorial freedom and individual conscience is undoubtedly correct, it is not as important as the needs of the conference, which might be jeopardized by his refusal to accomodate the request of particpating delegates. "We do not give a toss what a novel is," he tells Mehta, "I think I may even say this is Scandinavia's official position, and if a man stands up at the beginning of this afternoon's session and lies about what a novel is, I will just be grateful because then there is a better chance that aid will flow, because grain will flow, because water will flow..."

To which Mehta responds adamantly, refusing to even consider apologizing for or compromising his writing to what he considers emotional blackmail. "Exploitation of our feelings of guilt!" he rages at Martinson, "In the West we are always being asked to feel guilty. And so we must pay a price in lies!" (Hare Asian Plays 186)

The situation worsens when Mehta discovers Stephen wrote the proposed statement. To the shock of the diplomats, the argument seemingly becomes trivialized to a spat between two men over the attentions of Peggy. They are momentarily brought to their senses by the presence of M'Bengue, the Senegalese delegate, who provides the perspective of a third world citizen and explains their objections to the way Mehta and others depict them. "We take aid from the West because we are poor," he tells the assembly, "and in everything we are made to feel our inferiority. The price you ask us to pay is not money but misrepresentation. The way the nations of the West make us pay is by representing us continually in their organs of publicity as bunglers and murderers and fools." He complains that the Western countries, particularly the superpower nations, turn a blind eye to the positive activities of the underdeveloped nations--crops, dams, and educational innovations--and instead choose to dwell on the negative things like wars, famines, and acts of violence and terror.

He tells Mehta, "You distort things in your novels because it is funny to distort, because indeed the surface of things is funny, if you do not understand how that surface comes to be, if you do not look underneath. Just as a funeral may be funny to a small boy who sees it passing in the street and does not know the man who is dead. So also no doubt in Africa it is superficially funny to see us blundering about. But who makes the jokes? The rich nations." (Hare Asian Plays 192-93)

Though M'Bengue's appeal is a tempting one, his argument will not decide the issue. The Senegalese has based his complaint on the *pride* of the nations Mehta chooses to satirize, and suggests that as the sons of poor countries, Mehta and others who rise above their lot should not look

back in anger. This line of defense doesn't hold for most writers, particularly those who lean to the left, like Hare. When the Muslim author Salmon Rushdie was sent into exile following death threats and a bounty placed on his head by the Ayatollah Khomeni of Iran, none of his fellow artists in Britain, where Rushdie chose to hide himself, recommended he recant a word of The Satanic Verses. It would demean not only Rushdie but the craft of writing to withdraw because of people's *pride*.

The argument is finally brought to a halt by Mehta, who still steadfastly refuses to compromise and stalks out of the room. At this point the groundwork has been completed for the duel between Mehta and Stephen that will follow. The most important ideas and arguments have been raised and touched on, especially in the delegation scene. Some of these ideas include: responsibilities of the writer to his craft, his reader, and his subjects; redeeming and negative aspects of censorship; the role of writing itself in making and changing world events; whether all fiction is distortion; and the problems of the third world, including various responses by the West. Each of these subjects becomes fuel for the climactic argument in the next act.

The first act ends with Peggy's proposition--for one night she belongs to the man who proves his point in Mehta and Stephen's debate--and a return to the movie set. Though her actions seem juvenille, or at least irresponsible--offering herself to the winner of an argument she may not even fully understand--she has somehow maneuvered herself into the position of intermediate between Mehta and Stephen.

The second act opens with the film actors sitting around waiting to begin shooting again. There is an argument over a crossword puzzle and

the Peggy-actress tries on various dressing gowns in preparation for her shot. The real point of the scene, however, is to disclose that the movie is in jeopardy. After watching some of the filming, the real life Peggy Whitton balked at having her life shown on the screen and returned to Mehta to ask him to have the movie cancelled. For the time being, though, they move on.

After an exchange between Peggy and Mehta in his room and a brief delay when the Peggy-actress has an emotional crisis identifying with her part, Scene Eight, the debate between Mehta and Stephen, begins. With more at stake than simply scoring points for verbal wit over glasses of champagne, there is more of a fervency to the competitors' exchanges, and often more personal attacks are made.

Stephen begins by trying to prescribe some of the responsibilities of writers. "The thirst for ideals is at the very heart of things," he says, "We may say people need ideals as they need bread. As great as the need for bread is the need for ideals. The writer serves that need. He should be happy to serve it." (Hare Asian Plays 219)

Rather than answer his suggestion, Mehta deems his rival's opinions stupidity and rails against his "peasant-like ideas." To which Stephen sensibly scores another point by noting the author's jealousy of other's thoughts and other writers' work. Recognizing already that Stephen is more of a match than he had bargained for, Mehta decides to fight back.

He launches into a monologue explaining his poor childhood in India and his hopes for a new, prosperous life abroad. He says he sought "by the formulation of sentences not to escape from the reality into which I was born, but to set it in order. The setting of things in order, that has

always been my aim." In order to become educated, Mehta claims, "I went to London, to the university there, to the country where once medicine, education, the law had been practiced *sans pareil*, and found instead a country now full of sloth and complacency..a deceitful, inward-looking ruling class blundering by its racialism and stupidity into Suez." (Hare Asian Plays 221)

Hare is swinging the character of Mehta like a two-edged sword, cutting at perceptions of underprivileged countries in one direction and the vulgar excess of wealthy ones like England in the other. England, like America, Germany, and other fairly prosperous countries in the West, has seen a tremendous influx in immigration over the past few decades. The city of London, where Hare lives and writes, has become a cosmopolitan stew of nearly seven million people from all parts of the world, with large concentrations of the population hailing from Asian countries.

It is with authority, then, that the playwright allows Mehta to continue his story, saying, "It seems when people become prosperous, they lose the urge to improve themselves. Anyone who comes new to a society, as I did, an immigrant, has his priorities clear: to succeed in that society, to seek practical achievement, to educate his children to the highest level. Yet somehow once one or two generations have established their success, their grandchildren rush the other way, to disown that success, to disown its responsibilities, to seek by dressing as savages and eating brown rice to descredit the very civilization their grandfathers worked so hard to create." (Hare Asian Plays 220-21)

The topics Hare brings up with Mehta's impassioned speech are familiar ones to all the industrialized nations mentioned above: racial prejudice, the difficulties of emigration and starting a new life, hunger for

success and the jealousy and hatred of those left behind, the impossible lure of a community "melting pot," and the dream of the West as a land of opportunity. They are problems especially well known to America, England, and, more recently, Australia, where A Map of the World debuted.

Mehta continues, criticizing the West's behavior toward countries like his. "Not content with flaunting its wealth, the West now fashionably pretends that the materialsim that has produced this wealth is not a good thing. Well, at least give us a chance to find out, say the poor. For God's sake let us practise this contempt ourselves. Instead of sending the Third World doctors and mechanics, we now send them hippies, and Marxist thinkers, and animal conservationists, and ecologists, and wandering fake Zen Buddhist students, who hasten to reassure the illiterate that theirs is a superior life to that of the West." (Hare Asian Plays 221)

He winds up his argument by returning to Stephen's initial assertion about a writer's responsibilities. Calling the United Nations Assembly that convened the UNESCO conference in Bombay futile and wasteful, Mehta explains, "Last year a Special Committee on the Rationalization and Organization of the General Assembly was set up to examine the problems of excessive documentation. It produced a report. It was two hundred and nineteen pages long. I ask you, what fiction can there be to compare with this absurdity? What writer could dream up this impossible decadence?" For his finale he prescribes the role of the writer himself. "There is only one thing I know, and one only: that in this universe of idiocy, the only thing we may rely on is the lone voice--the lone voice of the writer--who speaks only when he has something to say." (Hare Asian Plays 222) It is Mehta's belief that "from the best intentions we tell

ourselves lies," and, like philosopher-kings to Plato, only the wit and wisdom of the writer can lead man to salvation.

When Stephen answers, there seems to be more than a little of Hare's own life experience embedded in his reply. While the previous day the younger journalist was content simply to scream his frustrations at Mehta, he claims his experience in the past twenty-four hours has matured him. He now feels some fondness for the Indian and tells him he senses "some growing generosity from you, too, especially this evening. You've stopped calling me Andrews. You call me Stephen, perhaps because even if you don't agree with me, you nevertheless now recognize me. Perhaps even as an element in yourself." (Hare Asian Plays 223-24)

Hare, like his creation, seems to have matured, or evolved, signifincantly as a writer by this point in the play. While in his younger days in the Fringe movement he was happy producing near one-sided polemics, diatribes in dialogue form railing against one aspect of the establishment or another, the debate between Mehta and Stephen has transcended the convention of straw man satire. Neither side is being set up and knocked down with abandon and either man might be judged the winner.

Still, the contest is not over. Stephen's final thrust is a truth Hare and other writers recognize, in the guise of a personal affront to Mehta. Stephen tells him, "I am arguing that tomorrow you must go out and denounce your own fiction, because it will be your last remaining chance to rejoin the human race." Mehta's objectivity, Stephen claims, is really separation. "Your so-called truthfulness is nothing but the projection of your own isolation," he tells Mehta, "and of your own despair. Because

you do a job which is lonely and hard, because you spend all day locked in a room, so you project your loneliness on to the world." (Hare Asian Plays 224)

This is undoubtedly Hare talking. Ten years later, in the introduction to his collection of interviews prepared for his trilogy of plays about British institutions, the playwright wrote, "Anyone of my age who has spent the larger part of their adult life writing, even for the theatre, knows the dangers of spending so much time alone. It is not just that the writer begins to project his or her own misery and isolation on to the world at large and assume that other people suffer from neuroses which in fact are the writer's alone. But also sheer ignorance begins all too easily to take its toll. The world is not as it was when we last had a proper job in it. There is nothing better for a writer than to go out and be rebuked by reality." (Hare Asking Around 3)

Stephen goes on to accuse Mehta of withdrawing so far that he can no longer take part in real events, and envying those who *do* rather than simply write about what has been done. His last attack is a vitriolic lashing at Mehta and the conservatism he represents. "Like so many clever men, you move steadily to the right," he tells him, "further, further, distancing, always distancing yourself...disowning your former ideals..attacking those who still have those ideals with a ferocity which is way out of proportion to their crime...Well, move to the right if you wish to. Join the shabby crew if you want to. Go in the way people do. But at least spare us the books, spare us the stations of the Cross, the public announcements. Make your move in private, do it in private, like a sexual pervert, do it privately. Move with a mac over your knee to the right...but

spare those who have to watch one good man after another go down." (Hare Asian Plays 226)

Stephen's last attack is more obviously liberal and decidedly English. References to the Right, the Stations of the Cross, and the pervert with a "mac" on his knee place the younger man's origins squarely in Britain. He leaves, however, claiming to be more world-wise. After reiterating to Mehta that his only chance to be human is to deliver whatever disclaimer the delegates ask him to, Stephen bows out of the debating contest and leaves to catch a late train away from Bombay and the UNESCO conference.

For the denouement the action returns to the movie set, now abandoned. The real Mehta arrives on the empty stage, meets Angelis, and tells him what an atrocity he thinks the story is becoming on its journey to the screen. He explains Stephen's fate--his death in a train accident after leaving Bombay--and the depth to which he and the others had grown to respect the young man. Before leaving he encounters the Stephen- and Peggy-actors and is struck by their resemblance to his friends. He confides to the Peggy-actress what may be the simplest theme of the play, running through each of the other arguments about writing and responsibility, truth versus fiction, third world problems and politics, and the antics of industrialized nations. "This feeling, finally, that we may change things," he tells her, "this is at the centre of everything we are. Lose that...lose that, lose everything." (Hare Asian Plays 236)

One of the appealing aspects of A Map of the World is Hare's willingness to experiment with structure and style. It seems he may owe a

large debt in these areas to other British playwrights. It has already been mentioned that his approach to the arguments in the play is distinctly Shavian--each side is armed with valid points and the ready wit to assert their opinions. Within these arguments, however, participants lose control much more readily than some of Shaw's dignified characters, and the results are soliloquies *a la* John Osborne--caustic ramblings that lead Hare's characters from one acerbic observance to the next.

In matters of structure, critics compared the alternating realities of the action in Bombay and the filming of those events to Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author and to Hare's contemporary, the English playwright Tom Stoppard's The Real Thing. Philosophically the discussion does not get as complicated as its presentation in Pirandello's work, with characters, actors, and real human beings all vying to prove and justify their existence. The comparison to The Real Thing is slightly more apt. In this Stoppard work the characters alternate between a play they are rehearsing and their real lives, which often mirror what they do on the stage. But Map is perhaps more akin to Stoppard's Travesties, in which questions of the meaning of art arise in the context of one man's (Henry Carr's) remembrances of events that may or may not have happened that involved he, James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, and Vladimir Lenin.

Critical reaction to A Map of the World, its original London production at the National's Lyttelton Theatre in 1983 and the 1985 New York production at the Public Theatre, was mixed. English reviewers, more familiar with Hare's work, were quicker to place Map within the context of his canon and other contemporaries' plays. As Irving Wardle, writing for the *London Times*, noted, "A new Hare play arouses more than ordinary

theatrical interest; you go along in hope of some fresh diagnosis from the social sick room, and maybe some authentic spark of hope. Hence, when Hare fails to deliver the goods the critical fraternity are apt to fall on him with far more ferocity than they would hand out to lesser men." (Wardle "Wrong Way" 11)

And, indeed, many of his countrymen were harshly critical. In the *Sunday Times* James Fenton took issue with the ethics of some of Hare's arguments, beginning with the inspiration for the play's title. He wrote, "'A map of the world which does not include Utopia,' says Oscar Wilde in the motto for this play, 'is not even worth glancing at.' I must say, this is not a motto for me. It is as bad as saying that there is no point in life on earth unless you believe in heaven. I don't think we should be bullied into living our lives according to fiction."

Fenton goes on to dispute the ideology of Stephen, the winner of the debate. "Oddest of all is the fact that although the young journalist emerges as the hero of the piece, the gesture he is all the time demanding from the novelist remains one of shabby and gratuitous self-condemnation," he asserts, "This will not do. It is not admirable in politics to make dishonest gestures on behalf of a good cause, and it is not admirable in art either." (Fenton 41)

Citing an overabundance of topical concerns, Jack Tinker of the *Daily Mail* wrote, "There is, it would seem, nothing Mr. Hare will stop at to keep that vast stage alive with challenging ideas. Unfortunately, the ultimate effect is stultifying in the extreme. Heaven knows there is not an issue he raises that should not command our care and concern, yet the manner of its delivery renders it stillborn on the senses. Conversations

inflate into long contrived speeches; wry arguments implode into airless debates." (Tinker)

Others, however, were more tolerant. Benedict Nightingale, a London critic who has followed Hare's development since his first plays with the Portable Theatre, decided Map was a "work of genuine search, struggle and discovery, and as rich as anything Hare has written to date." (Nightingale 27) Ros Asquith in *City Limits* conceded, "Untheatrical it may be, but it is intellectually engaging about issues that Tom Stoppard's The Real Thing (with which it is bound, both in form and content, to be compared) never took past first base." (Asquith)

American critics, not yet as familiar with Hare's plays, having seen only Plenty produced in New York, were more unconditionally accepting of A Map of the World. Lauding him for creating intellectual art, Sylviane Gold in the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, "David Hare writes plays about people who believe, passionately and unreservedly, in ideas--ideals, even--and in the somewhat antiquated notion that the way we live should bear some resemblance to the way we think. Characters who think don't turn up very often in today's theater, probably becasue thinking playwrights are currently something of a rarity." (Gold 26)

In the *New York Times* critic Mel Gussow agreed that "Mr. Hare is interested in philosophical circumnavigation. Led by the playwright, we stop at various ideological ports of call as we participate in a most thought-provoking theatrical journey." (Gussow H3) Even conservative reviewer Frank Rich, with whom Hare would later have a fateful public fracas over his New York production of The Secret Rapture, noted, "A Map of the World contains one of the few convincing, even sympathetic right-

wing protagonists to appear in an English play since the Suez crisis." (Rich C23)

The American production was not without its detractors, however. The most vociferous by far was Michael Feingold of the *Village Voice* who declared the play, "the largest lump of bullshit and ineptitude I've ever come across in the professional theatre," and complained that "Everyone, from the script girl on the film set to the head of the UN conference, behaves with the same egregious pomposity masquerading as principle, everyone is popped on and off stage as suits the playwright's plan--a kind of irrationally splayed schemation--without even cursory regard for the dictates of their position, or common sense. Actresses are asked to settle diplomatic affairs, journalists conspire at position papers with foreign dignitaries who were strangers to them the day before, directors suspend shooting to debate the screenplay's validity with the wife of the source material's author." (Feingold 94)

Reviewers were especially divided on the issue of the play-within-a-movie-within-a-play structure. Wardle complained that from the time the non-linear scenes began to occur "I lost the play and ceased to care either about its subject or characters. Hare fails to distinguish between actual flashback and film reenactment. The same actors appear as their true and fictional selves; and there is no way of telling whether what we are seeing are the events as Victor recorded them, or as perverted for cinema audiences." (Wardle 11)

Fenton agreed, seeing this structure as a possible dodge for the playwright. "The whole play is placed in an ironic and deceptive light," he contended, "since what we actually see, or appear to see, is the filming of the novelist's account of the incident. So, if a speech sounds banal or

impossibly contrived, we must always wonder whether this is the fault of the author or the fictional scriptwriter, and if the acting seems at times weird, stilted or improbable, there is the same get-out clause." (Fenton 41)

Others saw the complex structure as an opportunity. Rich noted, "If Mr. Hare's 'Map' is a jigsaw puzzle, that fractionalization suits the content. The play is in part about conflicting points of view--about how reactionaries and leftists look at geopolitics, how journalists and novelists look at events and how the West and the Third World look at each other...While he may be a man of the left, (Hare) can see (and let us see) through other eyes." (Rich C23) And Gold observed, "The play's complex structure lets it all just click together in your head after the piece ends. And that's when you realize just how ingenious Mr. Hare has been. He's managed to get out of this one play several others: a high-toned moral drama, and a cheap romance, and a comedy that debunks them both." (Gold 26)

Whether they liked A Map of the World or not, the comments of many critics at this time were important for one outstanding reason: nearly across the board they recognized Hare as a popular playwright with a social conscience. Hare's interest in the well-being of his country and the global socio-political scene could not be overlooked and the support of his audiences could not be denied. After its run at the Adelaide Festival A Map of the World played sixty-six times in the Lyttelton Theatre to a combined crowd of nearly 40,000, a respectable showing by the National's accounts. Wardle declared, "(Hare) has taken on himself something of Osborne's early role as keeper of the nation's moral conscience." (Wardle 11) Gussow claimed that "As a playwright, David

Hare is a surgeon who operates on the body politic," (Gussow H3) and John Barber in the *Daily Telegraph* wrote, "The fangs of the play's social conscience sink deep and are seen finally to have been sharpened by the dramatist's mastery of his medium." (Barber)

This play was also important in the trajectory of the playwright's career for the notice it garnered abroad. While Hare had been establishing himself as a writer of merit in England for several years, A Map of the World claimed *international* attention for the playwright. His invitation to the Australian Adelaide Festival marked his recognition by that country, and the positive reviews in America paved the way for future productions of his plays stateside.

Pravda

The epic scale of A Map of the World was a precursor to Hare's next work, Pravda, a collaborative effort that reunited Hare with his one-time Fringe companion Howard Brenton. Significantly, in the three years between productions of the two plays, Hare wrote two films, Saigon: Year of the Cat and Wetherby. His dabbling with celluloid and Brenton's penchant for characters and stories that critics have dubbed "comic strip" effects produced a play with an enormous cast, a variety of locations, and a structure that seems to imitate the cinematic thriller or serialized cartoon. Pravda is written in a progression of scenes that constantly alternate between intimate, two to four member gatherings and large, frantic throngs. Each one builds to either a dramatic crisis or specially conceived stage picture.

It is immediately apparent, both from this structure and the attention given to storytelling by the characters, that *plot* plays a more substantial role in Pravda than it usually does in both Hare and Brenton's plays. While both men are capable of producing interesting and dramatically cohesive plots for their plays, quite often, as with Hare's A Map of the World or Brenton's A Short, Sharp Shock, structure and story are merely means of revealing the playwrights' thematic interests. In Pravda, the story itself *is* of thematic importance.

"Pravda" is Russian for "the truth" and, while it happens to be the name of a formerly Moscow-based, Communist-run newspaper, it is instead to this definition that the playwrights wish to ironically refer. In essence, the play is about truth in all its many guises, a topic both Hare

and Brenton have long been fascinated with. Once, in an essay on his brand of political drama, Hare pointed to the theatre as an ideal tool for ferreting out the elusive virtue of truth. "One of the reasons for the theatre's possible authority," he said, "and for its recent general drift towards politics, is its unique suitability to illustrating an age in which men's ideals and men's practice bear no relation to each other..The theatre is the best way of showing the gap between what is said and what is seen to be done, and that is why, ragged and gap-toothed as it is, it has still a far healthier potential than some of the other, poorer, abandoned arts." (Hare "The Play is in the Air" 26-27)

Brenton is even more pragmatic in his use of theatre as a tool to unearth the truth. He is fond of *exposing* truths behind myths and misconceptions, something often reflected by the titles of his plays alone. Scott of the Antarctic, Hitler Dances, The Churchill Play, and The Romans in Britain are all works about historical figures or events in history that Brenton would like his audiences to reconsider. Commenting on Scott of the Antarctic, a play about Robert Falcon Scott, the famous South Pole English explorer, Brenton said, "I'm very interested in people who could be called saints, perverse saints, who try to drive a straight line thorugh very complex situations, and usually become honed down to the point of death. Scott was one of those...Scott was not on the ice to get to the pole. He couldn't skate in fact--he kept tumbling over. He was there because of his public school, his C. of E. religion and the British Empire...The project was ripe for breakdown." (Brenton "Underground Explorations No. 1" 16)

A collaborative work, by its nature, is a more complicated affair than an author's solitary writing. Adaptability and compromise can affect

the outcome positively or adversely. For this project, the initial idea was Brenton's, though, he explains, "I didn't want to tackle it alone. David was looking for a new play for the group he and Richard Eyre are running here (the ensemble at the National Theatre), so we said 'Great. Let's get together and do it.'" (Busby 9) The two writers rented a flat in Brighton, a London suburb, and split their time between intense creative sessions together and their individual work in the City. Brenton reports that they read newspapers incessantly and worked full days with him at the typewriter and Hare pacing in the background. "It was all done out loud," he says, "It was like putting something into a furnace in a smithy and either it breaks or actually comes out and it's sound." (Gussow "Playwright as Provocateur" 46) Hare admits the importance they placed on plotting Pravda. He noted, "We plan the plot very thoroughly indeed, by argument. Then hang the dialogue on at the last possible moment. The dialogue is the reward for all the work you do on the plot." (Busby 10)

The plot of Pravda, subtitled "A Fleet Street Comedy," concerns the efforts of Lambert Le Roux, a millionaire South African businessman, to monopolize the newspaper industry on London's famous publishing boulevard. Given South Africa's political climate in the mid-'80s and the world's perception of that embattled country at the time, Le Roux is established long before his first entrance as a villainous encroacher, rubbing his hands and twirling his mustache at the prospect of conquering a piece of British culture.

The play is largely seen through the eyes of Andrew May, an ambitious reporter for the *Leicester Bystander* who becomes that paper's editor-in-chief when it is purchased by Le Roux. With Andrew safely and

sanely running the *Bystander* according to its new owner's profiteering ideology, Le Roux moves on to purchase the *Bystander*'s competition, the *Daily Tide*, a sterling example of London's many down-market tabloids, and the *Daily Victory*, which brags of being "the only newspaper with England on its masthead." He maintains that his acquisitions are not meant to be used as mouthpieces for political agendas or to further business ventures, but still insists on strong management from the top (himself) down.

Andrew is promoted to Editor of the *Victory*, a better-selling newspaper, and even wins an editor-of-the-year award from his colleagues. His fortunes change at the beginning of the second act, however, when his wife Rebecca appears with a Ministry of Defence document leaked to her through a friend. The document is proof of a plutonium leak cover-up and indicts the Prime Minister and a good part of his cabinet. Recapturing some of the journalistic idealism and fervor he has lost working for the manipulative Le Roux, Andrew is about to stop the evening's presses and print the story page one when Le Roux arrives and fires him on the spot for intentionally endangering the esteem and profitability of his publishing asset.

No longer in charge of a major national newspaper but still longing for popular recognition and a voice in print, Andrew joins forces with others Le Roux has wronged in his quest for communications dominance. Together they outbid the media magnate for ownership of another paper, the *Usurper*, and begin publishing stories of Le Roux's personal life, including allegations of murder and thievery, which they hope will irrevocably destroy his reputation and ruin him financially, at least in England.

The stories prove to be lies, planted by Le Roux himself, and he sues them for libel. The cycle of the play, and Andrew's career, ends with the once civic-minded and ethical journalist placed back in charge of the *Victory*, ready now to kow tow to Le Roux's demands.

If there were any doubts about Hare's emergence as a popular playwright of dissent, they were vanquished with the National's production of Pravda. For a time the play even served to focus more widespread attention on Howard Brenton, whose work, with a few exceptions, still tended to be less mainstream than Hare's and often relegated to experimental theatres. A large part of their success must be attributed to the timeliness and topicality of their subject.

It was an attempt not just to lampoon Britain's newspaper industry, but an entire culture of avarice, acquisition and self-interest that the playwrights believed had flourished during the Thatcher years. It was, and remains, very much a play of the 1980s, and its social criticism is as recognizable to American liberals who remember the Reagan years as it was wickedly exciting for audiences halfway through the Thatcher era. Hare notes, "The play says that if you were a visitor from Mars and came here and read the *Mail*, the *Express*, the *Telegraph*, *The Times*, the *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Sun* and most of the others you would conclude that the relation of government to newspapers was much as it was in the Soviet Union. Those of us who live here know that to be untrue. So what the play is asking is what is it about Thatcherism that is so appealing." (Billington "What Excites Me About Pravda" 12)

Hare admits to an uncommonly confident feeling about Pravda even before it opened. On premiere night he and Brenton felt the

sudden recognition that "we were about to offer the public a play which they knew they wanted, even before it had started. We were sailing downwind. No, even more than that; we were being *willed* downwind, by a great gust of public sentiment." It was a sentiment Hare believed was fostered by the truth in the play. "It is believed that Howard and I regularly update Pravda. There has been no need. During its long run, different parts of the evening have glowed, as various pieces of wild satire have transformed themselves effortlessly into prophecy." (Hare "Sailing Downwind" 132-33) As examples of this phenomenon, Hare refers to Rupert Murdoch aping Lambert Le Roux when he acquired American citizenship in order to purchase television stations in the states; to the leak at Chernobyl which seemed eerily like the government plutonium cover-up in Pravda; and to other local events apparently inspired by the play.

The targets in Pravda are many and varied. Just as the audience finds themselves becoming smug and self-righteous watching the disreputable antics of the English press behind the scenes, they find themselves the object of ridicule as the readership of the papers being satirized. As an embodiment of 1980s sensibilities, Pravda resembles other plays, such as Caryl Churchill's Serious Money or Jerry Sterner's Other People's Money, that serio-comically illustrate the lust for money and power of the last decade. It goes even further, though, by depicting other excesses and societal afflictions that continue into the 1990s.

The original production of Pravda began with a brief scene between Andrew and his future wife, Rebecca, which takes place after the central action of the play. The young man has been taken to the countryside to recover from his ordeal with Le Roux but the temptation of

Fleet Street is too much and he can't resist the urge to call up his old boss. Rebecca is threatening to leave him as he heads for the telephone. In the revised 1986 version of the play, this scene is replaced by one in which Rebecca and Andrew have not yet met and their relationship with Le Roux hasn't begun. The chief difference is a reordering of chronology to reflect linear time, simplifying and clarifying the plot.

In both versions the opening scene and many subsequent ones are followed by a chorus of newsvendors who serve as segues and scene changing devices. They shout out the evening's headlines which are at first laughable, then recognizable as the sensationalized stories the public craves. They call:

FIRST NEWSVENDOR: HEADLESS MURDER CASE: WHOSE HEAD IS IT?

SECOND: SEX TUTOR SAYS 'SHE LOVED ME'.

THIRD: TWELVE GO-GO DANCERS FOUND IN CRATE AT HEATHROW: TWELVE EXCLUSIVES.

FIRST: ARAB LOVE NEST HORROR: TWO HELD.

SECOND: ROYAL HAIRDO: CUT OUT AND KEEP.

THIRD: GAY BISHOP--MP'S PROTEST. (Hare Pravda 9)

The headlines touch on all of the issues that seem to inevitably interest the prim and proper public in the underbelly of society--the morose, the macabre, and the private. The vendors' headlines scream out tales of violence and sex, and claim to have the inner track on the lives of the glitterati.

The scene that follows takes place in the offices of the *Leicester Bystander* where, amid the hype of the newsvendors outside and frantic reporters rattling off breaking stories, the paper's staff is trying to put out

the evening edition. In preparation for what is to come, Hare and Brenton make some initial observations about the publishing process and journalistic ethics in this scene. Andrew, still a lowly reporter, is coached in the "lost art of leader writing" by his editor, Harry Morrison, a man in his sixties who has given up his dreams of a free press and turned to alcohol and blues records. "As a young man I forged new copy," he tells Andrew, "I hammered at words. I wrenched them. Until it was kindly pointed out to me that what people wanted was something that was every day the same. The illusion of timelessness, that's what we sell. Balloons filled with a gently rising gas. 'On the one hand, on the other...' Anything else and you'd stimulate people. Never do that. It can only compound their unhappiness." (Hare Pravda 12)

Harry's ironic lecturing undoubtedly reflects Hare and Brenton's leftist sensibilities--the agitator's frustration at being rebuffed by the mainstream. Just as Harry at one time thought he could change the world, or at least make it better informed, with his writing, the two playwrights have had long careers battling the establishment. While Harry's will was broken, however, Hare and Brenton remain unjaded and choose tongue-in-cheek humor as a means of antagonism.

The entire newsroom is then thrown into a panic by the unannounced visit of the paper's proprietor, Sir Stamford Foley. The bustle of activity that accompanies Sir Stamford's imminent arrival reveals several things about Hare and Brenton's perception of the press and their relationship with management and readership. "Furrow your brows, put ink on your fingers," Harry tells his staff, "Expressions of enlightened concern. Firm but fair," (Hare Pravda 15) as though such attitudes were only struck for the benefit of the ownership.

In the midst of it all Moira Patterson, the owner of a health food shop, shows up to request a correction for a story that reported her son was convicted of selling cocaine. The childless Moira wishes the article retracted for the harm it is doing her business. Andrew, already learning the sneaky codes of his profession, explains, "If every time we got something wrong, we published a correction, then a newspaper would just be a footnote to yesterday's newspaper. And yesterday's a footnote to the day before's." With twisted logic he tells her, "A newspaper isn't just a scrap of paper, it's something that people feel they have to trust. And if they can't trust it, why should they read it? A thing is true, or it isn't. So by definition, what is printed must be true--otherwise why print it? And if we apologise and correct, how can the readers know what is true and what is not? To print corrections is a kind of betrayal. Of a trust. It's a matter--finally--of journalistic ethics." (Hare Pravda 17)

The exact kind of journalistic ethics the *Bystander* represents are further revealed when Sir Stamford announces the reason for his visit: He is selling his interest in the paper in order to purchase a share in a Kentucky thoroughbred horse. Then, as though that weren't damaging enough, he admits the paper has been sold to Lambert Le Roux, a white South African.

In the confusion that follows this revelation, Hamish McLennan, Harry's Deputy Editor, steps forth as the new boss, thanks to a lunchtime deal with Le Roux. Harry assaults his former assistant and the staff, with Andrew in the lead, threaten a strike. To which Sir Stamford, with all the empathy of a robber baron, hypocritically mourns, "Industrial relations in England! All this greed, all this bitterness...why can't we all just agree among ourselves?" (Hare Pravda 26)

Finally, as Harry is making a pathetically comical attempt to commit suicide atop his desk by cutting his wrists with an old razor, the phone rings. It is Le Roux, delivering his business decisions Howard Hughes style, mysteriously unseen. Since Hamish is too closely associated with the "old regime," Andrew is to be the *Bystander*'s new editor.

It is at this point that Hare and Brenton introduce Le Roux himself. His belated appearance serves a purpose: For the rest of the play he is the center of attention. The middle-aged businessman is described as "heavily built, muscular and dark." He is undoubtedly evil, but of the most enticing variety. Critics compared the character to Shakespeare's Richard III, Jonson's Volpone, and Shaw's Andrew Undershaft for his fascinatingly malevolent manipulations of other people and drive for wealth and power.

In a soliloquy to the audience he explains his upbringing in South Africa--the beauty of the landscape, the tragedy of the people--in terms that make him sound almost philanthropic. Then he sums up his view of his heritage in words that betray a more sinister, Darwinian personality. "What I do is a natural thing," he asserts, "There is nothing unnatural about making money. When you are born where I was born, you do have a feeling for nature. What I admire about nature is--animals, birds, plants, they fucking get on with it and don't stand about complaining all the time." (Hare Pravda 30)

Immediately after introducing himself the bare stage Le Roux stands on is transformed into a sporting arena in Frankfurt and the slippery character is seen in action. Among his other business interests is a line of sportswear which he hopes will be adopted by the English Olympic

cricket team. To this end he has invited an English MP, Michael Quince, to preview his uniforms at a German exhibition. The real reason Le Roux has picked up the tab for the MPs visit, however, is so that he may acquire another English paper, the *Victory*. Quince's mother is a majority shareholder and Le Roux hopes to use him to get at her investment.

Quince is at first hesitant, claiming that as a foreigner, especially a South African, Le Roux cannot "just *buy* a piece of England." He is persuaded, however, by irresistable enticements--the promise of editorial backing for his career. He observes, "The press and politicians. A delicate relationship. Too close, and danger ensues. Too far apart and democracy itself cannot function without the essential exchange of information--over lunch, over--on which the body politic depends. Creative leaks, interchange in the lobby, the art of the unattributable telephone call, late at night--'A source close to the Prime Minister', meaning 'the Prime Minister'. Your views aired, accepted, amplified, lying every day on the doormat. and in return, for the journalist, a promise of good copy...a sense of being allowed to participate." (Hare Pravda 38-39)

The exchange between Quince and Le Roux is successful for an audience because of the viewers' natural fondness for having their opinions confirmed. Many people find reason to suspect some sort of liason between the press and politicians. Government careers in both England and America have certainly been made or broken according to a civil servant's relationship to the press. Though the *truth* of the matter, the playwrights admit, is not known. Brenton wonders, "English newspapers aren't government propaganda sheets. The question is, why do so many of them choose to *behave* as if they are?" And Hare echoes,

"Why are the papers so willing to get into bed with government? Or with this particular government?" (Busby 10)

Quince is swayed and after an impromptu meeting of the board of directors in an exclusive private club, the *Victory* becomes another underhanded Le Roux coup. As with his previous takeovers, the proprietor's first order of business is restructuring the paper to suit his tastes and needs. As part of the buyout agreement, Le Roux agrees to allow the paper editorial freedom and even consents to a once a week prayer visit by the Bishop of Putney, coninciclentally an influential member of the board.

However the *Victory's* editor, Elliot Fruit-Norton, is opposed to Le Roux's ownership and suggests instead a co-operative buyout led by the current management staff. In response, Le Roux sacks Elliot and replaces him with tried-and-true Andrew May, who provides an important testimonial to Le Roux's good business practices that helps sway the board in his favor.

The negotiation scene in which Le Roux is handed the reins of England's foremost daily publication showcases more of the behind-the-scenes manipulation, greed, and hypocrisy the playwrights have found in the capitalist-driven English media. The setting for the board meeting itself is indicative of the members' real interests. The Irving Club is one of those last bastions of wealthy, English male-dominated society in which members escape the crudeness of their proletariat workers and indulge in a fine meal and polite conversation. As a waiter dryly points out when Andrew orders Oscar Wilde's drink, a spritzer and cheese sandwich, "Mr. Wilde was a member of this club. Ireland's greatest writer. 'Course writing that well, they pretended he was English." (Hare Pravda 42)

When the informal meeting begins Benjamin Silk, the Chairman of the board, announces the criteria set forth in the deeds of the paper's trust pertaining to the publication's ownership. Fittingly, the stipulation is merely that the owner be "a proper person." While this reference is deliberately vague and certainly not legally binding, its message for the trust is that the paper should be owned by a true, refined, upper class Englishman, which Le Roux, to date, plainly is not. Along with his recently swayed MP friend Quince, however, Le Roux has been working toward a solution to this problem. He has renounced his South African citizenship and become an official Englishman with a new passport, even affecting a different accent for his new role, and he handles what few minor quibbles the board has left with gentlemanly panache, finally sending them all off to dine together at an elegant restaurant nearby.

While Le Roux's villainy is obvious, and his behavior is meant to be scorned, Hare and Brenton do not offer another character to stand in relief to him as a moral icon. Andrew is too easily manipulated, and the minor characters are mainly tools of the playwrights that facilitate action. Their very names seem to suggest humorous or despicable traits about the English character--Hamish, Smiley, Eaton, Silk, Whicker-Baskett, Punt, Scroop, Ape-Warden, and, of course, Elliot Fruit-Norton. For all his idealistic posturing, and claims of usefulness to the masses, Elliot's farewell speech to the press upon being ousted from his job as editor betrays his true timbre. "Viewed in the evening light of history, my tenure at *The Victory* may seem only a passing shadow," begins his melodramatic oration, "But the unique qualities of civilisation which I have sought to advance are sempi-ternal. Addison, Steele, Johnson. These have been

my constant companions, and as I retire now to spend time with my wife Gilda, my animals and my two strapping lads, I know that friendly ghosts of the geat journalists will join us for dinner at our Suffolk home in Much Blakeley." And what will he retire to? "I have accepted the Chairmanship of The National Greyhound Racetrack Inspection Board," he continues, "A role to which I shall bring the same qualities of discrimination, balance and probity which have characterised my time at *The Victory*." (Hare Pravda 55-56)

Elliot, assumedly like many other newspaper editors, is obsessed with what he believes to be his gift for language, learning, and rational thought, and it has been convenient for him to align himself with journalistic principles and English patriotism. In the end, the playwrights suggest, he is a man like any other who, when pressed, abandons high-minded codes to serve his best interests. His demotion to racetrack administrator also provides the newsvendors another humorous segue. They call:

FIRST NEWSVENDOR. EDITOR GOES TO DOGS!

SECOND. FRUIT-NORTON: I'LL BRING CLASS TO DOGTRACK!

THIRD. SNOB MOVES IN: PUNTERS' NIGHTMARE! (Hare Pravda 56)

His purchase of *The Victory* is his most important one to date. Even though the paper is losing incredible amounts of money--over a million pounds a week--its symbolic significance to the country makes it a valuable commodity. Le Roux, therefore, takes a more active part in launching the new *Victory*. Whereas before he was content to stay at home and telephone his directives to Andrew or some other hireling, he now takes center stage, storming the offices of the paper and cutting his losses in one fell swoop by firing reporters and office workers left and right.

As writers cower behind desks and water coolers Le Roux advances like a dervish, sacking one for a complicated article on South American politics, another for simply belonging to the Home Affairs beat, and a third for going to the lavatory. As Eaton Sylvester, his assistant, keeps a running tally of office casualties, Le Roux's takeover degenerates into a child's game of red rover, with one side of the press room labelled the "safe end" where writers with jobs breathe a sigh of relief, and the other a sort of no-man's land where a wrong look or audible sound might mean termination.

The scene is a satiric reflection of corporate "downsizing," a devastating trend designed to maintain corporation profits by trimming labor costs begun in earnest in the 1980s. When the carnage is complete, Le Roux turns to the remaining crowd and, twirling his mustache if he had one, tells them, "We have cast out the bad. There was bad on this paper. Life is a fight between the good and the bad. We all of us, may now work together in a warm and friendly atmostphere. Let's make a good, a lovely paper, a family paper full of love...no more unpleasantness. Right everyone. Let's get the news on the street." (Hare Pravda 62) Like the melodramas its characters seem to spring from, this scene ends the first act of the play with the villain standing astride his victim. Audiences are sent into the lobby wondering if and how the down and out English press will rise up to defeat the foreign usurper. Only Hare and Brenton have added a critical twist: As the institution now exists, does the media *deserve* any better?

The second act opens in the newsroom of the new *Victory*. Now, instead of revelatory reporting and Elliot's "obsessional articles on supply-

side economics" that no one could understand, the paper is churning out palatable public interest stories and right-angled reports of national events. A police attack on a group of women peacefully protesting a nuclear facility that netted twenty-seven arrests and left two protestors hospitalized, under the new management becomes a valiant defense by the English constabulary against a marauding bunch of liberal fanatics. "Investigative journalism" for the new *Victory* means copying the news from the ten o'clock television broadcast and sending a group of reporters to a paté-tasting binge at the Ritz to get the in-depth scoop on pork content in hors d'oeuvres. As one reporter says, "Kitchens. Consumer objects. Holidays. Microchips. Show-biz gossip. Human interest devoid of interest. Keep it all frothy. The world's ten leading film stars, just how much bran *is* there in their breakfast? Funny, everyone used to be so frightened of investigative journalism." (Hare Pravda 68)

Still, the transition to lower quality, homogenized news reporting immediately garners the *Victory* a larger readership and its editor "The Golden Typing Finger" award. This is undoubtedly Hare and Brenton's tounge-in-cheek way of recognizing the lurid attraction-repulsion relationship between the press and the public. Though readers may publicly claim that vacuous "news" and scandalous stories of sex and violence are revolting, privately it is what they crave.

Arriving in the newsroom just after receiving the esteemed "Golden Typing Finger" recognition by his peers, Andrew wants to see the paper to bed before joining Le Roux and some of the British royalty at a dinner upstairs. His plans are interrupted, however, when Rebecca arrives with a leaked Ministry of Defense document that explains government testing performed on flasks of plutonium that proved them unsafe. Since the

Prime Minister had denied such rumors on several occasions, and instructed civil workers to do likewise, the memo indicts the entire majority government party in the cover-up.

Andrew is faced with a delicate decision. Long-neglected notions of journalistic integrity tell him he should immediately print the story and deal with the consequences later. The possible consequences, however, which include professional ostracization and possible persecution by the government, lead him to hesitate. There is no doubt which side his staff is on. Bill Smiley, a reporter Andrew brings into the debate, tells him, "This is fantastic! Pay-gold at last! The ladder to heaven! Ten fucking years in the saltmines of this fucking profession, doorstepping drunken councillors, and finally something that's real! And magnificent! That's not about traffic, or councils, or weddings! The joy of finally holding their balls in my hands!"

Rebecca bullies Andrew, "This is the job of a newspaper. It isn't a bad idea, after all. To tell people what's really happening. Long out of favour, of course. That's what you always said when we sat up late at night in front of the fire, talking about a free press. Why is it when a free press is presented with a real opportunity, freedom is on the one hand principle, and on the fucking other, in this case, doesn't apply." (Hare Pravda 73-74)

While he quivers on the edge of a decision, Andrew draws in another reporter, the *Victory*'s Lobby correspondent, Leander Scroop. Startlingly, Scroop tells them their leak is actually old news, that he had heard it weeks before. He explains to them, for the benefit of the audience, one of the modern media's questionable catch-22s. "Bear in mind," he tells them, "I was in the Lobby. The Lobby has rules. I met with

the Minister. I am free to disclose this about our meeting. It officially never took place. He was, in a sense, downing pink gins in Annie's Bar. But officially he never drank anything. Officially no briefing occurred...He told me everything, therefore he told me nothing. A perfect English arrangement. Everything that happened did not happen. I was present at a meeting at which no one met. Only I know the truth of this story, because I am a lobby correspondent; but if I report the truth of this story, I am no longer a lobby correspondent. I would be thrown out of my favoured profession. Which I love. Yes. The only way you can have the confidence of Ministers is to have the confidence never to repeat what Ministers say." (Hare Pravda 75-76)

Scroop's opposition aside, Andrew decides to publish the article anyway and calls for a halt of the evening's presses. Meanwhile his assistant editor, Doug Fantom, has retrieved Le Roux from his dinner party with the royalty. He listens to both sides of the issue, is unconvinced by Andrew's show of bravado in the face of government recriminations, and suggests they return the leaked document and instead print the identity of the source, beginning a new series, "Spies and Moles in Her Majesty's Government."

When Rebecca refuses to reveal her source, Le Roux fires Andrew, telling him, "You're a very confused person. You have a left-wing wife and a right-wing proprietor. The tensions in your life are irreconcilable." When he protests that he has just been chosen Editor of the Year for his outstanding performance, Le Roux responds that he doesn't like singularity among journalists, and explains what the playwrights must find the homogenous problem of newspapers to be. "I provided the formula," he says, "It worked in South Africa. Page one, a nice picture of the Prime

Minister. Page two, something about actors. Page three, gossip , the veld, what you call the countryside, a rail crash if you're lucky. Four, high technology. Five, sex, sex crimes, court cases. A couple of filler pages then its editorials. Then letters. All pleasingly like-minded, all from Kent. The odd one from Berne, Lucerne, Geneva, Zurich to add weight and variety. An international flavour. Then six pages of sport. Back page, a lot of weather and something nasty about the Opposition." (Hare Pravda 81-82)

He tells Andrew his only responsibility has been to write editorials, and someone else could do that equally as well. Andrew, like Harry Morrison, his editor at the *Leicester Bystander* before Le Roux's takeover, attempts a stand. He calls for solidarity among the news staff, a show of support from his former employees, but he is greeted by scornful silence and exits, vowing revenge.

In the brief scene that follows, the newsvendors hawk the evening papers, the headlines of which reveal that Rebecca took her story to a rival publication, *The Usurper*, which decided to publish the leak. In an amazing condensation of exposition, they shout:

FIRST NEWSVENDOR. NUCLEAR POWER STORY: MINISTER DENIES IT!

SECOND NEWSVENDOR. THAT FLASK: THE STORY IN FULL! EXCLUSIVE: ONLY THE DAILY USURPER!

THIRD NEWSVENDOR. SPECIAL BRANCH VISITS THE DAILY USURPER! EDITOR SAYS 'I'LL NEVER GIVE IN!'

FIRST NEWSVENDOR. EDITOR GIVES IN!

After a brief press conference held by Quince, in which he outlines the twist the government has put on the story, blaming the civil servant

who leaked the information rather than itself for irresponsibility, the Vendors continue:

FIRST NEWSVENDOR. USURPER EDITOR TAKES HONOURABLE COURSE!

SECOND NEWSVENDOR. EDITOR FOUND HANGED!

THIRD NEWSVENDOR. SEX-PLAN DIET! YOUR THIRTY-FIFTH DAY!

SECOND NEWSVENDOR. LEAK TRIAL STARTS MONDAY!

FIRST NEWSVENDOR. VICTORY NEW SALES RECORD! UP AND UP WE GO!

While Andrew and Rebecca are struggling to get the truth in print, sinking another paper in the process, Le Roux is busy insulating himself even further from dependence on others for his success. His assistant, Eaton Sylvester, meets him at his home in Weybridge to tell him about some trouble Quince, their pocketed MP, is in. Le Roux's bungalow is an ostentatious replica of a Japanese style mansion, with wooden floors, paper screens, and an indoor pool with a Japanese bridge. It is the place where Le Roux and his wife practice "Toyinka, the Japanese art of personal attack," as well as Yoga and Zen flower arrangement.

The media mogul's habitat is yet another stab at 1980s business philosophy. His surroundings reflect not only the gaudy eccentricities of the '80s nouveau riche, but also the upper echelon businessman's interest in the physical and mental training of their competitors, who in the '80s were principally the Japanese.

Eaton's message to Le Roux is that Quince needs one-hundred thousand pounds deposited in his bank in order to extricate himself from a poor political maneuver. Le Roux refuses, telling him he doesn't need Quince, the government, or anyone else. "Contacts?" he says, "I don't

have any contacts, do you? No, ditch everyone. You don't need anyone. With me, there's nobody left. I once had fifteen hundred people who worked for me in South Africa. Where are they now?" (Hare Pravda 91)

After discussing all the enemies Le Roux has made, the throngs of people he has fired, they decide to shake things up even further and attempt a hostile takeover of another paper, *The Usurper*. However, in this endeavor they are not alone. A coterie of Le Roux's former star players, Andrew May, Elliot Fruit-Norton, Rebecca May, Michael Quince and Bill Smiley, have gathered at one of the dog tracks Elliot is now in charge of administering. He proposes they join forces with other politically influential people who have been harmed by Le Roux, purchase *The Usurper* while it is in turmoil because of the uranium leak story, and turn it into a "one nation" paper, filled from cover to back with damaging stories about their former proprietor.

Their trump card, Elliot believes, is Eaton Sylvester, who meets them to say he wants to defect--to "loot the ruins" of Le Roux's empire before it crumbles around them. In exchange for a stake in his demise, Eaton offers them the sealed envelope bid Le Roux will be making for *The Usurper*, as well as stories about Le Roux's past in South Africa that will make devastating newspaper copy. After some initial hesitation the group decides to let him in and take the plunge, topping Le Roux's supposed thirteen million pound bid for *The Usurper*.

In another brief scene with the Newsvendors it is revealed that the rebellious cooperative succeeded in buying the *Usurper* and has begun publishing anti-Le Roux propaganda. Andrew holds a press conference and challenges Le Roux to respond to their allegations, telling the

assembly, "By his silence he condemns himself. If he can answer, then let him answer. If he does not answer, then draw your conclusions." (Hare Pravda 109)

However it is not through the press, but in person that Andrew next hears from Lambert Le Roux. While out hiking in the Yorkshire Moors, he encounters Le Roux on a hunting expedition and learns of the egregious mistake he and his cohorts have made. Believing the stories they were fed by Eaton and a string of secret sources, Andrew's crew used the *Usurper*'s pages in an effort to enlighten England. He tells Le Roux, "We want to be rid of you. Rid the whole country of you. This perpetual distortion of the truth. It has an effect. It's insidious. This contempt for balance. Facts! Because of you British people's minds are fogging...clogging...decaying...silting up...with falsehood."

Unoffended, Le Roux counters, "Delusions. Does nobody see? What on earth is all this stuff about truth? Truth? Why, when everywhere you go people tell lies. In pubs. To each other. To their husbands. To their wives. To the children. To the dying--and thank God they do. no one tells the truth. Why single out newspapers? Why there? 'Oh! A special standard!' Everyone can tell lies except newspapers. They're the universal scapegoat for everybody else's evasions and inadequacies. It is a totally unworkable view of the world!"

Then, from out of the brush, Ian Ape-Warden, a lawyer, appears to serve Andrew with a legal notice--a writ for libel. The final word is once again Le Roux's. He explains to Andrew that everything the editor has been publishing about him--all the grotesque stories he took to be facts--were fabrications, stories told to Andrew and his vengeful, over-eager colleagues. Rather than buying the *Usurper* himself and putting it out of

business, Le Roux concocted a scheme to run the paper into the ground along with all his enemies. He led them to their own destruction.

The final circus-like scene takes place in the newsroom of *The Tide*. Reporters dash from place to place slapping together scurrilous stories about talking horses, single line editorials ("To the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition: Jump in the Khasi"), and photo contests for large-breasted women. All his options depleted, Andrew returns to his maniacal master as the new editor of *The Tide*. Elated, Le Roux announces to his staff, "There is more rejoicing in heaven over the one who returns to me than there is over the two hundred lazy bastards who are loyal." (Hare Pravda 121)

In a final stroke of free press devastation, the doors to the newsroom burst open and the entire staff of *The Victory* joins the *Tide* reporters. Le Roux has combined the two radically different papers. "Upmarket, down-market, it's all the same stuff," he says, "And we do the same things to it." As Eaton enters with another round of pink slips for former employees and Andrew once again takes the editorial helm, Le Roux ends the play by announcing, "Gentlemen. We have a new foreman. Welcome to the foundry of lies." (Hare Pravda 124)

The "foundry of lies" Hare and Brenton created was enormously successful in its run at the National Theatre. It surpassed the National's previous performance record for a new play, Peter Schaffer's *Amadeus*, and, understandably, created quite a stir in the community and the press. Several journalists reacted instinctually with scorn for the way their profession was depicted. In *The Times*, Bernard Levin wrote, "It is an illiterate strip-cartoon, cruder by far than the worst excesses of any

newspaper possessed of photographs depicting a trouserless vicar in the company of the chief bellringer's wife...Never yet did I read a newspaper story that was simultaneously as ignorant, erroneous, unchecked, ill-written, and reckless as *Pravda*." (Levin)

In the *Literary Review*, John Orr said, "What starts out as a leftist spoofing of Thatcherism ends up as a patriotic ode to bumbling incompetence. All press, young and old, left and right, cynics and idealists, end up at a dogtrack in Lancashire, all hoodwinked and all British, flying the flag at half mast because they have all been well and truly screwed." (Orr 19) Summarizing the playwrights' complaints, Donald Trelford wrote in the *Observer*, "No one could say that the authors of *Pravda* set out to flatter the prejudices of anyone, such as myself, professionally engaged in Fleet Street. By my count our trade is convicted of the following vices: ambition, cruelty, cynicism, incompetence, complacency, defeatism, snobbery, bias, deception, plagiarism, triviality, sycohpancy (to politicians as well as to owners), cowardice, corruption, of being opinionated, arrogant, and drunk, of lacking convictions, of having fantasies about our own power and influence, and no solidarity." (Trelford 8)

Other critics, however, approached the production more objectively and recognized the satire for what it was: a vehicle for the larger messages of the play. In *Time* magazine, William A. Henry wrote, "*Pravda* is not merely lamenting the newspapers that are but pining for newspapers that might be...It recalls the morally assertive best of warmhearted Broadway satires like *The Solid Gold Cadillac*." (Henry)

Also stateside, Richard Christiansen in the *Chicago Tribune* said, "The serious issue of journalism as a public trust is given a sharp, frequently

very funny airing in *Pravda*." (Christiansen 1) Taking Christiansen's assertion even further, British critic Benedict Nightingale wrote in the New Statesman, "It uses frank and unabashed caricature to didactic ends: which are to suggest not merely that we're giving outrageously unfit people far too much control over what ought to be sources of truth and light, but that the British character of 1985, compounded as it substantially is of greed, cynicism, sloth and moral gutlessness, makes more than one aspect of our national life vulnerable to unscrupulous predators. 'Fleet Street is only a metaphor,' say Hare-Brenton in the Olivier programme, and mean it." (Nightingale "Rough Beasts" 30)

Nightingale, who has followed Hare's career from its beginning in the Fringe movement of the 1960s, has not always liked what he has seen. However, Pravda to him was a significant work. In an interview prior to Hare's 1993 premiere of The Absence of War, the London reviewer compared Hare to earlier Socialist-activist writers. He said, "While in J.B. Priestly's time he was a marginalized voice, now people expect to go see theatre and hear criticisms of the country. To be fair to Hare he has helped keep that tradition alive. Apart from Churchill and a few others, there hasn't really been another playwright who has done this job." (Nightingale Interview)

Matt Wolf, an American-born critic who has covered London theatre as a free-lance writer for ten years, agreed. He recalls, "I remember thinking it had problems dramaturgically *but* it was a big 'state of the nation' play and a polemic in the best sense of the word." He, too, places Pravda in historical context. "The British have been writing about public issues for a long while now," he said, "While in the states people

were writing domestic dramas--what Benedict Nightingale has called 'diaper dramas.'

Wolf also recognizes the societal relevance of the play in its time. He noted, "Pravda seemed uniquely British and it seemed very much a product of its time, like All the President's Men. It was very much in response to the Thatcher years. It's hard to remember now without Thatcher at the political helm that a Rupert Murdoch would never have taken control unaided by Thatcherism. Of course now, with all but a few papers gone from Fleet Street, Pravda seems like a museum piece." (Wolf Interview)

As Wolf notes, much about Pravda turned into prophecy. Fleet Street, in the course of only a few years, did indeed collapse, then scatter across the city under the whims of new management. On the positive side, the role of Le Roux heralded a career swing for stage and screen actor Anthony Hopkins. Wolf remarks, "(Pravda was) an extraordinary vehicle for Hopkins--a comeback for him in London after a series of dreary roles in the states." (Wolf Interview)

Indeed, most critics found themselves inexorably drawn to Hopkins' cagey Le Roux, even if they did not like the play. John Orr wrote, "The way is open for the Super villain to dominate the stage and Anthony Hopkins does not need any second chance. He struts around like a cross between a bull and a ballerina, his thick torso stuck archly forward, yet tripping lightly on his toes. As others speak, he appears neither to notice nor listen, but lets his weasel's eyes scan the audience with open menace. It is a ritual of unashamed hypnosis. We watch Hopkins and cease to listen to others. We grow impatient for his next entrance." (Orr 20)

In a recent interview, several years after playing Le Roux, the way Hopkins describes the part reveals some of the strength of personality he brought to the role. He told *Playboy* reporter Lawrence Grobel, "In Pravda I played a man called Lambert Le Roux who was a male version of Margaret Thatcher. He was like *Jaws*, in the way sharks move. This man knew exactly what price people had, and he knew that everyone had a price. I loved playing that part becasue he saw through all the bullshit. He knew that contained in each human being is the jungle. That's a pretty bleak look at life, but there is a part that is exciting." (Grobel 57)

Pravda also became a harbinger of things to come for David Hare. During production, when asked about the relationship of a prominent left-wing, Labourite playwright and the government-funded National Theatre, Hare responded with the anti-establishment battle cry, "In England, subsidized theatre is under attack from a right-wing Government. Let us, therefore, use the National Theatre to attack that Government from a nationalized stage." (Gussow "Playwright as Provocateur" 75) And it is from within the walls of the National Theatre that Hare has been operating ever since.

The Bay at Nice and *Wrecked Eggs*

The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs, Hare's plays that premiered at the National in 1986, the year after Pravda, were altogether simpler and subtler in their design and execution. The playwright turned from the multi-scene, thirty character, full-length, epic satire he and Howard Brenton had created to a pair of small cast, single-set, one act dramas. While Pravda was written expressly for the cavernous, 1200-seat Olivier stage, the new pair of plays opened in the National's Cottesloe Theatre, a 400-seat adaptable room.

Of all of Hare's plays produced since his breakthrough, Plenty, in 1979, The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs remain the least discussed and analyzed, both by the press and the author himself. In Writing Left-Handed, his collection of essays and speeches published in 1991, Hare discusses or alludes to all of his productions throughout the 1980s except for these two--they are conspicuously absent. Perhaps this is due to the fate of the plays. While the reviews for the pair, produced back-to-back with shared casts, were mostly favorable, they had a relatively short run in London and never received a New York production.

Though they were not as popularly successful as earlier ventures, these plays nonetheless represent an important part of Hare's canon. Besides being the only time the playwright ever used the one-act format, they are also an artistic assertion of the kind of play Hare has always insisted he writes, though critics have been hesitant to credit him for. Because so many of his plays have contained obvious and potentially incendiary political ideas, and because Hare comes from the generation

of playwrights that created the left-leaning Fringe Theatre scene, many scholars and reviewers have been quick to pigeonhole him as *only* a political writer or commentator on national and international interests.

In reality, The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs represent what he claims to strive for: a melding of the *political* and the *personal*. To those who expect sheer dogma from his work Hare has said, "I do understand the thinking. The Marxist playwright working in a fairly hostile medium feels that his first job is to declare his allegiance, to show his hand if you like. He thinks that because the play itself is part of the class struggle, he must first say which side he is on and make that clear, before he proceeds to lay out the ideas of the play as fairly as he may. To me this approach is rubbish, it insults the audience's intelligence; more important it insults their experience; most important it is also a fundmental misunderstanding of what a play is. A play is not actors, a play is not text; a play is what happens between the stage and the audience. A play is a performance. So if a play is to be a weapon in the class struggle, then that weapon is not going to be the things you are saying; it is the interaction of what you are saying and what the audience is thinking. The play is in the air." (Hare "The Play is in the Air" 29-30)

To Hare, extremes of any kind may damage dramatic art. "A theatre which is exclusively personal, just a place of private psychology, is inclined to self-indulgence," he claims, "A theatre which is just social is inclined to unreality, to the impatient blindness I've talked about." (Hare "The Play is in the Air" 34) Thus, in The Bay at Nice and in Wrecked Eggs, Hare attempts to balance these ends and achieve what he has called "the two distinctive virtues of real plays: they show us that feelings which we had thought private turn out to be common ground with others, and,

uniquely, they appeal as much to our heads as to our hearts. Or, rather, they send our minds and hearts spinning together, so that we cannot tell which is which." (Hare "Looking Foolish" 46)

The first play on the double bill, The Bay at Nice, finds its political element in its setting: the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, 1956. It is the year of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the Soviet invasion of Budapest. Against this backdrop of Communist Russia and the Cold War at its peak are set the personal lives of three characters whose immediate concerns lie far from the realm of global politics. Valentina Nrovka, one of Matisse's pupils in turn-of-the-century Paris, has been summoned to the museum to authenticate a recently discovered painting, believed to be one of her tutor's originals. She is led to a room in the museum where the painting sits, shrouded in a corner. At the Hermitage, she is met by her daughter, Sophia Yepileva, who seeks her mother's approval and assistance in divorcing her husband and starting a new life with her lover, Peter Linitsky, an elderly, improbable suitor who is identified mainly by his job with the sanitation department.

While the museum curators wait for Valentina's judgement of the Matisse, the two women discuss the consequences Sophia's plans would have for herself, her children, and her husband. Valentina opposes her daughter's recklessness, but finally agrees to speak with her husband and even to sell her apartment in order to help Sophia back on her feet. The play ends with Valentina removing the drape from the painting and recognizing it as the work of her fauvist teacher.

Hare's talent for creating multi-dimensional, driven female characters, absent in his last two plays, returns in The Bay at Nice. The crux of the drama lies in the conversation between the elderly Valentina and her somewhat estranged daughter, Sophia. Both women are highly educated and creative. Valentina, in her youth, lived a bohemian lifestyle, travelling Europe learning to paint. Her daughter, now a schoolteacher, also paints, though her mother questions her talent. Their discourse reflects their humanist intelligence, allowing the playwright the liberty to express a number of ideas while remaining true to the plot.

As they discuss the various crises in their lives they touch upon larger questions such as the nature of art, the meaning of personal freedom, public conscience, and national identity. Each woman's opinion on these subjects defines her relationship with the other, and her place in Russian society.

After first being left in the room where she is to judge the painting, Valentina complains to Sophia that the museum is too enamored of socialist realism, "Whirlpools of mud." She relates a story about Picasso who, she says, lived in an ugly mansion. When his friends questioned his aesthetic sense he said, "You are all prisoners of taste. Great artists love everything. There is no such thing as ugliness." Her daughter counters, "By that argument, if everything's beautiful, then that includes socialist realism." (Hare The Bay at Nice 5-6)

Valentina continues her lament for great art by saying, "All the artists are dead. The poets are moaners. And the playwrights are worse. Because they're exhausting. People run round the stage. It tires me. In their stories the minute hand is going round like crazy. But the hour hand never turns at all." Her contempt for the modern extends even to polite

conversation. "Tell me, who do you think I should be seeing?" she asks Sophia, "Name anyone in Leningrad who's worth an hour. A full hour." To which her daughter replies, "Well, of course I enjoy everybody's company. I find something good or interesting in everyone." (Hare The Bay at Nice 7)

These opening glimpses of Valentina and Sophia's personalities are very revealing. Valentina, once a free spirit but now set in her ways, longs for the artistry of earlier decades--Matisse and Picasso, Tolstoi, Chekhov and Ibsen--while her daughter is comfortable with the present. One has become a near recluse while the other is still searching for life's satisfaction. It is a conflict between jaded experience and idealistic youth similar to the one between Stephen and Mehta in A Map of the World. Both sides are adequately prepared and equally matched, for Hare is less concerned with which one is right and more interested in degrees of differences and the resulting conflict.

It is Valentina who first brings up the play's central conflict: whether Sophia should seek a divorce from her husband. She tells Sophia she has heard rumors of the rift and encourages her to say what she has undoubtedly come to say. Before she has the chance, though, the women are interrupted by the museum's Assistant Curator who arrives with the painting.

The work the Curator brings is Matisse's "The Bay at Nice," a painting depicting fragments of a room near a seashore. Though it is never actually seen by the audience, the painting holds symbolic significance for all of the characters and many of the actions that follow. It is representative of the playwright's search for truth. As one critic observed, "Like all of Hare's plays--or indeed, any work which questions moral

standards--this is basically a piece about authenticity: what constitutes a true work of art? love? decent work? a valid life?" (Radin 30)

The first question of authenticity, of course, is the validity of the painting. Interestingly, on this subject Hare chose to delve deeply into research behind artistic forgeries and methods of discovering false documents and works of art. The Curator explains, "We know a great deal about pigment chronology. We have radio carbon. We have X-ray crystallography. We have wet chemistry. All these are invaluable if the painting is old enough. Because dating is what usually gives the forger away." (Hare The Bay at Nice 11)

Being a fairly recent painter, however, the works of Matisse prove difficult for these methods. The state's scientists have been somewhat helpful. "Their work is very useful," the Curator says, "It is respected. Within certain limits. They have proved that if the canvas was forged, it was forged some time ago. Almost certainly in France. They can establish that. Where and when. That is useful work. But it does--in this case--we believe--stop short of *who*." (Hare 11)

The subjective matter of *who* that the objective methods of science can't prove is what the museum needs Valentina to settle. It is, Hare seems to suggest, a minor victory for humanists to find that there are still some things the cold eye of science cannot resolve.

The painting takes on added significance when its origins are known. The Assistant Curator explains to Valentina that it was bequeathed to the museum by a former Count of Russia, a Czarist who fled the country in 1919 to live in the south of France. While it puzzles the museum staff that an exiled supporter of the czars should choose to have such a work sent back to Russia, Valentina understands perfectly. She,

too, chose to spend her life abroad, avoiding many of the catastrophes that accompanied the revolutionary years. But, as she notes, "We all must make our peace." (Hare 16) Like the Count, and the painting, Valentina followed the allure of her homeland and chose to return to it to have her child, Sophia.

The discussion of the painting allows for more commentary on the nature of art and the role of the artist. Each character in the room has a different relationship to the creative world that surrounds them. Sophia says she paints for sheer enjoyment, "not to be in competition with great artists." Her mother, though, tells her, "You should want to be Cézanne. Or else why paint?" She accuses Sophia of shallowness, saying, "What you do is called photography...Painting is ultimately to do with the quality of feeling." Chiming in at the end, the Assistant Curator merely adds, "I can't tell. I'm an Academician. My heart is in the catalogue." (Hare 13-14)

The range of sentiment toward the art of painting, from casual amateur, to emotional aficianado, to scientific studiousness, is Hare's way of examining a difficult puzzle--the nature of art--from several angles. None of the three participating characters can agree on how painting should be accomplished, what its purpose should be, or how it should be valued. Interestingly, the Assistant Curator is given the last word on the subject in this conversation. "All art is loot," he says, "Who should own it? I shouldn't say this, but there isn't much justice in these things. If we examined the process whereby everything on these walls was acquired...we should have bare walls." (Hare 16)

Following the Assistant's exit to fetch some tea, Valentina is once again able to prod Sophia about her marriage. The thematic focus of the play shifts from quesitons of art and aesthetic to discussions of love, duty,

and self-fulfillment. Sophia, who has spent years with her husband, Grigor, and brought up two children with him, feels disenchanted with traditional ways of thinking about relationships. "I think less and less of love," she tells her mother, "What does love have to do with it? What matters is not love, but what the other person makes you." (Hare 18)

Since her husband is so successful, Sophia feels inferior. She explains, "When I stand next to Grigor, it's clear, he is a dutiful man. He's a model servant of the State. Next to him, I look only like a fortunate woman who must struggle every day to deserve the luck she's had in marrying someone so worthwhile. That is my role. In marriages everyone gets cast. the strong one, the weak. The quick one, the slow. the steady, the giddy. It's set. Almost from the moment you meet." (Hare 18)

Sophia's expression of dissatisfaction is a perfect example of Hare's melding of political and personal turmoil. In 1979 Hare divorced Margaret Matheson, his wife of ten years with whom he had three children. He undoubtedly understands the myriad difficulties in relationships that can drive wedges between couples. It is not, however, one of these many familiar complaints--infidelity, frigidity, apathy, or simple irreconcilable differences--that leads off Sophia's list of complaints about her marriage. Rather, it is Grigor's effectiveness as a statesman.

Constantly mixed with all her other grievances is a resentment of the government's role in their lives. "With Grigor, I'm dowdy, I'm scatterbrained, I'm trying to prove myself," she says, "All the standards are his. Grigor, of course has nothing to prove. He's a headmaster at thirty-seven, the Party approves of him. He can always find his shirts in the drawer. I usually can. But Usually is no good next to Always." (Hare 18)

The new love in her life, Peter Linitsky, is apolitical. He is a simple man who works for the Sanitation Board. To Valentina, this is an absurd compromise. She tells Sophia, "You've found yourself a mediocrity, so you suffer less by comparison. Is that what you mean?" (Hare 19)

She tells her daughter she must face both her conscience and her children in making such a drastic move. For Sophia, though, it is a matter of self-actualization. "Do you think I've not thought of them?" she asks, "Mother, it's hard. But I have the right to live my own life." She claims there is a principle at stake, saying, "In their private life, a person must be free to live as they choose." (Hare 19-20)

Choosing between personal freedom and communal obligation, however, is something Valentina is quite familiar with. Hare uses the older woman's background to once again broaden the importance of the discussion to encompass larger aspects of society. Valentina chastises Sophia, "How convenient. Goodness. An ideal. Which also coincides with what you want. How perfect. What perfect luck. Run off with this man. Call it 'living my own life'. 'I must be myself, I must do what I want...' I have heard these words before. On boulevards. In cafés. I used to hear them in Paris. I associate them with zinc tables and the gushing of beer. Everyone talking about their entitlements. 'I must be allowed to realize myself.' For me, it had a different name. I never called it principle. I called it selfishness." (Hare 20)

What might have degenerated into a simple-minded mother-daughter spat about rights and responsibilities, growing up and owning up, is instead made more dramatically interesting and socially relevant by Valentina's references to her life in Paris. The era she refers to was one of artistic revolt and personal liberation. The idealists in the barrooms were

intellectuals and free-thinkers. But in historical terms, Hare's use of the City of Light in this context cannot help but conjure other images of revolution synonymous with Parisian culture. More than a century before, the boulevards and cafés were filled with the disgruntled proletariat plotting *real* revolution, and only a few years after Valentina's stay, the city was fighting to liberate itself from foreign occupation.

Before they can settle the matter, their discussion of liberty is interrupted by the arrival of Sophia's suitor, Peter. Valentina's reception of the man is a mixture of surprise at his age--so many years her daughter's senior--and icy scorn for what she thinks he represents--the ignorant, mundane masses. After a few brief exchanges, in which it is discovered that Peter, too, was once married, the dialogue once again settles on the political intrusion into the characters' lives. Feeling she has found the perfect reason why this man can not court her daughter, Valentina tells Peter, "I know nothing about you. For all I know, you're a kind and decent man. I'm sure you managed a divorce. But I am sure...I would stake my life...you are not in the Party." (Hare 23)

Not deterred, Sophia asks for her mother's help in speeding up the painfully slow divorce process, which involves publishing a notice in the newspaper and proving "necessity." Her necessity, Sophia claims, is to be free. Once again the two women argue the qualities of freedom, this time involving a third party, Peter.

"Grigor's not free," Valentina tells Sophia, "You're not free. Child, you've lived thirty-six years. How can you be so naive?" (Hare 25) She tells her daughter there is no such thing as freedom, but Sophia recalls her mother's tales of countless lovers and her happy life in Paris. In stark contrast, when asked his belief about freedom Peter admits, "I don't

know. I'm pressed to make a living. Half goes to my ex-wife. My children are grown-up. They work in a factory making bottles. One's doing quite well. The other was born a bit slow. So I am always thinking of him. Most days. Most hours. I'm not an expert on freedom." (Hare 25)

Into his seemingly dreary existence, however, some hope has dawned. He tells Valentina, "I find myself nearly sixty-three. And...never really had the chance to take a risk in my life. What else is there now for me but Sophia?" (Hare 25-26) Peter's late optimism establishes another contrast in the play. While earlier it seemed that Valentina's jadedness compared to Sophia was a result of having lived longer, Peter's capacity for hope so late in life suggests that her bitterness is more the result of experience.

"Love is pain," Valentina argues, "Am I right? Look at you now. You're in torture. You shift from one foot to another...You're forever taking sidelong glances at her, checking up on her, seeing she approves of everything you say. Thinking all the time, how does this go down with Sophia? In fiction it makes me laugh when books end with two people coming together. Curtain! At last they fall into one another's arms! The reader applauds. But that's where books should really begin. This fantasy that love solves problems! Love makes you raw. It strips the skin from you." She maintains that committment and responsibility should govern their actions. "Chuck out everything," she says, "Husband. Jobs. Children. Girgor. Yes. Destroy Grigor's life. For a bet placed by two shivering tramps at the racetrack. And there's nothing guaranteed at the end. People should stick. They should stick with what they have. With what they know. That's character." (Hare 26-27)

When Valentina ends her tirade and complains that her tea has not yet arrived, Sophia welcomes the chance to go get it for her, leaving her alone with Peter. The discussion that follows between the suitor and his potential mother-in-law, evenly matched in years, is noticeably less edged than their initial encounter. For awhile they banter genially, Valentina describing Paris and Matisse, and relating anecdotes about famous painters and their work. When Sophia returns, however, she is disturbed to find that Peter did not broach the subject she left him to bring up: whether Valentina would help them financially.

By now, Valentina has drawn on a number of tactics to discourage the unlikely couple from their plans. She still insists neither of them has the courage or stamina to follow through with the arduous task of rebuilding their lives. Sophia, though, sends her mother down another path by asking her to recount the story of her daughter's birth for Peter. She explains, "I was a wayward woman--that's the word. I lay around in beds, in studios, with men, smoking too much and thinking, shall I grow my hair? I had a child. Oh, I was like Gorki's mother, who stopped for fifteen minutes on a peasants' march to give birth in a ditch. Then she ran to catch up with the marchers...I had my little Sophia in an atelier in the Marais, with two jugs of hot water and a homosexual friend who delivered her. And then I thought--well, is this it? this lounging about? this thinking only of yourself? this--what word should I use--*freedom*? Having a child changed everything. I suddenly decided that Paris was meaningless. Indulgence only. I had a Russian daughter. I had to come home." (Hare 39)

She explains that regardless of the consequences in Russia, which included not being able to pursue her talent as a painter because of the

predominance of Soviet Socialist Realism, she felt exile would be cowardly. Ultimately, her defense of her actions is less patriotic and Communist, and more simply Utilitarian. She sincerely believes in the greater good for the greater number of people. "My life is not happy," she says, "But it would also be unhappy if I'd been cowardly. Your life is defined by an absence, by what is not happening, by where you can't be. You think all the time about 'me'. Oh 'me'! Oh 'me'! The endless 'me' who takes over. 'Me' becomes everything. Oh 'I' decided. The self-dramatization. Turning your life into a crusade. A crusade in which you claim equal status with Russia. On the one hand, the whole of Russia, millions of square miles. On the other, 'I' think and 'I' feel. The battle is unequal. That kind of self-advertisement, it seemed to me wrong. And dangerous...I wasn't a communist. I know what has happened since. I'm still not a communist. How could I be? But I made a decision." (Hare 40)

Once again the seeming distasteful antagonist in Hare's writing exhibits sympathetic qualities late in the play and seems to speak for the playwright. Like Mehta's silky smooth refinery in A Map of the World and Lambert LeRoux's stampeding charisma in Pravda, Valentina's difficult past, her life of contradictions, serves to validate, or at least explain, her difficult demeanor. The focus has shifted temporarily from the question of Sophia's happiness to that of Valentina's.

Having expended his usefulness in the mother-daughter debate, Peter makes arrangements to meet with Sophia later in the week and excuses himself, once again leaving the women alone. Understanding what Sophia needs from her now--two thousand roubles to pay for the court costs of her divorce--Valentina offers one final objection concerning her husband. "Have you thought of the effect the divorce will have on

him?" she asks, "A Party member? You're a private citizen. Love in a small flat, it's nobody's business. But Grigor--he will lose position. Influence. Friends. He will be discredited. It's a sign of failure."

"Well, I can't live with the Party anymore," Sophia responds, "I've always known...after all, in my profession I work with young people. I spread ideas. I can't be considered for promotion unless I am also willing to join. The moment is looming when they will ask me. This way the moment will never arrive." (Hare 42-43)

With the final element, the political element, resolved, Valentina finally relents and agrees to raise the money Sophia needs, not for her, she claims, but for the children. Before leaving, Sophia asks her mother for an embrace, is refused, and must move to the stolid woman herself. Her final words of warning to her daughter are, "Whatever you do, this time you must live with it," to which Sophia responds, "Yes. I've learnt that from you." (Hare 46)

All that is left after Sophia's exit is the matter of the painting, which remains shrouded in a corner of the room. Alone, in the only obligatory scene of the play, Valentina picks up the canvas, briefly examines it, then, as her eyes fill with tears, puts it down again. When the Assistant Curator returns for her verdict she tells him it is indeed a Matisse, but not the first in a series as the museum suspected. "There was nothing in the foreground, so you assumed this is where he started," she tells him, "Then later he put in the woman. Or the violin. But no. It was the opposite. He removed the woman. He sought to distil." She explains further, "He said that finally he didn't need a model. Finally he didn't even need paint. *He* was there. He was a person. Present. And that was enough." (Hare 47)

The playwright's final directions suggest that "The background fades and the stage is filled with the image of the bay at Nice: a pair of open French windows, a balcony, the sea and the sky." (Hare 48) In the end Matisse's painting, "The Bay at Nice," holds several important meanings for Valentina. The actual canvas and frame are a physical reminder of her distant past, a time when she held the potential to be idealistic and free. Matisse's attitude toward his art suggests a reverence for the individual, for the self, that Valentina, through her life of sacrifice, remembers but no longer feels. Finally, the artist's "distillation" of his subject, removing the woman from the scene, mirrors Valentina's own withdrawl from life and, literally, from the stage.

While the settings for The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs could hardly be more dissimilar, the two plays share many of the same thematic offerings. Set in the present day in upstate New York, the second one act is a three-hander about a WASPish couple, identified only as Robbie and Loella, who have decided to divorce and are throwing a party to honor their separation. Grace, the only guest to arrive at their "celebration" is a recent acquaintance who proves to be a worthy character foil and catalyst for the single, simple dramatic action of the play: getting the couple back together.

Like The Bay at Nice, Wrecked Eggs uses the intimate, personal turmoils of its principals to comment on wider socio-political issues. Though it may not be immediately recognizable, the structure and style of the plays is another return to Shavian qualities. Plot, in the Aristotelian sense, is of secondary importance to theme. Christopher Edwards noted, "Taken together the plays represent interesting essays in a genre--the play

of ideas--that English playwrights do not usually handle well at all. Both examine the conflicting demands of personal fulfilment and responsibility; themes that confirm Hare to be a moralist." (Edwards 48)

Wrecked Eggs begins in the living room of Robbie and Loelia's country home in upstate New York near the Hudson River. The dramatic action--reuniting Robbie and Loelia--is not announced until quite late, nearly a third of the way through the play. Most of the dialogue and "action" at the beginning, then, is seemingly mundane conversation that shapes the characters' personalities and introduces the themes Hare is interested in.

Like Valentina and Sophia in The Bay at Nice, the characters of Wrecked Eggs are highly educated and opinionated. Each is able to comment on a wide variety of subjects, allowing the playwright great freedom of ideas. The themes in the first play dealt largely with timeless, universal issues--freedom versus responsibility, familial allegiance, the nature of art--and several of these are picked up in Wrecked Eggs; but there is an added element of more specifically contemporary concerns. The playwright continues some of the axe-grinding over 1980s greed and self-centeredness that he began in Pravda, only this time it is Reaganomics rather than Thatcherism that bears the brunt of his critique. Setting the play in New York was an obvious tactical choice, for there is a noticeable urge to pique the conscience of the United States at work, bordering on anti-Americanness. The result is still a steady mixture of personal and political, but in an altogether different milieu.

As the lights rise Robbie is in the middle of telling Grace a story about a man with two wives who was recently run down by a truck as he

was leaving a laundromat. The tale segues into talk of Robbie's ideal woman, Grace's recent abortion and her "ridiculous fertility," various methods of contraception, and other matters of sex and relationships. The first sign of trouble comes when Grace tells the couple, "Somerset Maugham said that half his schoolfriends had devoted themselves to career, and half to seducing women. And at sixty the ones who had spent their lives chasing women did not seem noticeably deprived of happiness." (Hare Wrecked Eggs 56)

Abruptly, Robbie changes the course of the conversation away from women and relationships and toward careers. He suggests that as a lawyer he is too busy to spend his time pursuing women. "My nut is one hundred thousand dollars," he says, "That's what I need every year just to maintain our apartment and...I really have to work pretty hard, Loelia has to work...We both have to work, just to live in Manhattan, keep this place. I'm at the office most evenings. Preparing a brief. Just to hit that nut." To which Loelia revealingly adds, "That's before he even gets on to pleasure. Pleasure's extra for Robbie." (Hare 56)

The difference between the hosts, with their home in Manhattan and getaway cottage in the countryside, and their guest is apparent when Robbie questions Grace about her finances. "What's your nut?" he asks, "Your monthly outgoing? Just to stand still?" She responds, "Do you know...I have no idea. I'm in a cash business, it's all entertaining...Little bits of money in tin cans. I find dimes in my shoes and dollars in between pages of the books I'm reading." (Hare 57)

These early probings of independent economic status become a running motif through the play. To some degree each character's personality, opinions, and position are colored by his or her holdings and

views on wealth. Grace is undoubtedly less well off and her corresponding views of the gliteratti are appropriately cynical. Her position is made all the more ironic by her job as a press agent.

Grace's business allows Hare to use a few choice barbs that apparently could not find their way into Pravda. Citing the epitome of 1980s sensibilities, she tells Robbie and Loelia that newspapers decide what to put in their pages mainly by the criteria of success. "Reading about success is the new pornography," she explains, "If we had censors in this country and their job was to cut every article which uses the word 'survivor', if they cut every word about *success*, if they cut every word about the rich and their apartments, and what they eat, and what they sit on, and what they have on their walls, and where they go in the summer, and what other rich people they're sharing their beds with, and why we should envy them, and why we should think they are wonderful people really, or in spite of it, or because of it, and how exactly they made it, and why they made it and other people didn't, and what incredible pressure they have to put up with, and what a bore it is to be recognized, and how difficult it is once you're successful to go on being successful, if we cut every article which implies what's successful must be good, if we just said sorry--press censorship--this is Russia--none of that may appear...Then this is the form in which you would get your average morning paper." (Hare 58) To illustrate her point she pulls from her bag an "edited" copy of the *Times* that is shredded almost to nothingness.

In another strange twist of conversation, talk changes from the media back to contraceptive devices. Loelia exclaims, "I read Robbie's rubbers," and reopens discussion of various ways to avoid pregnancy. Amid observations of the Romans' methods of avoiding conception

(Grace notes they used half an orange) Robbie again becomes uncomfortable and takes the first opportunity to change the subject with another anecdote. This time the subject is the Japanese. He says, "I read...there was this Captain. On a container ship. A couple of Toyotas fell off into the sea. He feels he's responsible. So he kills himself. I mean, I don't understand this behaviour. It puzzles me. It seems excessive. It seems *foreign*."

Grace and Loelia join in, bashing the enemy of the 1980s businessman. "It's hell to deal with them," Grace says, "They think saying no to people is rude. That means if you have to do business, there's three days of saying yes all the time. Then finally the fourth they will say, er there is a slight problem. You see, they think it's impolite to disagree. That can make life pretty laborious." Loelia adds, "The ones I don't get are the ones who are so desperate to die. When Hirohito surrendered...I've seen this newwsreel. all these Japanese soldiers at the end of the war, and they're all weeping and wailing and falling on each others' necks, and just gushing, because they're not going to have their chance to get killed." (Hare 60-61)

Finally seeing his chance to work what is really troubling him into the conversation, Robbie tells Loelia, "You're always saying you don't go anywhere. Now you'll be able to. You can go to Japan," and explains to the puzzled Grace, "Oh I see, no. I didn't mention. Loelia and I are going to split up." (Hare 61)

With Robbie's announcement, the random pre-dinner conversation becomes more focused and nearly everything that is said from this point on relates to Robbie and Loelia and their dissolving relationship. He explains the idea of the party was his. "I always think in this country we

don't know how to perform rites of passage," he says, "We don't know how to mark them. We're very bad. All the important moments. Birth. Marriage. Death, obviously. In other cultures, people know how to handle them. They have rituals." (Hare 62)

Though Robbie's comment could easily apply to most English-speaking countries, Hare's remarks about American society to the press and in speaking engagements, while not labeling him an "Ameriphobe," do reveal a certain disdain for what he perceives as vacuity in American culture. In a speech for English Literature students at Notre Dame in 1988, Hare noted his theory that "America's gift is for the aesthetic, not for the moral arts. I am arguing that it is no coincidence that America has the greatest ballet and modern architecture in the world, that as a nation it cares desperately about how things look and feel and sound, but that when it comes to those arts which are most concerned with the question of how people behave, or possibly how they ought to behave, America is not exactly a world beater." (Hare "A Stint at Notre Dame" 127)

It is revealed that Robbie and Loelia had invited a number of people to the gathering, but the notice was so informal that only Grace, who Loelia just met the week before, showed up. The couple seem to be taking their imminent estrangement very well. In keeping with the nature of their relationship to this point, both began preparation for a huge dinner for the occasion without informing the other. Robbie lit the barbecue and Loelia prepared soft-shelled crabs and veal.

Neither seems angry or spiteful. When the menu error is discovered they are both complimentary. Robbie praises Loelia as an excellent cook and lauds her cinnamon croissants, while she returns the favor, saying, "He

cooks like an angel. He does a cajun stew with gulf prawns and okra that breaks my heart every time I eat it." (Hare 64)

Nor does the extreme civility they show one another seem to be a mask for more tawdry feelings *a la* Virginia Woolf. As they recount their earliest days as a couple for Grace--their meeting and courting--there is genuine fondness in their reminiscences. Paired with Sophia's sad abandonment of her husband, Grigor, in The Bay at Nice, the gentle rationality of Robbie and Loelia in planning their parting reveals a multi-faceted understanding of human relationships. Whether one scenario or the other can be attributed to Hare's own divorce experience, it is obvious he perceives a wide range of factors--intellectual, emotional, and moral--that affect such proceedings.

Social commentary is still mingled with the story of Robbie and Loelia's relationship, continuing the merger of personal and political. When Loelia again brings up the subject of money and work ethics, Grace suggests it is only the wealthy who can afford to be cavalier about their jobs, to just walk away from day-to-day troubles. She recognizes a certain immorality about her job in public relations, saying, "The job I do is absurd...And yet I collect a salary. I eat. I prosper. I decorate the office. With my nice skirts. and my smile. And because I'm reasonably smart and one step ahead, although I disdain what I'm doing, I don't get fired." (Hare 66)

Robbie, now proving himself a wide-ranging pundit, offers some sage remarks about money, employment, and sacrifices. "Nobody's job is satisfying," he says, it can't be. All the time. You work to make money. If you make money, your job is a success. It's as simple as that...And when you make money then your job begins to seem interesting--there you are-

-It's a two-way thing. Not every job can be interesting. It's impossible. There's a lot of shitty work. What's nice about money is when you get it, it speaks to you. It says 'What you do is shitty: now here's a reward.' Money doesn't bullshit, that's what's so good about it, money is...well, the great thing is...money is *straight*." (Hare 67)

Just as Robbie is on the edge of becoming one of the wealth-crazed brokers from Caryl Churchill's Other People's Money or the next Lambert LeRoux, Hare allows some moderation to creep into his oratory. "Quality of life is something else," he observes, "It's to do with good taste. And judgement. And there's relationships."

On the subject of relationships, Grace provides the significance of the play's title. Referring to their seemingly smooth relationship, she tells Robbie and Loelia, "I mean, ten years and you're smiling and laughing, and having a good time. And cooking two dinners. Neither of them eggs...With me it's eggs always. I say to myself, 'How do you want 'em? Fried, boiled or wrecked?' 'Oh hell, just wreck 'em,' I say. With you it's real dinners." (Hare 70)

She continues further, taking the couples' relationship beyond the immediate company and into the larger societal realm of the '80s: You have this nice home. You have flowers. You have trees. and in some way, I can tell, it's all *real* to you...It comforts you...And I can't get that comfort. You know, you come in here, you look at these *things*--that bookshelf, that record player, this sofa, you think, right, these are people to whom the comforts of life are actually real." (Hare 70)

But, Grace explains, she cannot enjoy these things because she is not a part of the conspicuous consumption culture that Robbie and Loelia belong to. "I'm a heretic," she says, "I don't want a pick-up truck.

Or a satellite dish on the side of the house." Her remarks are not an overt condemnation of her friends' lifestyle. She is not a nouveau beatnik advocating voluntary simplicity, just an acquaintance volunteering her perspective.

Robbie, however, too long immersed in his earn-and-spend way of life, is amazed. "But 'things' are surely...in a way they're what you work for," he tells Grace, "Shit, I'm working five days a week. Most evenings I'm working. Even these weekends--which are meant to be what I work *for*--I'm bringing back work with me...I don't see what's wrong with that." (Hare 71)

The civility of the occasion begins to get strained as Robbie becomes more impassioned about the various subjects the group tackles. Loella insists on recounting some of the earliest episodes in their relationship, back in the days, she says, when "If I saw anything in jeans, I fucked it." (Hare 73) Finally, exasperated, Robbie reveals the reason for his increasing discomfort. "*That's* the dishonesty," he tells Loella, "I don't know why you're so desperate to split." (Hare 79)

Shortly afterwards, Robbie leaves the women alone while he takes a dip in the pool, and Loella is free to explain a few things to Grace. The most important revelation doesn't concern their disintegrating marriage, but Robbie's father. Her husband, Loella explains, is the son of a famous American spy. "He's not Robbie Baker," she says, "He's the son of Bill Dvorak. Remember?"

The figures Hare seems to have modeled the fictional Dvorak on are Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Like the Rosenbergs, Bill Dvorak was accused of disclosing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. Also like the real-life Cold Warriors, his actions were defended as not anti-American,

but pro-something else. Unlike his counterparts, however, Dvorak was not executed, but survives as an embittered reminder to his son of what can go wrong in American democracy.

This, seemingly, is the most important function the unseen character of Robbie's father serves--to explain some of Robbie's earlier opinions and actions, and place his future behavior in a new light. He claims that the reasons he changed his name and broke off communications with his father were not political, but personal. "I disliked him as a person," he tells Grace, "That's my objection. I don't care what he *did*, as you'd say. He was a puritan. He was also a snob. He used the word 'upright'. He disapproved of how ordinary people lived. He was from Maryland, he thought himself superior. In the civil service, so he thought he knew best. How to direct people's lives...He always had some epxert rationale. That's why he did what he did. Because he alone understood. He claimed to understand the need to defuse the cold war better than anyone."

Robbie's early life was inextricably entangled with his father's politics. "I hated all the stupid meetings," he continues, "And pamphlets. I was paraded to idiots who thought he shouldn't go to jail. They were so stupid they assumed I'd agree with them. That was my childhood." (Hare 86-87)

Robbie's childhood, Hare now seems to suggest, is at least partly responsible for his current ethics and lifestyle. Besides being caught up in a national (and, indeed, *international*) fervor for advancement and acquisitions, Robbie has the additional burden of defining and justifying his *Americanness*. At this point in the play Hare returns to his criticism of what he perceives as the American way of life and attempts to offer an explanation for it.

Admittedly, on this subject the playwright's words in the mouths of his characters, especially Robbie, sometimes seem cliche. But, intermingled with the play's other ideas, they provide an interesting outside perspective. American virtues, as ascribed to the country's founding fathers and expounded in elementary classrooms the land over, are tallied one at a time in explaining Robbie's outlook and the way it has colored his marriage.

"My attitude is this," he tells his wife and guest, "do something. Pay for it. Take it like a man. Don't start squealing. If you betray your government, fine. But be ready for the consequences." His oration on self-reliance continues, like something drawn from a political platform speech, "That's why I love this country. The right to start again. The right to acquire a new name. Cross out the past. Start over. That seems to me a very basic thing." (Hare 87)

His patriotism extends so far that it is the source of the only criticism he offers of Loella. "There's no flag in you," he tells her, to which she responds, "Robbie stands there at baseball, he's got a hot dog in one hand, he's got popcorn in the other, he's got an extra large Diet Sprite with french fries on the side, and he's shouting 'Kill the umpire'. And I think, does he mean this? This is just a charade." (Hare 88-89)

Now, too, Robbie's earlier pride in the amount of work he does is seen differently. Not just a means of making more and more money, the labor he performs, whether writing briefs and arguing for juries or building his home, is also an assertion of his independent roots. After Robbie leaves for a trip to the market, Loella tells Grace, "You have to say, why are these steaks so delicious? Because Robbie put in every brick of the barbecue himself." (Hare 89)

Her allegiance, however, does not run as deep. "America! Shit!" she declares, "I practically have to run the stars and stripes up the flagpole before I'm allowed to go to the john. You know in this country there's meant to be freedom. Freedom! Isn't that it? So why are we now all pretending to believe the same thing?" (Hare 90)

Robbie's American enthusiasm, whether sincerely felt or a facade to cover the shame and anger he feels about his childhood, has contributed to the breakup of his marriage. Ironically, though, the "rights" Robbie reveres as an American citizen are the very ones Loelia demands--especially the pursuit of happiness. Like Sophia in The Bay at Nice, she feels privileged to demand more from her life. "I was born in Milton, Nebraska," she explains, "They told me I'd be happy. I think I've got a right to do something else...I was meant to be happy. I'm a happy sort of girl. Instead of which...I don't know, I'm confused, I'm angry. We have to keep moving. He has to keep working. I have to keep whacking balls round the ocurt. When we stop, we don't know what to do. If there's a pause, if there's a silence, then we fill it. We work. We make love. To cover the quiet bits. I've paced round his problems. Like a prison-yard. I've walked round for years. I know every inch of the ground. Well, can I have some new ground? Am I allowed that? Aren't I entitled?" (Hare 92)

Certainly the anxiety and emptiness that Loelia describes afflicts every long-term relationship at one time or another, regardless of geography. In this context, though, their restlessness and her dissatisfaction seem to be a peculiar American angst.

Regardless of her despair, Grace suggests the couple should stay together. Though she, herself, doesn't follow her own advice and stick to relationships, she tells Loelia she sees resolute qualities in them that can

outlast their difficulties, "Loyalty. courage. Perseverance," she says, "If you don't use them, you're going to feel lousy." (Hare 93)

And with these simple words Grace turns the tide. When Robbie returns from the store (with more groceries than the entire group of their absent guests could ever consume) Loelia calls him into their bedroom for a private talk, telling Grace "I'm staying till Tuesday." (Hare 94)

The play's ending is ambivalent. There is some cause to think that Robbie and Loelia might remain together, at least for awhile. However, in Hare's work it is not the quantity, or duration, of a relationship that proves its success, but its quality. Again, the playwright is more interested in the truth of the matter than in maintaining acceptable social customs. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that the union will endure past Loelia's new deadline.

Either way, their marriage is not the most important topic in Wrecked Eggs, any more than Sophia's divorce is in The Bay at Nice. In both works, the dynamics of the relationships and the participants involved are vehicles for larger ideas that transcend the immediacy of personal crisis, location, and nationality. Questions of freedom, integrity, and communal identity are what the playwright pursues through politically personal lives.

Though the double bill was given a typical production run in the Cottesloe, sixty-three performances, it did not receive much publicity and played to only a little over 12,000 people, about a quarter of Hare's usual audience at the National Theatre. It still managed to find its admirers among London reviewers, not all of whom could agree on which play they liked the most. Writing about The Bay at Nice in a *Times Literary*

Supplement article called "Culture and Consumption," Julian Graffy noted, "Hare's concerns transcend his context, and his eloquence and wit provide an absorbing variation." Graffy is less convinced, however, by Wrecked Eggs, largely due to the treatment of its foreign characters. "Hare writes about Europeans and Americans, about deprivation and excess, culture and consumption," the reviewer observed, "For a European audience it is unsurprising, perhaps even initially flattering to find his Americans trite and vulgar, his Europeans intense and complex, but, to quote Hare, 'Is it right?' One cannot help noticing that the dice are loaded. The main Russian protagonists are an artist and her teacher daughter; the American couple a lawyer and his tennis coach wife. The Russian sanitation engineer responds with radiant joy to talk of Matisse. Would Hare let his American equivalent do likewise?" For Graffy, "The doggedly clichéd view of Americans, unengagingly vulgarian in the pursuit of sensation, casts doubt upon Hare's whole enterprise. *The Bay of Nice* (sic) alone is a more satisfying offering than with *Wrecked Eggs* to follow." (Graffy 1064)

Others, though, preferred Hare's American comedy-drama. In *Plays International* John Elsom wrote, "*Wrecked Eggs* is the more appealing, being witty about contemporary society, which Hare knows, in a manner clearly impossible when writing about Leningrad in the 1950s." (Elsom 25) A frequent Hare supporter, Michael Billington added in *The Guardian*, "What makes *Wrecked Eggs* a better play is that it clearly springs from direct observation and that, through the character of the press agent, it focuses on real moral dilemmas: how to hold on to a belief in right and wrong in a materialistic world, whether to opt for the dignity of solitude or

the pleasures of commitment." (Billington "Rev. of Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs)

Even those who did not particularly enjoy the plays grudgingly found elements to admire. In *Plays and Players* Kenneth Hurren wrote, "(Hare is) in no hurry to get to the point but is off up a succession of byways, very few of which lead even circuitously back to the main road, and the impression is of ambling along genially to nowhere in particular. It is not unamusing. The superficial small-talk produces a crop of flip epigrams which, God knows, are not to be despised: if you had this sort of chatter at your dinner-table twice or thrice a year you'd be lucky. Those would be the occasions when the hand-picked guests come along with all their lines rehearsed, just hoping to steer the conversation into the right cues." (Hurren 21)

Like Pravda, this production also contained a personality critics were drawn to. Prominent American-born, London-based actress Irene Worth, whose career with the Old Vic and early National Theatre under Laurence Olivier, as well as performances across the Atlantic in New York and Stratford had established her as one of Britain's premiere actresses, played the role of Valentina Nrovka. Christopher Edwards in *The Spectator* observed, "Certainly Irene Worth, with her haughty disdain for cant and moral fudge, succeeds in earning our respect. Here is a fine classical actress creating a character of severe moral grandeur through whom Hare can challenge a prevailing idea of 'freedom'." (Edwards 47) In the *Sunday Times* John Peter echoed Edwards, saying, "I shall never forget Irene Worth as she finally gazes at the painting, her face bathed in a halo of proud, lonely, superhuman transfiguration." (Peter 51)

From a dramatic literature standpoint, The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs, while obvious deviations from Hare's usual style, are nonetheless valid dramatic entertainments. Though they may not satisfy those readers and audience members in search of the playwright's usual sweeping epic structure and grand political statements, they are still compelling theatre, as critical response has indicated.

Perhaps most importantly in terms of Hare's development of style, these two one acts, along with his next play, The Secret Rapture, represent the most private of Hare's politically personal works. In terms of characters and staging, they are the most intimate of his plays since 1979, and balance only near the edge of provocation. They neither lampoon, like the 1985 Pravda, or dissect and critique, like his trilogy of institutional plays that were produced in the opening years of the 90s.

As John Peter noted, "David Hare's two new one-acters are political plays in the sense that Ibsen's plays are political plays: they turn their searchlight on the power struggles and the morality of personal commitment. I actually think that this is what he's best at. We have had quite a few political plays recently, after years of grumbling that there weren't any; but the fact is that most English playwrights do not have the pure dialectical passion of the French and Germans, and their natural battlefield is not the public confrontation but the private tussle. These two plays are intensely private, but their resonances are vast." (Peter 51)

British writers like Howard Brenton, Edward Bond, and Howard Barker might argue a case for "dialectical passion" in the hearts of English dramatists, but Peter's point is largely valid. In The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs Hare continues the British tradition of the "private tussle"

found in the plays of Shaw and Wilde, yet intimates that grander social criticism might be afoot.

The Secret Rapture

The interaction of private lives and public politics that Hare sought to delicately balance in The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs is even more poignantly noticeable in his next play, The Secret Rapture, which opened in the National's Lyttelton Theatre on October 4, 1988. The title evokes religious significance. "In Catholic theology," Hare noted, "the 'secret rapture' is the moment when the nun will become the bride of Christ: so it means death, or love of death, or death under life." (Hare "Love, Death and Edwina" 38)

In this work, all three meanings seem to apply. The Secret Rapture concerns two daughters whose father has just died, leaving them to care for a distraught stepmother approximately their own age. The siblings are Marion French, a Tory Junior Environment Minister, and Isobel Glass, co-partner in a graphic design firm. Marion, like Robbie and Loella in Wrecked Eggs and Lambert LeRoux in Pravda, epitomizes 1980s greed and selfishness and, assumedly, Conservative Party hard-heartedness.

Isobel, on the other hand, is kind, virtuous, and self-effacing. In the London of Mrs. Thatcher's second term, Hare suggests, she is an anomaly. Her beneficience is pitted against the designs of her sister, lover, and friends when Katherine, the uneducated, boorish, alcoholic widow of her dead father is thrust upon her as a responsibility following the patriarch's interment. In short order, Isobel loses her business, her boyfriend and, ultimately, her life, to her charge, becoming, by play's end, not just a nun figure facing death, but an actual martyr.

Thematically, the play is Hare's most refined attack on the social and political climate of Britain under Margaret Thatcher's Ministry. Pravda highlighted the excesses of the press and multimillionaire business tycoons with international ramifications. A Map of the World, The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs, while indicating trouble on the homefront, utilized foreign characters and settings. The Secret Rapture, though, is purely and unabashedly British.

Matt Wolf, writing for *American Theatre* magazine, placed the play in the context of other works, a sort of dramatic anti-Thatcher movment. He wrote, "While *The Secret Rapture* may be the most high-profile and salable play yet to examine the Thatcherite zeitgeist, it's just one of many recent works to advance an irony central to contemporary British culture: whereas Thatcher's Conservative government may have an inimical attitude toward the arts, as shown by lower levels of state subsidy and publicly voiced disinterest, that same attitude is prodding British playwrights towards a sustained and aesthetically challenging output that might never have happened without her. Difficult politics, in other words, has become the stuff of provocative art."

Listing several contributors to this ongoing criticism of the British political machine, filmmakers such as Derek Jarman (*The Last of England*), Stephen Frears, and Hanif Kureishi (*My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*), and writers like Bob Clark (*Rita, Sue and Bob, Too*), Wolf continues, "It's the theatre that has responded most frequently, and sometimes most subtly, to the undeniable shift that has taken place since May 3, 1979, when the Oxford-educated grocer's daughter began staking her claim to her present status as the longest continuously serving leader in the Western world. The predominant tone taken by dramatists

is, as might be expected, harsh, with left-wing writers lashing out at the loss of morality and scruples that have accompanied Mrs. Thatcher's anti-welfarist, pro-business stance." (Wolf "Thanks a Lot, Mrs. Thatcher" 50)

Hare has admitted being piqued by the Thatcher government's advocation of predatory business ethics, and even attributed the genesis of this play to an experience with Tory supporters. He explained, "At dinner I was laughed at because I didn't have any stocks and shares. I said when I had money I put it in the bank, and everyone roared with laughter. Ten years ago in England nobody had investments. That's all changed. The assumption that everyone will make as much money as they can and spend a lot of time doing it is new in England. The feelings of total inadequacy I had for not being part of this interested me, and I gave them to Isobel. And I'm proud to say, even having written the play, I still have no investments." (Bloom 33)

The Secret Rapture is difficult to categorize. Like most of Hare's other works the play is divided into two acts, each with several scenes and locales. It is a hybrid of comedy and drama, lampoonery and dogma. John Turner observed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, "Is it political satire? Probably not, though politicians are satirized roundly and it pokes about the issues in contemporary debate. Is it a comedy of contemporary manners? Yes and no: full, frequent, and enthusiastic enunciation of 'fuck' speaks for yes, but the absence of any cheap stereotypes beyond politicians and graphic designers--creatures of the 1960s and 1970s surely--suggests no. Is it timeless tragedy? Up to a point, but nothing is absolutely timeless which can nail the deformed personality of a female Conservative minister so convincingly to the floor...As a playwright Hare seems to find it difficult to resist the temptation to set

intellectual puzzles. If this play seems to be an uneasy hybrid of Ibsen and *Serious Money,* he must bear some of the responsibility." (Turner 1148)

The playwright himself agreed consensus on Rapture's worth was elusive, though he was willing to label it more definitely. "It's either the Great Play or a load of old tosh," he remarked in an interview in the *Toronto Star,* "I think it is a very unusual play for the moment. There has been an awful lot about the economic consequences of Thatcherism in England and there's been brilliant work...about the effect of Thatcherism on people's lives. But there's been very little about the psychology of Thatcherism. For some reason, she's generated very little fiction and there's been no real studies of the mentality of the people around her and what they want. It is an unfashionable play in that it is a tragedy. We don't have many plays with heroines or many tragedies in England at the moment. It is commonly said that it's not possible to write a tragedy nowadays and I was interested to see whether it was." (Crew F3)

Hare's study of the mentality of Thatcherites in The Secret Rapture, as Wolf noted, is what provides the play with its extreme topical importance. Yet timeless concerns are not neglected. As has already been mentioned, Hare is often concerned with the nature of goodness in his plays and chooses women to portray virtuous characters, since that is where he believes decency resides. Susan in Plenty, Peggy in A Map of the World, and Rebecca in Pravda are just a few of Hare's heroines who attempt probity in declining moral climates. In The Secret Rapture, Isobel is the sum of all that have come before her, straining harder for virtue, and finally being consumed and destroyed by her passion for goodness.

The opening image of the play symbolizes all that follows. In a darkened room Isobel is seated at the foot of her father's deathbed, observing a peaceful moment with the enshrouded, deceased man. A door to the room opens and the darkness and silence are broken by her sister, Marion, whose presence is obviously an uncomfortable intrusion for both women. Isobel explains her pious vigil, saying, "I decided this would be the only place. For some quiet. There's so much screaming downstairs," and muses about their father's last moments, telling Marion, "There's actually a moment when you see the spirit depart from the body. I've always been told about it. And it's true. Like a bird." (Hare The Secret Rapture 1)

Though her initial reason for coming to the room seems to be to see her father for a final time, or to commiserate with her sibling, Marion soon reveals her actual intentions are more materially oriented. She has come to recover a ring she gave her father shortly before his death. Though Isobel doesn't condemn or even comment on her actions, Marion still feels the need to defend herself. "For God's sake, I mean the ring is actually valuable," she exclaims, "Actually, no, that sounds horrid. I apologize. I'll tell you the truth. I thought when I bought it--I just walked into this very expensive shop and I thought, this is one of the few really decent things I've done in my life. And it's true. I spent, as it happens, a great deal of money, rather more...rather *more* than I had at the time. I went over the top. I wanted something to express my love for my father. Something adequate." (Hare 3)

Of course, adequacy is all her gift could buy. Compared to Isobel's devotion, which led her to remain by her father's side throughout his final days and comfort him at his death, when his wife and Marion refused

even to visit, the gesture was a shallow attempt at purchasing feeling, made more useless by her subsequent retrieval of the ring. Though Isobel still refrains from comment, something in her demeanor or the sisters' relationship leads Marion to guiltily continue her defense. "Oh, for God's sake, I can't stand it," she protests, "Your disapproval." (Hare 4)

The actions and words of the two sisters in the first few moments of the play lay the basic foundation for their characters. Isobel is clearly the Cordelia to Marion's Goneril. Marion, the elder sister, in life ignored her father and sought to buy his affections when it seemed important, while Isobel comforted him with the less tangible, more human qualities of genuine love and concerned ministrations. From their reactions to one another it seems they are both aware of the positions they hold and the effect they have on each other, and the feeling is one of slight rivalry, of more importance to Marion than Isobel.

Not long after Marion retrieves the ring her husband, Tom, arrives to see if they will be joining the assembled mourners downstairs. One of Tom's earliest distinguishable character traits is his assertive religious devotion. After Marion complains that Katherine, her father's widow, is a drunk and is even intoxicated that day, Isobel tells her, "Well, it hardly matters. Least of all to Dad," to which Tom adds, "No, he's fine. He's in the hands of the Lord." (Hare 5) Both Isobel and Marion regard Tom's devout remarks throughout the play with suspicion and occasional condemnation. As the plot progresses, however, they become an important foil for each of the other characters, especially Isobel.

The three briefly discuss the deceased and his surviving wife. Marion's sentiments are that her father was a foolish old man who was "taken for a ride" by the younger, reckless Katherine. Isobel, more

forgiving and understanding, counters, "Dad loved her. You must allow him that. He wouldn't have married unless he genuinely loved her...The great thing is to love. If you're loved back then it's a bonus." (Hare 5)

Tom's position is that of the less important man in a play driven by women. Whether as a courtesy to the sex Hare finds more civilized and kind, or just as a realistic character portrayal, Tom is wishy-washy and self-depracating. When they are both involved in a discussion or decision, he unfailingly cedes the field to Marion, his wife. His contribution to the discussion is, "I'm sure both of you are right. It's wonderful being a woman because you have that knack of knowing what's going on. Men just don't seem to have it. What is it? A sort of instinct? Still, *vive la différence*, eh?" (Hare 6)

Before going to join the other guests, Marion suddenly and rather viciously turns again on Isobel, telling her, "You've made me feel awful. It's not my fault about the ring. Or the way I feel about Katherine. You make me feel as if I'm always in the wrong...Well, we can't all be perfect. We do try. The rest of us are trying. So will you please stop this endless criticism? Because I honstly think it's driving me mad." (Hare 6)

The hapless Isobel, who has yet to say anything about Marion and the ring, remarks to Tom when her sister is gone, "It's not her fault. You lash out in any direction. Marion's in grief. It's her way of grieving. She chooses to lash out at me." (Hare 6) The unsolicited abuse she accepts at the hands of Marion is repeated in other relationships Isobel has in the play. Her kindness and generosity are hard for others to accept at face value, and, not knowing how else to react, they become defensive and protect themselves from imagined assaults by lashing out at her. These

qualities in Hare's heroine are what led at least one critic to refer to her as "Saint Isobel." (Golomb)

Tom sympathizes somewhat with Isobel's plight regarding her sister, since he, himself, must face her foul moods daily. "You see, it happens quite often. She gets angry," he tells Isobel, "Why? I mean, she's got everything she wants. Her party's in power. For ever. She's in office. She's an absolute cert for the Cabinet. I just don't see why she's angry all the time." (Hare 7)

While Tom is not meant to be a sympathetic, tow-the-line character in the play, this particular view aligns him with Leftists and Labourites who have often wondered aloud about the discontent of the Tories in seemingly prosoperous times for their party. In an unrelated editorial for *The Spectator* a few months before the London premiere of The Secret Rapture, Hare himself questioned:

> "Why is the Right in such a bad temper? You can't open a newspaper without reading an attack on what it has taken to calling 'the liberal intelligentsia'. Really, it's mystifying. You would think the right had everything it wanted. There is a Prime Minister in power whom it affects to admire more than any individual since Churchill; there are said to be 10,000 million spare pounds in the Treasury; the Trade union movement has been effectively castrated; the Labour Party has been sent into a double digit period of exile; important elected centres of opposition to the Government have been abolished by a pliant Parliament; 'family' values have been reinforced by the spread of a disease which, it is none too subtly implied, has some sort of moral dimension; the broadcasting authorities have been cowed to the point where they publish lachrymose position papers on their own shortcomings; the rich have enjoyed a period of unparalleled prosperity; private schools and hospitals have boomed as standards have been allowed to deteriorate in the public sector; the ILEA is soon to be abolished; expensive and highly profitable health-insurance schemes are soon to be given a

> massive risk-free boost; the judiciary is as intolerant and tame as it needs to be; the nuclear arsenals are fabulously well stocked; there is a British military presence south of the equator; and now, as a final cherry on the *sachertorte*, there is a mischievous piece of anti-gay legislation being enacted to the undisguised merriment of all the most backward people in the kindgom. By all the criteria of the age, we ought, surely, to be living in paradise. Yet if anything now marks the tone of those ideologues who guided us into this era, it is, in their writing and speeches, increasing evidence of acrimony and dyspepsia. 'Whingeing' was once said to be the prerogative of the Left, yet lately, it seems, it too has been privatised." (Hare "Diary" 7)

His wonderment at the Conservative Party disposition notwithstanding, Tom is still a figure of ridicule in the play, not a hero. Against the relatively realistic philosophies of the other characters, even Isobel with her hope for humankind, Tom's mythologizing of Christianity is seen as childish folderol. Asked if he ever gets angry, Tom responds, "Angry? I don't think so. There's no need to, since I made Jesus my friend."

To convince the skeptical Isobel of the verity of his beliefs, he relates a fortuitous event that he ascribes to his faith in God. After Isobel called him to announce the death of her father, Tom wanted to drive to Marion's office to let her know in person. Going to the car, he finds it "Won't start. I open the bonnet. Spark-plug leads have perished. I can't believe it. I think, what on earth am I going to do? Then I think, hey, six days ago an old mate called in and left, in a shopping bag, a whole load of spare parts he'd had to buy for his car. and you know, as I go in and look for it, I tell you this, I don't have a doubt. As I move towards the bag. I've never looked inside it and yet I *know*. It's got so I know. I know that inside that bag there is going to be a set of Ford Granada leads. and

then you have to say, well, there you are, that's it, that's the Lord Jesus. He's there when you need him." (Hare 7-8)

Aside from the comical nature of his story in relation to current theological thought, the belief system Tom has constructed for himself is a very 1980s strategy. From a small investment and a little effort--attending church once a week, tithing and espousing Christian virtue--he reaps a huge reward: divine guardianship and life everlasting. In his world it is a business scheme similar to investment banking and stock trading.

Like nearly all of Hare's earlier full-length plays, the structure of The Secret Rapture relies on a series of scenes that move from place to place and may cover leaps in time of only a few moments or several months. As Isobel and Tom leave to join the gathering downstairs the scene shifts to the back lawn of the house. A little time has passed and the group is just returning from the funeral. The first person on stage is Katherine, whose presence is vociferously announced in the blackout during the set changing. Loud and crass, she criticizes the service in a manner not befitting a recent widow on the day of her husband's funeral. "The priest was awful," she complains, "It was clear he never knew him. To be honest, I was relieved. When the coffin came in, I thought, oh dear, this is going to be unbearably moving. And then mercifully the vicar opened his mouth. It's quite extraordinary. The church must send them on some sort of training course. Called Trampling on People's Feelings."

The fact that Katherine was so easily distracted from showing emotion at the loss of her supposed loved one illustrates immediately one of her most important character traits. Insulated from nearly all interpersonal feelings by her self-centeredness, she becomes a burden to

anyone she attaches herself to, with the apparent exception of the dead Robert Glass.

As the group settles down for refreshments and polite condolences, it becomes obvious that Isobel's task for the past several weeks has been not only to care for her father in his last days, but to oversee funeral arrangements and provide for guest accomodations that day with no help from her sister or Katherine. The thanks she gets for preparing the priest for her father's eulogy is Katherine's complaints and Marion's interference. For his funeral speech Isobel "stressed forty years of opposition to nuclear armaments," something the dead man sincerely believed in. Marion, however, in her capacity as Tory Junior Environment Minister, dissuaded the priest from that line of praise. She tells Isobel, "There's such a thing as a suitable time. Funerals shouldn't have politics dragged into them." (Hare 10)

One of the most important reasons for the family gathering, it is revealed, is to determine what Katherine will do with herself now that Mr. Glass is gone. It has already been pointed out that she has an ongoing alcohol problem and an abrasive personality but, when pressed by Marion, she says determinedly, "All right, look, I know, you all think I'm hopeless. I'm not hopeless. I've had time to think. I do have a plan. I'm not going to stay in this house for the rest of my life. I decided. I'm going to work with Isobel." (Hare 12)

Her decision comes as a surprise to Marion and Isobel both. Before Isobel, who hasn't yet been consulted, can respond, Katherine appeals to her beneficient nature, knowing she won't be refused. "I never had a chance," she explains, "I left school so suddenly. I wasn't ready. I had this ridiculous relationship with drugs. Which, thank God, I got over. But while

that was going on, it was fucking hard to hold down a job. Then I put on four stones. I couldn't concentrate. I was fat and spotty and all over the place. So I never got going. Before I met Robert. And then down here with him, what was there? I helped out in the shop. But that's not really work. I know I'm ready now." (Hare 12)

Everyone present questions the idea. While Isobel stammers, trying to find a way to respond, Katherine presses further, saying, "All right, well fine, I didn't ask Isobel. No I didn't. I assumed. That was wrong. I apologize. However, thank God Isobel is a generous person. I think she knows what I can contribute. She isn't going to say no." (Hare 13) This is the tactic most often used on Isobel by other characters in the play and one that proves most effective: a sort of emotional-moral blackmail which reminds her of her magnanimous disposition and precludes her refusal.

Again before a decision can be reached there is an interruption. Marion's portable phone rings with a call from her staff and she has to take it indoors. The workaholic politico's indiscretion--taking office calls on the day of her father's funeral--provides another chance for comment on the nature of Thatcherites and '80s careerists. "I see there's no chance of escaping this Government," Katherine wryly comments. Asked how he tolerates it, Tom says, "It's just part of Marion. She's just someone who permanently gives off a ringing tone." (Hare 13-14)

Again placing ideas he wishes to popularize into the mouths of his antagonists, Katherine complains, "I just hate it. The idea of what she's doing. Someone at a party once said to me--they hadn't met Robert--they said, 'Oh, I hear you've got two step-daughters.' 'Yes. Marion and Isobel.' They said, 'Where are they at school?' I said, 'Marion's not at

school actually, she's Junior Minister at the Department of the Environment.' They looked at me like I was nuts...I have to explain to everyone. She's just my step-daughter. It's absolutely nothing to do with me. What this Government is. Its loathsome materialism. The awful sanctification of greed. It's not my fault. That's what I say to people. I can't help it. Please don't blame me." (Hare 14)

Though, by Hare's standards, her grievance is aimed in the right direction, it is tainted with irony. Her insistent deflection of blame and the greed she, herself, shows in her subsequent behavior toward Isobel align her with the very Conservative bureaucrats she seeks to impugn.

When the conversation turns back to Katherine's needs, however, Isobel admits she is hesitant about offering her a job since her commercial art firm is a very small operation and not extremely profitable. Katherine's last ditch ploy is to threaten herself with her chemical dependency, summon the memory of Isobel's dead father, and accuse her of hypocrisy. "I'm going to the pub," she warns, "I don't give a fuck. I'm sick of being patronized. there's only one person who ever believed in me. There's just one man who ever gave me a chance. the rest of you--well, yes, Isobel, in a way you're the worst. The others don't pretend. but you--it's all this kindness and tolerance and decency. Then just ask for something, some practical demonstration, just a small act of faith, then it's no. 'Fuck off.' It's so *fucking* English." (Hare 15-16)

After her tirade Katherine storms into the house. Marion arrives almost immediately to report that the distraught woman has peeled up floorboards in the kitchen to reveal a secreted stash of alcohol. It is now *her* turn to unjustly berate Isobel. Her suggestions sound suspiciously like the tactics Hare would ascribe to the government she represents:

MARION: How can you have been so incredibly stupid?

ISOBEL: What was I meant to do?

MARION: I'd have thought it's fairly obvious. You have to pretend.

ISOBEL: Pretend? Pretend what? That I have lots of money? That I don't have any partners? That we don't all have to work alongside each other, three to a rather small room?

MARION: Why didn't you say, 'Well, I don't know yet. Come to London.'

ISOBEL: That's exactly what I said.

MARION: Keep her calm. String her along.

ISOBEL: I tried.

MARION: *Lie* to her. (Hare 16-17)

Katherine returns from her tantrum, significantly calmed now by the effects of the alcohol. Finally speaking reverently about her dead husband, she explains how Robert Glass saved her from a life of aimlessness and meaningless relationships. "People say I took advantage of his decency," she says, "But what are good people for? They're to help the trashy people like me." Whether Katherine's maxim is true or not, Isobel is sufficiently touched by the tribute to her father and finally relents, against her better judgement, to giving her a job. True to her character, when Isobel tells her, "I'd like to feel it would mean you gave up the whiskey," Katherine replies, "I can't promise. I can promise I'll try." Tom, who has only stood at the side and watched without lending any practical service, simply adds, "Praise the Lord." (Hare 19)

When the third scene begins an undetermined amount of time has passed, but assumedly it has been several weeks or months, for Katherine

is already changing Isobel's life in unexpected ways. The new setting is Isobel's studio/office where she and her boyfriend, Irwin Posner, run their commercial art business. The first impression of Irwin, from his own description, is of a responsible, extremely structured man. "I've got everything on file," he tells Isobel, "I can't help it. I file everything. I even filed at schoool. Every scrap of paper. Everything in place. I don't know what it means. Someone once told me it meant I was prematurely middle-aged." (Hare 20)

Of course such a carefully planned life is bound to be altered by the presence of someone like Katherine. For the moment Irwin is maintaining his stability, largely, he claims, out of love for Isobel. The third partner in their firm, however, was not so patient. While Isobel and Irwin discuss a book cover he is creating depicting a firing gun and bullet wound (an illustration that is to take on added significance by the end of the play) there is a knock at the door. Opening it, Isobel finds the visitor gone and a note left behind from Gordon, their other artist and bookkeeper, enigmatically stating that he can no longer work for the firm, that it's time to move on.

Irwin helpfully explains that Katherine's presence drove Gordon from the office. Not just her impulsiveness and the strain she puts on the firm's income, he claims, but "before Katherine came, Gordon had job satisfaction to compensate," he says, "And I think he probably felt that had gone." A further complication, he claims, was Gordon's affection for Isobel. Though the man was older and "looks like Sydney Greenstreet," he, like Irwin, was attracted to Isobel's kindness. "He's living at a certain level of pain," Irwin suggests, "But there are priveleges. Like, he sees you

every day. You give him your attention. Things are pleasant. And stable. Till Katherine." (Hare 22-23)

Irwin attempts to take things a step further and warn Isobel about the way everyone has forced Katherine on her because of her kind spirit. That same spirit, though, is what prevents her from shunning the burden. "I just know that if I tried to get rid of her now, it would be disastrous for her self-confidence," she tells him, "She's just lost her husband. She couldn't face the future. She was frightened. She was lonely. If I hurt her now, it'll put her right back on the drink." (Hare 25)

Katherine's behavior when she arrives for work, however, is not that of a suffering, bereaved victim. Instead, she is a whirling dervish of self-absorption and reckless disregard for others. Just after Irwin complains that the unwanted addition to their business has even found her way into their bedroom, causing Isobel to refuse sex, Katherine bounds into the office demanding money to pay a flower-seller (she's just offered to purchase his entire stall) and announcing proudly that she has just sold her late husband's, and Isobel's father's, home. Before Isobel can react to this news Katherine adds that, through the false allure of sexual favors, she has convinced an already faithful and respected client to use the firm exclusively. Not content to stop there, she then starts berating Irwin about the book cover he is working on, criticizing his approach to art as too accurate and literal.

When Isobel finally manages to question Katherine about the sale of the family home, her response is galling, though by now predictable. She agrees that Marion hates the house and "said she was never going to use it. I said I could never face going back. That left only you." She, of course, did not bother to consult Isobel, knowing she might object. "I

have no money, Isobel," she continues," It's as simple as that. Roibert and I spent everything he earned. He had no investments, he didn't approve of them. He thought they were wrong. So do I. It's immoral, all that disgusting trading in shares. He just bought books. I loved that in him. His other-worldliness. The way he just didn't give a damn about money. But now of course we've got to pay for that other-worldliness. The bill's come in. We've got to pay duties. And I knew you wouldn't want me to starve." (Hare 29)

The only part of Katherine's impassioned speech that is truly surprising is her professed opinion of investments and trading in shares. Though Hare voiced his distaste for such dealings, Katherine is an unlikely opponent of anything that would profit her, and it seems likely her comments are merely meant to harmonize with the feelings of her dead husband, the father Isobel adored.

This, it seems, is what continues to trigger Isobel's protective feelings toward Katherine: the life she shared with her father. She recognizes the destructive effect Katherine is having on her life, complains to Irwin that selling the house was wrong and that courting clients so crudely is appalling, but each time the elder Glass is mentioned, she falls back in line behind her father's widow. "There was something there for Robert," she tells Irwin, "I can't just abandon her. Think, there was this middle-aged man. Very idealistic. Living a life of ideas...He said that living with Katherine was like being on manoeuvres with a great army. You had no idea where you'd wake up the next day..He didn't mind her awfulness. She was prepared to say what she thought, especially to all those people he didn't dare be rude to himself. That's what he loved. She wasn't

dependent on anyone's opinion. You know what it was? He thought she was free." (Hare 30-31)

As Isobel is once again on the verge of deciding to get rid of Katherine, though, she comes through with another bit of surprising news. Tom has decided he would like to invest in the firm so it can expand. While the details are still unclear, it seems obvious Katherine has been pushing for something behind the scenes. Her *real* feelings about profiteering, more similar to Marion and Tom's than to her dead husband's, begin to show. "We'd get a bigger place," she tells the shocked couple, "In the centre of town. If we expand now, get some capital investment, we could be making money like hay. Everyone else is." (Hare 32)

When Isobel finally summons the wherewithal to protest, Katherine easily cuts her off with another reference to her father. She tells her, "It's something Robert said. He said, "You must always remember Isobel is very *narrow*. She has no vision." (Hare 32) Though Irwin tries to help the floundering Isobel in evicting Katherine, it is too late. The scene ends when she tells him that, for all her trouble, Katherine must stay.

The fourth scene returns to Robert Glass' house, now in the process of being vacated for sale. It is the site Marion has chosen for a meeting with an anti-nuclear lobby in her capacity as Junior Environment Minister, and the place where both sides of the family are to meet to conduct business arrangements for the expansion of Isobel's firm.

Marion and her assistant, Rhonda, are discussing the recent conflict of principles between the government and the group when Katherine arrives for their scheduled meeting. Marion explains, "I had to see a

delegation. Those awful Greens. Green people. About radiation levels from nuclear power stations. A subject, I may say, about which I know a great deal more than they do." Just how much more the government knows about environmental hazards, according to the playwright, is evident in Marion's parting retort to the lobbyists. "I hate exaggeration," she says, "That and self-righteousness. Those two things." Displaying both, she chides them, "Come back and see me when you're glowing in the dark.'" (Hare 35)

Hare pursues government arrogance still further when Marion gloats, "They were expecting an idiot. That's the first mistake. Because you're a Conservative. And a member of the Government. They expect you to be stupid...You blast them right out of the water. Hey, at this moment I could take them all on. The gloves are off. That's what's great. That's what's exciting. It's a new age. Fight to the death." (Hare 36)

Contrasted with Marion's cutthroat mentality toward opposition is Irwin's offhanded pacifism regarding the sounds of hunters on the grounds in the distance. As he enters the room he observes, "It's like the trenches out there. Bang! Bang! Bang! What is it about country people? They want to kill everything that moves...Outside the cities England seems to be one big rifle range." (Hare 36-37) By the end of the play it is a tremendously ironic remark, showing Hare's creativity as a dramatic craftsman.

The meeting finally begins when Tom arrives with paperwork detailing the incorporation scheme for Isobel's business. She is hesitant about the venture, feeling that the firm doesn't need to expand and suspicious about the creation of a board of directors, on which she would simply be a single vote. Tom, though, claims good intentions. His wife

notes, "Tom is President of Christians in Business. I think that makes it pretty clear he's a man you can trust," to which the executive adds, "We meet six times a year. We try to do business the way Jesus would have done it." (Hare 38)

The lighter jabs at government ruthlessness, corporate interference, and Tom's religious propensities are all part of a larger swing at the watchword of the eighties: *greed*. Hare returns to this societal ill when the Frenches further try to tempt Isobel. "Are you crazy? There's money to be made," says Marion, "Everyone's making it." Tom piously adds, "Remember, God gives us certain gifts...And he expects us to use them. That's our duty. If we fail to use them, he gets angry. Justifiably. God says to himself, 'Now look, why did I give that person those gifts in the first place? If they're not willing to get out there and make a bit of an effort?" (Hare 39)

Once again calling on his uniquely eighties-informed vision of Christianity, Tom suggests the absurd: that God himself is behind his idea of a corporate merger. It is a wryly humorous approach to questioning faith that the playwright would return to with more vehemence in his next work, Racing Demon, which is entirely concerned with the effects of the Thatcher years on organized religion in Britain.

Pitching in her unsolicited opinion, Katherine adds to the fray, "You know I think this Government's appalling. But on the other hand, let's face it, given what's going on, it's just stupid not to go and grab some dough for yourself...I mean, give it to the good guys. That's my philosophy. If we don't make the money someone else will. Well, in my book the arseholes have had it their own way long enough." (Hare 40)

The contradictory ethics Katherine shows--supporting Marion and the government one minute and scorning them the next; vilifying investment practices one day and spearheading corporate scheming another--are not faults in character creation, but, as Hare would have it, attributes of the Thatcher regime. They are part of a greed-driven society's penchant for using words and ideas to their advantage, regardless of how they really feel about them.

To illustrate, almost immediately after chastising her for not jumping on the money-making bandwagon and hauling some in for herself, Marion accuses *Isobel* of selfishness. "I don't know how else to interpret a refusal," she says, "You're saying you dont' think your brother-in-law will look after your best interests. I don't know. Perhaps that's what you feel...Also, you know, you must think of other people...I sometimes think, what sort of life is it if we only think about ourselves?" (Hare 40)

In this instance the "other" Marion is referring to is Katherine. Though at no time since her father's death has she been ready to directly help Katherine, Marion now claims the venture would be of greatest benefit to her and that a seat on the board of the new company would be "the kind of security she's lacked in her life." (Hare 41)

Once again pushed into a corner by her charitable nature, Isobel turns to Irwin, who only the night before objected to the partnership on the grounds that business should not mix with family. Now, however, he has changed his tune. Since being offered twice his salary by Tom and Marion should the merger succeed, Irwin is now wholeheartedly behind it, to Isobel's dismay.

When the Frenches and their company, Katherine and Rhonda, leave, Irwin attempts to mollify Isobel. "Things move on," he tells her, "You

brought in Katherine. Be fair, it was you. It changed the nature of the firm. For better or worse...I wouldn't hurt you. You know that. I'd rather die than see you hurt. I love you. I want you. There's not a moment when I don't want you."

Isobel's response, as the sound of the hunters outside grows louder, is, "The guns are getting nearer. God, will nobody leave us in peace?" (Hare 43-44) Knowing what the audience knows at this point in the play, the guns may be symbolic of Isobel's family--Marion, Tom, and Katherine--or of the Conservative Party and its ethics. The peace she seeks could mean just the status quo, poor but happy, a state abhored and misunderstood by everyone around her. There is no mistaking by the end of the play, however, that the "guns...getting nearer" more literally represent her own murder at the hands of the crazed Irwin.

A significant amount of time has once again passed between the first and second acts. When the new act begins, the setting is Isobel's offices, now located in the West End of London. Stage directions suggest a larger space with more desks, newer furniture and expensive fixtures. Irwin is alone with Rhonda, Marion's aide from the previous scene, in the semi-darkened room. They are sharing champagne, she is scantily dressed, and there is the suggestion that some sort of sexual antics have taken place, or soon will.

Conversation, though, concerns Rhonda's experiences in the political arena. It is an opportunity for more easy shots at the Tory Party, like this exchange:

IRWIN: I'm trying to work out which one it must be. A Tory politician whose wife can't come.

RHONDA: Have you got it yet?

IRWIN: Not really. To be honest, I'm spoilt for choice. (Hare 45)

It is also, though, another chance for Hare to prove his sympathy toward women in the workplace, especially in the Houses of Parliament.

Rhonda's explanation of the frustrated Tory and his wife leads her to offer her opinion on men in general. "Do you have any idea what being a woman is like?" she asks Irwin, "By nightfall you're stuffed. You've spent the whole day sitting listening to men deceive themselves. If you're lucky. That's if they're not actually out deceiving you."

Nonetheless, she becomes intimately involved with a stranger who grew excited watching her eat a prawn and mayonnaise sandwich. Their intercourse, she decides, left much to be desired. "He's like a man," she says, "that's all I can say. He's so out of touch with his feelings that he's like some great half-dead animal that lies there, just thrashing about." Her final verdict? "Men are cunt-struck. But they rarely know why." (Hare 46-47)

While some of Rhonda's comments may be oft-heard complaints from the legions of working women in Britain and elswhere, the language she employs and her approach to her subject are more severe than the tactics Hare's women usually use. This may be partially due to Rhonda's place in the play. She is a subsidiary character, liked by Marion because, as she puts it, "I cause chaos." (Hare 48)

She causes her fair share that day. Isobel unexpectedly shows up at the office and finds Irwin and Rhonda in the midst of their after-hours tryst. Nonplussed but hiding her suspicion, she explains she missed a flight to Glasgow for an important business meeting. As Rhonda makes use of the office's shower Irwin guiltily starts to cover for himself, deflecting some

blame toward Isobel who, he claims, hasn't looked so well lately and has been turning all his concern away.

To make matters even worse, Isobel tells Irwin that Katherine was the reason she missed the plane. During a business dinner, the reforming alcoholic was given a few drinks and, after losing an important contract, "picked up a steak knife and plunged it straight for the managing director's heart." (Hare 52) The contract in question was a vital one for the new business and its loss will prove financially devastating.

Even while she is facing her own personal turmoil, the fiscal crisis of her agency, and the antics of the uncontrollable Katherine, people still feel obliged to lay their troubles at Isobel's feet. Irwin insists he must talk to her, to iron out their problems. Isobel protests, "What, you all night and Katherine in the morning? Please let me go, I've got problems enough." But even Irwin is not dissuaded from overburdening the pathetically saintly Isobel. "You've started avoiding me," he persists, "You tolerate me, yes. But every time I look at you now, you look the other way." (Hare 52-53)

Coerced into an argument she sought to avoid, Isobel admits her behavior toward Irwin is not normal, but it has been a "mistaken idea of kindness." "We've both been aware of it," she says, "You as much as me. We should have parted some months ago." Feeling put upon by everyone around her, she was especially disappointed when Irwin backed the merger of her firm and Tom's business interests.

Now, all her doubtful feelings about Irwin have been brought to the surface and are struggling with innate kindness. "I know you love me," she tells Irwin, "God knows, you say it often enough. I don't say that to be cruel. But I never hear the words without sensing something's being asked of me. The words drain me. From your lips they've beocme a kind of

blackmail. They mean, I love you and *so...So* I am entitled to be endlessly comforted and supported and cheered...Oh, yes, and I've been happy to do it. I comforted. I supported. I cheered. Because I got something back. But it's gone. We both know it. Yet you want some period in which we both flounder together. hang on tight while we get sad. But I don't want to be sad. No one can remeber now, but the big joke is, by temperament I'm actually an extremely cheerful girl. That's what's so silly. I'm strong. You sap my strength. Because you make me feel guilty. I can never love you as much as you need. Now I see that. So I've done a great deal of suffering. But that's over. I'm ready to move on." (Hare 54-55)

Isobel's confession and assertion of independence are a mixed bag of tidings. By this point in the play it is obvious she needs to find a way to stop sharing in the troubles of the world, and a frank assessment of her relationship with Irwin could be a good start. She is still not, however, completely aware of her predicament.

After suggesting Isobel is too enamored of her father's impractical notion of integrity, in anger Irwin demands, "Tell me why you will sacrifice your whole life for Katherine?" Blind to her own actions she replies, "'Sacrifice'! Irwin, really, what a word." (Hare 56) In a final attempt at breaking through her emotional defenses or naivete, Irwin berates her, "But also it's true, Isobel, my dear, you must learn something else. That everyone knows except you. It's time you were told. There's such a thing as evil. You're dealing with evil. That's right. And if you don't admit it, then you can't fight it. And if you don't fight it, you're going to lose." (Hare 57)

The idea that Isobel actually cannot conceive of evil suggests she is more a dawn of creation figure than a latter day saint, as critics have dubbed her. She really fits neither bill perfectly, for her actions are too complicated to pigeonhole her as simply a walking allegory. In a complete roundabout, when Rhonda emerges from her shower Isobel offers to accompany the two of them to the movies, even suggesting a big bag of popcorn to ensure a good time. It is nearly the last time Irwin will see her alive.

As the three of them leave the scene onstage shifts to Tom's office. He has called a board meeting to discuss the dire straits of Isobel's business. Three weeks ago she walked out of the cinema for popcorn, got on a plane and left the country. Though, as Irwin explains, she returned shortly afterward, she has avoided him ever since, not showing up for work, meetings, or personal rendevous.

She has, however, been busy with Katherine. After buying back her father's house, Isobel promised to put Katherine into a flat in London and care for her. To Marion, of course, her sister's behavior is irrational and inexcusable. "It's so typical, isn't it?" she remarks snidely, "She's feckless. She was born irresponsible. Someone said, 'Do you know what politics is? Finally? Politics is being there every day.' And you know it's true. You have to be there. I'm there every day." (Hare 61)

Though everyone is perturbed by Isobel's sudden change of face, Irwin still cannot bring himself to condemn her. "What do you do?" he asks Tom and Marion, "When everything you think, everything you feel is screaming at you that you belong with her? What do I know? Very little. A bit about drawing. A bit about how to look after myself. Which I've

done for years. Beyond that, nothing. Except I've known one certain source of good." (Hare 62)

Ultimately that is Isobel's attraction and repulsion for everyone in the play. Whether as a repository for unwanted troubles or an endless font of kindness, Isobel's family and friends are attracted to her as the "one certain source of good" they know, while at the same time they remain confused, jealous, and spiteful of her bounty.

At the moment, the primary objection is that Isobel is making the daily operation of the firm nearly impossible by her absence. Returning to the religious imagery of Isobel as saint, nun, or martyr, Irwin says, "It's all of a piece. while I work there, I don't think she's going to come near it. My guess is she's made some sort of vow." Ever skeptical of acts of true integrity, Marion responds, "I don't believe this. This is most peculiar. What is this? A *vow*? It's outragious. People making *vows*. What are *vows*? Nobody's made vows since the nineteenth century." (Hare 63)

Isobel's seriousness is apparent, however, when she calls from the lobby to inform the board that she will make an appearance as soon as Irwin has left the building. After her request is granted, she joins the meeting in progress as though nothing were out of the ordinary, shunning personal questions and getting right to the business at hand. "You want to sell the firm because it's not profitable and sack all the staff, is that right?" she asks Tom. (Hare 64)

Tom admits those are his intentions; that the firm has been losing money and he can make a healthy profit on the building if he sells now. Additionally, Isobel forces him to concede that the venture never actually cost him anything since it was used as a tax write-off. Though never becoming accusatory or even implying any wrongdoing, Isobel reveals

the true nature of Tom's Christian business values and family loyalty. Like everything else, his principles are less important than profit.

Still, Isobel does not object, and in the spirit of getting things over with agrees to the dismantling of her operations and the disbanding of their partnership. Tom and Marion are not content to let the issue lie so neatly. In a mockingly magnanimous gesture of consolation Tom offers Isobel a small office space within his own building, behind the car park. Provided she continues her trade with Irwin, he is willing to let her use the space rent free for the first year and even pay her utility bills.

The space, however, is a hovel. As Isobel says, recalling Tom's Christian businessman's association, "Forgive me, but I think even Jesus might have doubts about setting up a business in there." (Hare 68) The issue is moot anyway, since Isobel has no plans to renew her relationship, for business or pleasure, with Irwin. "All my life I've got on with everyone," she says, "But this one time, all my instincts say, 'Do something decisive. Cut him off. Wake him up. Shock him. Make it final.' 'Do what needs to be done.'" (Hare 69)

Though Isobel sounds like an addict of some sort, slowly waking up to the reality of her fixation and trying to quit in stages, her self-destructive goodness still has her imperiled. Her ultimate explanation for her actions, especially as they concern Katherine, returns her to her dead father. "What am I meant to do now?" she asks, "In my case there's only one answer. I must do what Dad would have wished." (Hare 69)

Marion's reaction is prophetic. "You are truly insufferable," she tells her troubled sister, "Hide behind your father for the rest of your life. Die there!" (Hare 69) Tom, following Isobel out the door, expresses his usual useless concern and false remorse and says, "I should never have done

this. I didn't see what would happen...I'm going down to pray. I fear for her." (Hare 70)

By the time the next scene begins in the new flat Isobel has purchased for Katherine, the women's relationship has degenerated to near absurd levels. Each plays a particular role: Katherine is a selfish child, pitching screaming tantrums at the slightest suggestion of decorum or authority, and Isobel is the beleagured parent of an uncontrollable hellion, making doomed, obligatory attempts at behavior modification and appeasement.

Nothing Isobel does for Katherine suits her. When she suggests they go for a walk, Katherine hates the idea. When she prepares her dinner, Katherine says, "Your cooking is uspeakable. It's all good intentions. Fuck Shepherd's pie. It sums you up." (Hare 71) Yet, for all her protestations, Katherine remains oddly dependent on Isobel for *something*. When Isobel tells her unhappy charge, "If you ask me, then I will go," Katherine's first response is, "Go." Then, as soon as Isobel reaches for her coat, she stops her, saying, "Please don't leave me. Please, Isobel. Just stay for tonight." (Hare 72)

Katherine's plea is heartfelt. She even takes the time to try to explain to Isobel how mediocre she has felt all her life, and how her explainable instability caused her to nearly stab to death their business associate at the earlier ill-fated dinner. It becomes apparent, though, that part of her desire to confess and purge her emotions may be a charade, a way to stall for time and keep Isobel at the apartment.

Though she is warned that Irwin somehow has a key to the flat and Isobel still doesn't want to see him, Katherine intentionally unlocks the

deadbolt to the door when the women go to bed. Shortly after, undoubtedly according to plan, Irwin shows up and lets himself in.

As Hare noted, The Secret Rapture was his attempt to see if it was still possible, against popular opinion, to write a tragedy. With this dramatic form as a model, the final encounter between Irwin and Isobel represents the inevitable destructive climax caused by the heroine's hubris, in this case her innate goodness in a world gone bad.

When Irwin enters the flat Isobel tells him in no uncertain terms she does not want to see him. She even calls for Katherine who, of course, does not come to her rescue. There is a palpable undercurrent of precipitous violence in the previously steady and docile Irwin. He asks if Isobel will just sleep with him and, when he is refused, produces a gun.

With uncharacteristic brutality Isobel tells him, "Force me. You can force me if you like. Why not? You can take me here. On the bed. On the floor. You can fuck me till the morning. You can fuck me all tomorrow. Then the whole week. At the end you can shoot me and hold my heart in your hand. You still won't have what you want. The bit that you want I'm not giving you. You can make me say or do anything you like. Sure, I'll do it. Sure, I'll say it. But you'll never have the bit that you need. It isn't yours." (Hare 75)

When it is obvious nothing he says is going to convince her to return their relationship to the way it was Irwin turns to threats of violence. He is obviously nervous, pushed to the edge by feelings beyond his control. Still, Isobel mocks him, thinking him uncapable of using the gun on her or anyone else. She is mistaken.

When Katherine, out of curiosity, finally comes in to see what is happening and refuses to help Isobel by calling for the police, Isobel dares to go on her own. With Irwin pointing the gun directly at her and ordering her not to leave, she turns at the door and notices, "I haven't got shoes. Still you can't have everything." (Hare 78) These words, echoing the sobered realization of the shoeless traveller who met a man with no feet, are Isobel's last. As the door closes behind her, Irwin unloads his pistol rounds through it, killing her instantly. Katherine kneels beside her fallen benefactor and Irwin breathes, "It's over. Thank God." (Hare 78)

The final scene of the play is an epilogue that serves to show the effect Isobel's life, suffering, and death finally had on those around her. Bringing the setting of the play full circle, Hare places the denoument back in the living room of Robert Glass. Now the house seems to have fallen into the hands of Marion and Tom, who are trying to restore it to the condition it was in when Mr. Glass passed away, partly out of a belated sense of filial duty, and partly in memory of Isobel.

As they arrange furniture and knick-knacks and cart belongings in and out of the room, it is obvious each has been changed somewhat by Isobel's murder. The workaholic Marion refuses a phone call from the Ministry, opting instead to reminisce about her childhood in the house. Katherine, echoing Grace in Wrecked Eggs, has lost interest in possessions. "Robert loved things," she tells Marion, "It made me jealous. He'd pick up a book. Or a photograph. His whole mood would change. Right away. Things consoled him. He was lucky." Even Tom's faith is shaken. He stops himself as he is beginning to console Marion with words

from Jesus and says, "I don't know. I've slightly lost touch with the Lord Jesus." (Hare 80-81)

When the room is finally complete and they stand back to admire their work Tom tells Marion, "Well done. It's lovely. A perfect imitation of life." (Hare 81) His words at this point echo the conflicts all the characters in the play have fought. Throughout, each has sought to find and define what the living of life is truly about. For Tom it has been business and religion; for Marion, politics; for Irwin, Isobel; and for Katherine it has been the drawing of life from others. Of all of them, only Isobel lived life by *giving* to life, to others.

Even in death, it seems, Isobel continues to give. Left alone, with their work finished, the usually conservative and restrained Tom and Marion cannot help suddenly feeling a renewed attraction to one another, physically and emotionally. After exchanging a sensuous kiss and words of affection, Tom leaves Marion alone for a moment. As she sits in the middle of the room, surrounded by the remnants of her life with her father and sister, she says to herself, "Isobel. We're just beginning. Isobel, where are you? Isobel, why don't you come home?" (Hare 82)

And indeed, as these last words suggest, they are just beginning. Thanks to the sacrifices of Isobel, each of the other characters has discovered something about themselves and each other that will inform the way they live the rest of their lives.

Fittingly, a certain moral assertiveness accompanied critics' reviews of A Secret Rapture when it premiered at the National Theatre in October of 1988. Whether they enthusiastically supported the play or found it, as

Hare suggested, "a load of old tosh," many critics found themselves, unsurprisingly, divided along political and ethical lines.

Michael Billington, the regular theatre critic for the *Guardian*, which is associated with Labourites and the Left in England, wrote in *Plays International*, "What few people noticed first time round--myself included--was that this is a deeply optimistic play which says that the English virtues of tolerance, consideration and humanity will in the last resort triumph over the historical aberration of Thatcherism...The final image of the play unequivocally shows that the Isobels of this world will win out over the Marions and that harmony and peace will return to our diseased, temporarily unrecognizable Britain." (Billington "A Year of Smooth Transition" 25)

John Peter in the *Sunday Times* agreed. He wrote, "Hare has written one of the best English plays since the war and established himself as the finest British dramatist of his generation. *The Secret Rapture* is a family play; it is also the first major play to judge the England of the 1980s in terms that are both human and humane." (Peter "Moral Masterpiece for our Times" C8)

Those not already disposed toward liberal party politics, however, were not as easily convinced, especially on the American side of the Atlantic. Commenting on the New York production, Robert Brustein wrote, "Part of the problem is the playwright's political agenda. Whatever his feelings about the intrinsic nature of evil, Hare believes behavior to be deeply influenced by the social environment. This endows his personal relationships with a dimension beyond the domestic, but it also imprisons his characters in representative roles. The play's heroine (once again, Hare's central character is an idealistic woman) is Isobel Glass--liberal by

persuasion, therefore warm and decent and independent by nature--while her sister, Marion French, is a Conservative politician and businesswoman, thus hard-nosed, frugal, unfeeling, Darwinian. Hare makes some effort to complicate these characters--Isobel is oddly unforgiving of her boyfriend's infidelity, Marion has an uncharacteristically soft and passionate moment with her huband. But essentially, like everyone else in the play, they exist primarily as symbolic reflections on life and character in Margaret Thatcher's England." (Brustein "No Secrets, No Rapture" 29-30)

In the *New Yorker*, Mimi Kramer noted, "That Hare wants us to take his little family drama as an allegory of what has happened to political idealism in England and America (socialism in his country, liberalism in ours) is only too clear." But, she felt, he falters in his presentation. Her review continued, "Allegory, in order to work, has to be revealing on two levels, and Hare's play, in order to state any more than the obvous (that it's selfish ont to care about those we should care about), would have to explain something about why people think and feel and behave as they do. But, just as Hare's is not an interesting analysis of why masochistic people put up with the demanding, destructive, and confrontational dependents that life has dealt them, there is room in his microcosm of British and American politics for no subtlety of thought or motive." (Kramer 112)

The New York production fared much worse than the London premiere, due in large part to a change in directors and a hostile critical reception that led to an enormous row in the press. Howard Davies

directed The Secret Rapture for the Lyttelton Theatre while Hare himself took the reins at the Barrymore Theatre stateside.

Several American critics who had seen the London production felt Hare had done himself and his play a disservice by redirecting it in New York. John Simon in *New York* magazine wrote, "Perhaps it's Hare who is bananas. He certainly gives most of his characters elaborately sculptured speeches--something out of an Oxford-Cambridge debate, with a touch of High Church sermon and a dash of absurdism thrown in. Then, as his own director, he has the cast orating at the audience, very slowly, very deliberately, as if doing a special matinee at a mental hostpital." (Simon "Rapture Under Wraps" 132)

Richard Hornby in the *Hudson Review* chimed in, "the problems in the script were aggravated in the New York production by the fact that Hare himself directed. I hate to keep faulting him, but facts are facts: As I have noted in the past, he has a poor sense of space, creating awkward movements and meaningless stage pictures. In many instances, actors even convered one another from the audience's view. Hare repeatedly used upstge center for the main entrance, which is the worst possible place for it to be." (Hornby 123)

The most severe damage, however, was done by the reviewer who many playwrights feel makes or breaks a play in New York: the *Times* critic. Though Frank Rich found a lot to like about the play when it was in London, he felt Hare's treatment of the new production was shoddy. "Mr. Hare, serving as his play's director for its Broadway premiere at the Barrymore, is his own worst enemy," Rich wrote, "The passion and wit that reside in his script--and that are essential to engage an audience and lead it to his ideas--are left unrealized in this production. Those who did

not see last season's staging of "The Secret Rapture," directed by Howard Davies, are blameless if they find Mr. Hare's New York version baffling right up to that final scene. The textual tinkering since London may be minor, but the wholesale changes of casting and design have flattened the play's subtleties into coarse agitprop and tossed its overall intentions into confusion."

Rich continued complimenting the script, the actors, and the designers, while criticizing their effect under Hare as a director, and ended by saying, "What I don't understand is how a dramatist so deep in human stuff could allow so pallid an imitation of life to represent his play on a Broadway stage." (Rich "Bad Sister vs. Good Sister in Hare's 'Secret Rapture' C3)

Whether as a direct result of Rich's criticism or not, the play had a short life in New York. After twenty-two previews at the Public Theater it received nineteen more at the Barrymore, followed by a mere twelve actual performances. The *Times'* notice prompted Hare to write an angry note to Rich accusing him of closing the play by his unnecessary harsh tone. Rich replied that his job as a critic was to tell the truth as he saw it, and soon the two writers' quarrel went public. *Variety's* headline for the affair read "Ruffled Hare Airs Rich Bitch," and the seasonal battle between New York artists and critics was resparked.

As literature, The Secret Rapture benefits from Hare's attempt to write a tragedy, though it is clearly not one in the classical sense. Its structure is unified, with focus maintained on the central action between Isobel and her surrounding family and friends. It is mostly serious throughout, beginning and ending in death, setting the recommended

tone for a tragic play. As the protagonist, Isobel can certainly be labelled a basically *good* person who through a fatal flaw, tragic error, or *hubris* (in her case represented either by her extreme beneficience toward others or fixated love for her father) meets with destruction.

There is not, however, a sense that fate intervenes, that the characters are *destined* to play out their parts accordingly. Nor is there likely to be felt a catharsis as the result of purging feelings of pity and fear for Isobel. Hare's political motives confound this aspect of identifying with her character. Since she is, in Hare's mind, an anomaly, one of the few good people left in a society built upon avarice and self-interest, she is difficult to *empathize* with, though she may elicit a great deal of sympathy.

Overall The Secret Rapture is probably destined to outlast each of Hare's other plays that preceeded it in the 1980s. While it is definitely a product of the era and contains an ample amount of contemporary criticism, its universal qualities--good versus evil, family conflict, and the struggle for self-definition--propel it well beyond the decade of its creation.

Still, though the script may succeed, its production closed a few avenues for the playwright. While the poor showing in New York did not adversely affect The Secret Rapture in England or in subsequent regional American productions, it took a toll on Hare as a director, especially following a string of other unsuccessful directorial attempts. Following The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs at the National in 1986 was Hare's production of King Lear, which, even with Anthony Hopkins in the title role, proved unsatisfactory to critics, the public, and Hare himself. Next was Hare's only attempt at opera, The Knife, about a married transexual

with three children coming to terms with his new female identity. He directed the production in New York in 1987 and it was a complete failure, in terms of writing and staging. To date it has not even been published.

Failure behind the footlights, however, may have turned Hare into an even more focused playwright. After a hiatus from theatre, during which he wrote and directed two films, Paris by Night and Strapless, both released in 1989, he returned to the stages of the National with what, to date, has been his most ambitious achievement: Racing Demon, Murmuring Judges, and The Absence of War, a trilogy of plays examining British social institutions.

Racing Demon

What Hare and Howard Brenton seemingly began with Pravda, their 1985 collaborative satire of the Fleet Street press, continued with Hare's next solo efforts, an entire trilogy of plays devoted to the dissection of some of Britain's most revered institutions. Combining the best elements of his earlier work--contrasts between the public and private, insightful criticism, strong female characters, and timely issues--the three plays, even with occasional structural and production flaws, proved the playwright's success as Britain's foremost dramatist of popular dissent to even his harshest critics.

The genesis of the trilogy lies in Hare's curiosity and gentle prodding of the venerable Church of England, an institution some feel is mired in dogma and hopelessly behind the times, stuck performing mundane social work while longing to provide spiritual fulfillment. The path that led him to Racing Demon began, as Hare says, accidentally. He explains, "In the summer of 1987, I set off to drive north towards York University, intending to visit the General Synod of the church of England, with no other motive but curiosity. I had the vague suspicion that priests pretending to be politicians might present me with an entertaining spectacle. I was not even planning a play. After the first session, I detained a passing bishop and, wanting to be able to remember what he was then telling me about hell, I asked him if he would allow me to take a few notes." (Hare Asking Around 2)

The playwright's "few notes" led to volumes of dictated and transcribed conversations with vicars, bishops, and parishioners as he

became more and more interested in the dramatic possibilities of the current state of organized religion in Britain. Then Richard Eyre, his friend of more than twenty years and Director of the National Theatre, helped provide the inspiration for the play's plot. "I was able to put him in contact with a vicar who had been fired from his church," says Eyre, "It was something that was making the news quite a bit at the time." (Eyre Interview)

This led to one of the central issues of the play: the function of the individual conscience within the Church, and the Church's role in a decidedly secular community. With his dramatic and thematic structures in mind, Hare continued his inquiries then "put the research on one side and wrote a work of pure fiction." (Hare Platform Discussion) It was not his intention to portray any of the real people he met or replicate their crises and triumphs. In Asking Around, a book he subsequently published containing excerpts from his interviews, Hare expresses his disdain for slavishly true-to-life docudramas. He writes, "The plays which flowed from it (the research) are, in so far as anything is, pure works of fiction. I am not a great fan of works of art whose chief aim is to imitate reality. I think the British cinema is chiefly debilitated by its insistence on stealing its stories from newspapers. I distrust faction, and I cannot see the point of plays and films which seek to reproduce how Christine Keeler and Gandhi once walked and talked. No film aiming to explore the psychology of, say, Richard Nixon can do justice to the boundless complexity of the man himself. A play in which an actor has to walk around pretending to be William Shakespeare is, in my opinion, doomed in advance." (Hare Asking Around 4)

The result of his work was a triumph for Hare and the National Theatre. Racing Demon, a tale of four London clergymen battling faith, bureaucracy, heirarchy, and tradition, garnered four Best Play awards, as well as Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor recognitions for two of its company. Possibly the only production in the National's history to perform on all three of its stages, it entered the repertoire of the Cottesloe Theatre on February 8, 1990, transferred to the larger Olivier stage in August of that year, and returned the following autumn to the Lyttelton before touring the United Kingdom.

Hare did not have to wait for critical kudos, however, to realize he had come upon a formula for success. "I had the idea, during the rehearsals of Racing Demon, that we (Hare and Eyre) should try and do three plays rather than just one. I wanted eventually to put three plays together in one day--the Church, the Law and the State." (Hare Discussion) After his very public fracas with Frank Rich over his directorial skill in the American production of Secret Rapture, however, Hare was hesitant to oversee such a project himself. For this reason he turned to Richard Eyre as the director for Racing Demon and continued the alliance for the next two plays.

Eyre explains, "I directed a play of David's in the '70s, then for many years he did his own work. But with Secret Rapture he didn't want to direct. I wasn't available so (Howard) Davies did it. Then, when he directed it in New York it confirmed his view he was sort of out of sympathy with the role of the director." When the chance to rejoin the playwright in a challenging new series of plays came up, Eyre was ready. "Both of us enjoyed working on Racing Demon," the director says, "and we felt strongly the value of an ensemble and continuity. At the same time I

was keen to find a project that was very ambitious--a grand folly--and this seemed to be the idea. If you run a theatre you need those landmarks in your life and in the life of the theatre. This challenges everyone involved." (Eyre Interview)

Dramatic works on the grand scale the two men had in mind are rare in modern drama. Wagner's Ring Cycle, Ibsen's Peer Gynt and Peter Brook's Mahabharata rival Hare's trilogy in terms of epic length, a quality the playwright praises. "I love long days in the theatre," he says, "When they work, they do make you more open and receptive. There is a wonderful stage you go through at about the seventh or eighth hour at which all your critical faculties are gone and all your resistance is gone and you become more open and you simply accept." (Hare Discussion) And August Wilson's chronicle of African-American experience in each decade of the twentieth century--Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Fences, Joe Turner's Come and Gone, The Piano Lesson, and Two Trains Running--compares in terms of extended narratives around a broad central theme. None of these, however, assume the authority in wide-ranging subjects the way Hare's plays do.

On a socio-political scale Racing Demon found its admirers and detractors among the London press, clergy, and theatre-going public. Few refute some of the despairing statistics the play offers--English clergy are largely overworked and underpaid, parish church attendance on most Sundays is less than 1%, and the church often finds itself desperately behind the times, clinging to doctrines that are often irrelevant and ineffective in their present environment. Some, however, argue that there are important facets to the crisis of faith issue within the church that

Hare has not presented. A few even point to what seems an obvious agnostic bias on Hare's part as a barrier to objective judgement of religious issues. At the human level, though, Racing Demon is one of Hare's most effective plays to date. It combines humor with pathos while doing what Hare does best: exploring vital public issues in intensely personal realms.

The central character in the play, based loosely on Eyre's discharged vicar, is Lionel Espy, a reverend in a central London parish who has found the rift between his theological ideals and daily obligations increasingly difficult to manage. The play opens in his church as he kneels to pray. His soliloquoy plunges the production right into the question of the validity of religious faith in hostile environs.

"God. Where are you?" are the first words of the scene. Lionel continues, "I wish you would talk to me. God. It isn't just me. There's a general feeling. This is what people are saying in the parish. They want to know where you are. The joke wears thin. You must see that. You never say anything. All right, people expect that, it's understood. But people also think, I didn't realize when he said *nothing*, he really did mean absolutely nothing at all." (Hare Racing Demon 1) Both in the writing and performance, Lionel's prayer plays as a curiously touching combination of suppliance and humor. From the outset, the characters in the play are *real* people with multi-leveled personalities and problems.

Hare uses soliliquies like the one that begins the play interspersed with more conventional dialogue scenes to provide extra insight into the thoughts of the principal characters. After Lionel's private soul-searching in the church the scene changes to the Bishop of Southwark's home where Lionel is meeting his superior for a working dinner. The change in

location is customarily rapid and fluid. Hare's cinematic writing style, already mentioned, was assisted in Racing Demon's production by designer Bob Crowley, who created, originally for the Cottesloe, a simple, bare, crucifix-shaped playing area. Changes of locale were marked by changes in lighting and the addition or subtraction of basic furniture items or small properties.

Before their meal, Southwark introduces the play's principal conflict to Lionel. Amid pleasant conversation about English dinner entrees and their wives' special dishes, the Bishop mentions a problem in Lionel's congregation. "There is an element in your parish who are unsure of you," he says, "Maybe question the power of your convictions." In typical dry English humor he continues, "They're not sure you still believe in the rules of the club." (Hare 2)

His defenses instantly up, Lionel shows where his main concerns lie. "What parishioners are these?" he demands, "It's a largely working-class parish...I don't have to tell you, Christ came to help the poor...But there is, I know, a small middle-class rump...A rump of regular communicants who've been coming to the church for a very long time...And since the poor are not given to visiting bishops' palaces, I assume the complaint is from them?" (Hare 2-3)

The bishop chooses to return to an age-old dilemma for the church, one that has split England's largest congregation many times over centuries of worship. "We are talking about the service of Communion," he tells Lionel, "Sometimes you even seem uninterested in the sacramental side of your work." It is this expectation of the Church that has the frustrated reverend questioning his faith. With Quaker earnestness he tells Southwark, "It is fairly desperate. I wouldn't even say the Church

was a joke. It's an irrelevance. It has no connection with most people's lives. A lot of people are struggling to make a life at all...Perhaps, as the years go by, that becomes more important than ritual." (Hare 3)

Lionel's allegiance to the poor, though, while heroic, is not the concern of Southwark and the Church's governors. He resolutely tells the vicar, "The administration of the Sacrament. Finally that's what you're there for. As a priest you have only one duty. That's to put on a show...We're not talking about opinion. We're talking about authority. History. What the Church of England *is*. It's a disparate body held together by a common liturgy." (Hare 4) Then, with an ominous warning just to "fulfill your job description," the bishop leads Lionel off to dinner.

This scene, the inciting incident of the play, in which the old and new guard of the Church of England briefly cross ideologies, prepares the audience for several similar discussions that follow, attempting to establish or redefine the Church's mission. This philosophical floundering was one of the most striking aspects for the playwright during his investigations. He writes:

> Very early on in my researches into the Church of England," he writes, "I was astonished to find a group of inner-city priests who had virtually abandoned their aim of bringing souls to Christ, but who were instead interpreting their religious mission as social work, pure and simple. Although I myself had been educated in a devout Christian school and was now moved to write a play which sought to restore to the stage the ancient subject of man's relationship with the gods, I found to my surprise that many good priests almost refused to discuss God with me. They had ceased to believe that the divine could, in any significant way, be separated from the social. They were quite clear-minded in seeing themselves as part of a society which had, to all intents and purposes, abandoned its responsibility to the poor. Although most of them made glancing references to government

> policy or to the failure of politicians to understand the conditions in which they worked, their primary interest was not in ideology, nor, even less, in allocating blame. They just wanted to bandage wounds. Into the vacuum created by society's indifference, they were pouring as much love and practical help as they could. To do this, they were working long days, and moreover on salaries considerably below those of social workers or of officials at the DHSS. (Hare Asking Around 6)

The opposite side of Lionel's social work mentality is represented in Racing Demon by his conservative adversary, Reverend Tony Ferris, an upstart associate gaining missionary zeal. The scene that follows Lionel and Southwark's dinner is a post-coital exchange between Tony and his girlfriend, Frances, in her apartment. He has already dressed while she still relaxes on the floor, wrapped in a sheet. There is the sense from the beginning that their relationship is in decline, due mainly to Tony's devotion to his calling. While she encourages him to stay and spend some personal time together, he hedges, drawn to his work. "It's just tonight I want to work on a scheme I have," he tells her, "which I want to put to the team. I've got an idea for common worship, to try and involve the Catholics and Methodists as well. I wanted to start with a day for World Peace. Or something. If we could get everyone together it would be the most incredible coup." (Hare 5)

While Lionel, who has been administering to one parish or another for many years and has had the chance to see the drastic decline in living standards in the cities worsen, has become somewhat jaded and sees more of the earthly, practical side of his duties, the less experienced Tony owns the idealism and folly of youth. He is still urged toward a more spiritual calling.

Like Lionel, however, his calling is taking its toll on personal relationships. Frances complains to him, "It's always Christ. We're alone. We make love. We have a little time. And then Christ enters the room." (Hare 6) It becomes clear that the purpose of this scene is to show Tony casting Frances aside in favor of the Church. Though he puts on the front of being accomodating, offering to stay for dinner, then reneging, lying about an aunt visiting town, inside the strain of carrying on his relationship with Frances has worn him down.

"I know this sounds terrible," he finally tells her, "but the fact is, our relationship...well, *we* understand. It's a caring and loving relationship, with some eventual purpose. It's in the context of...well, of our future. Of one day marrying...I mean, you know I would *never*...the physical experience, I mean, you understand it's always in the context of a long-term commitment...But I have been getting worried how it may look to the rest of the world." (Hare 7)

While Lionel and Tony are two representatives of life within Britain's theological framework, Frances is the first character who is part of the country's increasingly secular majority. Though she initially found Tony's faith endearing, and still understands his need for it, she doesn't speak its language or hold its principles. "I didn't make love in any 'context'," she tells him, "Whatever thay may mean. I made love because I wanted you. Is that really such a terrible idea?" (Hare 9)

After the couple agrees to part ways because of their seemingly irreconcilable different interests, the fourth scene begins in Lionel's sitting room, where he is counseling one of his parishioners whose husband has been abusing her. She tells the cleric about an abortion she was forced to have, the most recent of several, and asks the Church's stance on the

issue. Initially Lionel attempts to tow the party line. "What does it say? About abortion?" he tells her, "Abortion is wrong." But immediately his humanistic sympathies rise up and he continues, "I'm not saying *you* were wrong." (Hare 12)

Just as Tony arrives for a scheduled meeting of the parish's team of vicars Lionel requests they join him in a prayer for the woman's troubles. When they are finished, the woman asks if the prayer will help. Lionel's reply, an honest one, is simply, "I don't know. It can't do any harm." In a similar vein he continues, "I don't know if God'll help you. But now you do have a friend. You have me. This house is always open. Whenever you're lonely." (Hare 13)

Though there is a certain amount of confidentiality that must be maintained concerning a vicar and someone who seeks counsel, Tony cannot help but question Lionel's methods of handling the situation. Immediately their philosophies are at odds. "Is it deliberate you never mention the Bible at all?" he asks Lionel. The elder vicar, however, practiced in this kind of situation, is ready for Tony's scrutiny. "If I give her a Bible," he tells him, "her husband will find it. Poor thing, she's not all that bright...If he finds out she's been to see me, he'll get even more hostile. The marriage is in trouble already. We don't want to make it worse by making him feel the do-gooders are all ganging up on him."

Lionel's experience with the woman presents another problem in the Church's growing role as government surrogate. "I can call the Social Services," he tells Tony, "You know the mess they're in. And to say what? There's a young woman hooked on antidepressants who's living in fear of her husband? You know what they'll say? 'So what else is new?' Or else

they'll refer her to a doctor. Well, it's the doctors who got her into her present state. They referred her to me. And so on. For ever." (Hare 14)

Still, the idealistic Tony can't help but wonder, "Isn't this the perfect moment to tell her about Christ?" The separate approaches the two men take to their jobs are now firmly established. In medical parlance, one wishes to treat the patient's body, the other his mind. Lionel retorts, "We're not salesmen. We don't look at people's suffering and think, 'Oh, this is excellent, now we've got a foot in the door.' Whatever we are we're not ambulance chasers." (Hare 15)

Their debate is interrupted by the arrival of a third member of their parish team, the Reverend Donald "Streaky" Bacon. Streaky, aptly named for his habit of cycling to work through crowded London streets, adds a measure of levity to the play. While he participates fully in discussions about parish operations and is a fully fleshed character in his own right, one of his principal roles is nonetheless a figure of comic relief.

In a huff about the lack of respect motorists give bicycle riders, he is oblivious to the fact he has just interrupted an important conversation. Before Tony can bring Lionel back to the point, Reverend Harry Henderson, their final member, joins the ranks, bringing with him bags of tea, coffee, and snacks for the meeting. Tony's point is now lost amid the shuffle of pre-business tea time and Harry's excitement over an exorcism he will witness that evening.

The confusion caused by the gathering of the vicars further illustrates Tony's separation from the older men in the group. While they have all become comfortable and casual with the proceedings and seem to know the proper decorum for debate and discussion, Tony is frustrated by their seeming unconcern. Finally, when they notice he is

troubled, he tells his partners, "We were discussing how much we should be pushing Christ at people, and how much they should be left to find him for themselves." (Hare 17)

His challenge serves as a call to order and the group gives him their attention. Tony repeats his complaint about Lionel's working methods and claims they may be responsible for the Church's recent failings. "We feel we've had a good Sunday if between us we attract one per cent. One per cent of our whole catchment area," he tells his associates. His visionary side takes control and he lectures, "I want a full church. Is that so disgraceful? I want to see the whole community all worshipping under one roof. That's what I want. And that's what I believe the Lord wants as well. I'm the junior member, this is my first parish, I've no right to bring this up, I can tell, we can go about our business, we can look at our schedules, but really if in three years we don't fill the churches on Sunday, I'm sorry, then I think we'll have failed." (Hare 17-18)

For all his fervor, though, he cannot inspire like emotions in the more experienced clerics. The issue is momentarily swept under the rug as Lionel presses more practical concerns--the working schedule for the week. He distributes stacks of calendars with hospital visitations, home communions, and other responsibilities penciled in and jokes, "I sometimes think that if the Lord Jesus returned today, the Church of England would ask him to set out his ideas on a single sheet of A4." (Hare 20)

Tony, however, is not amused. Thinking he is being ignored, he once again tries to press his point, only to be told the scheduling issue, for the moment, matters more. His alienation from the group seems to go unnoticed by the other men until finally he asks what, besides a desire to help people and a basic belief system, holds them together. In a stroke

of ominous foreshadowing Lionel replies, "Why, Tony, surely the fact that we're friends?" (Hare 21)

The relationship of the four vicars in this scene is one of the most enticing aspects of Racing Demon. While several key issues are raised and statistics are bantered about, the playwright never succumbs to didacticism. The attention given to the human qualities of the characters is rewarded by a heightened sense of empathy for their plight. Furthermore, the mixture of admirable qualities and personal foibles in *each* personality creates more dramatic tension--no one man's view is clearly right or wrong. This variegated use of character coloring from the dramatist's palette is not as successful later in the trilogy, particularly in the next play, Murmuring Judges.

After he is apparently spurned by his colleagues, Tony appears next in a soliloquy at the church, where he is able to give free reign to his frustration in a prayer. "Is anything *right* with the Church?" he asks, "I mean, is the big joke that having lived and died on the Cross, Jesus would bequeath us--what?--total confusion, a host of good intentions, and an endlessly revolving Cyclostyle machine? Is he really entrusting his Divine Mission to people like the Reverend Donald Bacon, universally known as *Streaky*?" He continues his complaint with a further portend of things to come, "Christ didn't come to sit on a committee. He didn't come to do social work. He came to preach repentance. And to offer everyone the chance of redemption...That's why he came. God, please help Lionel to see this. Because otherwise I think things are going to get rough." (Hare 22)

Following a pattern of introducing characters, then providing them with scenes to reveal deeper aspects of their personalities, the sixth scene

occurs at the home of Reverend Harry Henderson. Like each of the other men, Harry has personal concerns that occasionally interfere with his life in the church. In later scenes it becomes obvious that Lionel's occupation with social work has distracted him from *any* kind of personal life, a fact that has particularly worn on his marriage. Tony's feelings of guilt rising from his sexual relationship with Frances cause him to abandon her. Harry's particular burden is even less acceptable to society and the Church: He is homosexual.

His Scottish boyfriend, Ewan, bears the brunt of Harry's confusion and difficult predicament. His job as a Church representative makes it impossible for the two of them to be seen together in public, to carry on some semblance of a normal, loving relationship. Ewan complains that Harry should fight for him, but Harry's response is that his work is more important. "I am the vessel," he says, "I am only the channel through which God's love can pass. That makes me, as a person, totally irrelevant. As a person, nobody should even be conscious I'm there. If I do something which is in any sense worrying...if I upset my communicants in any way, then the focus is moved. From the Lord Jesus. On to his minister. And that is not where the focus belongs." In the end his sentiment is, "I'm a priest. I have to soak up my punishment." (Hare 24-25)

Harry's description of his job in the clergy provides yet another way the Church's representatives view themselves. Lionel is practical, a social worker; Tony, idealistic, a converter; and Harry is almost neutral, a facilitator. The scene also provides another facet of the myriad difficulties the Church faces in the late twentieth century. As homosexual relationships are accepted by more and more social institutions--local governments, businesses, clubs, the entertainment industry, and even

other denominations of faith--is it a matter of adapt-or-perish for the Church of England?

As the previous scene ends with Ewan leaving Harry and returning to Glasgow, the next scene begins outside the home of Stella Marr, the woman who sought help from Lionel earlier in the play. In Hare's earliest version of the play, the one published to coincide with the play's opening in February of 1990, this scene is a confrontation between Tony and Stella's abusive husband, a hulking West Indian named Jabbai. At the end of his patience with Lionel's gentle ministrations, Tony intends to solve the domestic disputing himself by reasoning with Jabbai and converting both husband and wife. He is thwarted, however, by Jabbai's stubbornness and ends up actually fighting with him.

The scene that actually reached production is quite different. In the same surroundings, Tony encounters Stella herself. She is surprised to find the curate at her door and frightened he will anger her husband. Her face has been scalded with hot water, a misfortune she claims was an accident she caused herself. Doubtful, Tony insists on helping her. When she denies his offer he righteously and resolutely refuses to leave her alone. "I won't stay away," he tells Stella, "Can I tell you something? Jesus has your interests at heart. Yes he does. But he can't help you--I tell you this from my own experience--he can't help you until you admit your own problems to yourself...Oh yes, and if that means my standing here--yes! *Standing* here outside this house until I find your husband, until I get him to face what he's done, then OK. I can wait here for days." (Hare Racing Demon rehearsal draft 35-36)

There is a marked difference between Tony's religious convictions and the professed piety of other Hare characters, such as Tom in The

Secret Rapture. Tom's Christian business ethics, his '80s brand of evangelism, is fodder for satirical show. It is a false mustache of faith recognized as a stereotype, particularly in America where several denominations are capable of spawning similar vociferous, self-serving figures. To his credit, Hare resisted the urge to typify Tony this way. The young reverend's beliefs, while not fully developed and sometimes naively used, are sincere. Owing to this, he is an infinitely more empathetic character.

Tony's attempt at forced conversion is followed by a return to Lionel's home, where Frances has called to see the senior vicar. She is met by Lionel's wife, Heather, a woman who, though hospitable, seems alone and detached from her husband's work. While waiting for Lionel's return she tells Frances, "He's on his rounds. He gives communion to the housebound on Tuesdays. Then he's Chairman of the local school...And a housing charity. Also ex-prisoners. There's a discussion group. And the mentally ill. They believe now in something called 'care in the community'. That means closing down the hospitals and letting them wander the streets. So Lionel does a group. That's also Tuesdays." (Hare 29) She has obviously become accustomed to her husband's absence. Even when Lionel arrives her role is simply that of a servant to guests and a quiet occupier of other rooms in the house, always deferring to Lionel's need to work.

Frances' visit is not merely a social call. She has come to warn Lionel about potential danger from the higher administration of the Church. Though not devout herself, she is a member of the Parnells, a well known church family with connections to Bishops and Cardinals. As

such, she is privy to inside information which, in this case, may be helpful to the vicar.

Her caution to Lionel is to beware of the Bishop of Southwark. Tired of the complaints he is receiving from Lionel's parishioners, he wants to be rid of the troublesome reverend. Lionel, though, for all his experience in the Church and the community, is also capable of showing surprising naiveté. He is appreciative of Frances' concern, but refuses to believe he can be ousted from his position because of a promise given to him by a lower bishop. "You can't overrule a promise," he tells her, "How can you? It was freely given. It was in good faith. I mean, now I sound patronizing, which I always hate. But you don't understand the Church. It has its weak moments. But this was a promise. And that's the end of it." (Hare 36)

They also discuss Tony, Frances' relationship with him and his evident obsession with evangelical Christianity. "He's thrown himself at the job," Frances observes, "He's incredibly naive in that way. He wants to get hold of people and solve them." Lionel replies, "It's a common failing. When you first start. You go in too hard. Usually with a lot of talk about Jesus. Always a danger sign in my experience." (Hare 34)

There is an odd sort of attraction between Lionel and Frances evident in the script and even more obvious in the play's original production. Early in their conversation Lionel admits to her, "I did actually meet you...Years ago. In a deanery garden. In Norwich. You were a little girl in a pink dress. I was just on the verge of getting married, I remember. You were incredibly beautiful." Then, as if to excuse a possible impropriety, he tells her, "It's the sole advantage of being a priest. Sometimes you can say what you think. Looking at you now, nothing has changed." (Hare 32)

It is an undercurrent to their friendship that continues throughout the play. Just before she leaves Lionel tells her, "Now I know Tony's crazy. To have given you up." And, though he feels instantly guilty for such an "unchristian" thought, Frances comforts him, "It was human. I'd say it was the most reassuring thing that I heard." (Hare 37)

With Frances' announcement about the Bishop of Southwark's intentions to be rid of Lionel, all the necessary groundwork has been laid for the dramatic action of the play. The characters have all been introduced and their relationships explained, and the goals and dangers for each of them are known. The last few scenes of the first act escalate these complications.

The next soliloquy belongs to Frances. She walks into a church and, according to the playwright's directions, "looks round like one who has been away a long time." (Hare 37) It is a feeling Hare himself probably most readily identifies with. Frances' prayer begins, "This is stupid," and becomes more venomous from there. "May I say I don't even believe in you?" she challenges, "Nor does anyone I know. Except my family. Who don't count. And Tony. And Lionel, possibly. In other words you're fielding a very weak team. I'd say you were Accrington Stanley. Whereas my lot--the non-believers--you'd have to say we're looking pretty sharp."

In some of Hare's most stinging criticism of religious faith in general, lines that were published but did not actually make production, Frances continues, "And we don't do that awful *claiming* you do. 'Well, they're Accrington fans really, they just don't go to the games.' 'Well, they're Accrington in their daily lives.' Every time someone does something nice, we don't say, 'Ah, there you are, that's the Accrington in them.' Or when the sun comes over the mountain, 'Oh, look, proof that Accrington exists.'"

Her indictment is not all such well-crafted rhetoric. With obvious deep-seated resentment born of experience she bursts, "You're not a *moral* God. Your style is more 'what a sweet baby! Wham! Give it cancer!"

Frances, too, joins the chorus of other voices that are harbingers of Lionel's inevitable downfall. "I like the idea of justice better than God," she says, "Because God is arbitrary. As everyone knows. Except Lionel. And he will very shortly find out." (Hare 38)

Though Hare's topic in Racing Demon is the Church, other items of scrutiny still appear. The scene following Frances' prayer takes place in a wine bar in Glasgow, where Ewan encounters Tommy Adair, a journalist searching for a scandalous story about a particular Church of England vicar whose sexual habits may be questionable to a good part of his paper's readership.

After asking a few leading questions about Ewan's leisure time and the practices of homosexuals in the era of AIDS, the reporter comes directly to the point. He wants to pay Ewan for his story. He tells him, "I am talking about sums of money so large that they would fund the Press Council for a year. But we must have specifics." Pravda has already proven Hare's distaste for the practices of the press in England. It is not likely, then, Tommy's digging will get him far.

Despite his treatment by Harry, Ewan tells the writer, "You'll never get me, you know. You won't get anyone. I'll tell you why. Because life in this country is such a bloody sewer. But what people still have...which is theirs...which belongs to them...which is precious...is what happens in private...And that's why you want it. That's why you want to slime all over it. Because it *is* private. And in private, there's still some decency." (Hare 40)

With sentiments like these Hare accomplishes several feats as a dramatist. Firstly, he vents his own feelings and frustrations. It is well known the playwright has a passion for privacy and the rights of individuals to conduct their lives as free of outside interference as possible. Secondly, he creates tense, interesting dramatic situations and dialogue. Finally, the reason such scenes are so appealing, he identifies with his audiences and even expands their horizons. It may be that a good part of his audience doesn't believe homosexual relationships within the Church can be condoned. Yet he relies on Britons' resolute defense of their private lives to gain sympathy for characters like Ewan and the Reverend Harry Henderson.

As Tommy leaves Ewan at the bar with an ominous threat that he'll be in touch, the scene changes to the empty chamber of the Synod where the governmental body of the Church is meeting. Streaky and Harry, in attendance for the first Synod session, have arrived early to talk to the Bishop of Kingston about Lionel. They have all known each other for some time and much of their conspiratorial conversation reverberates with overtones of backroom politicking in the House of Commons, a similarity no doubt intended by the playwright.

Once apprised of Lionel's perilous situation, Kingston admits his promise to the cleric that his job would never be in danger, and agrees something should be done before his quarrel with Southwark takes a nasty turn. He tells the men, "I would say the heart of my job was preventing problems growing into issues." (Hare 43)

As an example of a problem becoming an issue, Kingston offers the current debate before the Synod, which concerns the ritual practices of the Freemasons. "We all know it's extremely peculiar when they roll their

trousers up and wrap hankies round their faces," he says, "But do they then perform an act of worship? That's the only question. If they do, then it's blasphemy." Like politicians facing similar no-win situations on issues of the state, the Church has to find creative ways of addressing possible breaches of its codes of conduct without alienating its constituency. "What's the result?" Kingston asks, "Internal dissension. We give mortal offence to 50,000 people who are also members of the Church of England. And who are rather better than almost everyone at turning up every week. Why risk it?"

His answer? "If on the other hand, we form a committee, the committee commissions a report, the report is referred, saying well, er almost, but this isn't *quite* an act of worship, not quite, and would the Masons mind changing just one or two words? Well then, what are we left with? A harmless eccentricity...Avoiding the crunch is what the whole thing's all about." (Hare 43-44)

Obviously one of the principle lessons Hare learned in his research at the Synod was the far-reaching influence of politics, even in ecclesiastical matters. Given his penchant for the political, the discovery undoubtedly pleased him. The debate on Freemasonry was one that the playwright actually witnessed at the Church's meeting, and is chronicled in his chapter on Racing Demon in Asking Around. In his prefatory remarks he explains:

> The actual government of the Church is exceedingly complicated, but the general work of Synod...involves debating and voting on papers and resolutions which are submitted to it. Although there are officially no parties in what is either a circular or a semi-circular formation, the spectator quickly spots factions which group together to represent certain views within the Church.

> At the risk of caricature, to which devout Christians rightly object, it is possible to isolate three dominant tendencies: the Anglo-Catholics, with their High Church emphasis on ritual and tradition; the Evangelicals, with their strong beliefs in good and evil, and personal salvation; and the Liberals, who, in the demonology of the other two groups, are held to be in a controlling ascendancy over the whole Church. Individual loyalties and alliances are actually quite complex, and votes are satisfyingly difficult to predict. (Hare 14)

The playwright's observations about the factions within the Church are evident in his portrayal of the four members of Lionel's parish team and the higher administration. Southwark, who earlier stressed Lionel's duty as a provider of communion, is obviously aligned with the Anglo-Catholics. Tony, perhaps unknowingly, has placed himself squarely alongside the Evangelical branch, and the other three men--Harry, Streaky, and Lionel--probably fall haphazardly in the catch-all category of Liberals.

Furthermore, though Hare claims not to have copied *personalities* directly from life to the stage, he is not above extracting the things people *say* and adapting it into dialogue. His transcriptions of some of the Synod speeches during the Freemasonry debate reveal bits of speeches that made the cut into Racing Demon's production. Dr. John Habgood, the Archbishop of York, for example, was the one who described Freemasonry as "a harmless eccentricity," saying, "Men gain a certain pleasure from doing things they wouldn't do in front of their wives." He also quipped, "I would have difficulty in worshipping an architect, with or without the Church Commissioners' approval." (Hare Asking Around 18)

These and many other actual quotes found their way into the mouths of Hare's characters. While the playwright wasn't, in his own

words, attempting to "imitate reality," he was still discriminating enough to rely on the real world for creative inspiration.

The political aspect of the play is not confined to the churchmen. Hare admits to being very conscious that the present condition of the Church and other institutions he examined for his trilogy owed much to the Thatcher government, the Tories. Accordingly, the Conservatives are dragged into Lionel's present crisis. Streaky tells Kingston that the Leader of the House is one of the members of Lionel's congregation and that may be part of the problem. "He hears Lionel's sermons. He's heard them for years," Streaky says, "They tend to harp a bit on certain themes. The divided nation. The failings of materialism. The importance of devoting our lives to the poor. He's a Tory minister who sits through it every Sunday. Imagine." (Hare 45)

His implication is that the minister is the one who blew the whistle on Lionel and is pressuring Southwark to replace him. Kingston, however, immediately balks at confronting the issue. "This is really not something you should try to pursue," he tells Lionel's defenders. Referring to yet another crisis for the Church, its tenuous relationship with the State, he says, "The tensions are impossible. Ever since we failed to confer on the Falklands expedition the theological status of a holy war. Church and State are held together by a single thread. It's not even a thread! It's dental floss!" (Hare 46)

Streaky and Harry, however, are shrewd manipulators, and they convince Kingston that it is in everyone's best interests for him to put in a show of support for Lionel. As the members of Synod start to enter the hall for the debate, the scene ends with a cynical observation from Kingston. Watching the men in legal wigs and gowns assemble, he remarks, "Well,

here they come. The great debaters. Democracy at work. The search for formulae with the maximum of ambiguity combined with a minimum of offence. The Lord in these matters guide us." (Hare 48)

The last scene in the first act is a brief exchange between Lionel and Tony. Having been warned by Streaky and Harry that the young curate is going to be dining with Southwark and possibly discussing Lionel's position, he has come to rally support from his parish partner. Finding him in the church in the act of prayer, Lionel bides his time, then finally interrupts. Still, with his career in the Church at stake, he cannot bring himself to raise the issue. He invites Tony to dinner, is naturally refused, and left alone as Tony rushes off for his meeting with the Bishop.

Lionel ends the act asking, "What can you do, Lord? You tell me. You show me the way. Go on. You explain why all this hurt has to come. Tell me. You understand everything. Why do the good always fight among themselves?" (Hare 49) While he is not literally tied to the tracks or gripping a ledge several stories up, Lionel's predicament at the end of the first act provides the equivalent of a cliffhanging curtain, meant to build interest for what follows intermission.

When the second act begins, not much time has passed. Tony arrives in the dining room of the Savoy Hotel for his dinner with Southwark only to find Harry and Streaky waiting to intercept him. In their efforts to save Lionel they have decided to make one final attempt to stop the problem at its source. In an amusing manner, the two vicars escort their younger comrade to a back room in the restaurant where they try to ply him with drinks and get him to change his mind about complaining to the bishop.

Comically, Streaky recommends, "I'd have half-a-dozen oysters. And follow it up with Chateaubriand. Call it a Last Supper. And I wonder which one are you?" (Hare 52) Though Tony has given up alcohol, Streaky continues to attack rounds of tequila sunrises with a vengeance and, owing to his inebriated state, becomes more boisterous in his arguments.

When Harry and Streaky make a plea for comraderie and loyalty, Tony counters with their obligation to the Church and laity. In his opinion, Lionel failed miserably when he sent Stella back home to be abused again by her husband. "He's tired," Tony suggests, "And why is he tired? There you have it. That's my whole point. Lionel is tired because he gets no strength from the Gospel. That's the problem. He's tired because he isn't getting anything back." (Hare 54)

Though Tony's character is in the unenviable position of playing the antagonist to the very sympathetic Lionel, his own plight is argued quite effectively. His beliefs and actions rest on a purity of interpretation that, in an ideal world, might be more desirable. He tells his companions about an incident in college when he questioned a lecturing bishop about Church beliefs. "I said, 'Bishop, what's the present thinking on hell?' 'Hell?' he said. 'Yes.' He said, 'Well, we believe in it.' I said, 'I see. Then why do we hear so little about it? It doesn't come up much in the pulpit these days.' He said, 'No. No, we try to downplay it. After all, we don't want to put people off." (Hare 57)

For Tony, this salesmanship of Church doctrines is reprehensible. The only approach for him is an honest, forthright one which includes all the fine print. "We've been *given* these rules," he says, "and, by chance, what's extremely convenient, these rules are all set down in a book...And

this book is on sale, it's actually available...You can actually take it, you can actually go and say, 'What is the position on this? What is the thinking?' Oh yes. Look. There we are. Matthew, for instance. What does it say? Ah, there we are. There's a line. A little line of print. Actually written down. 'If a man do not believe in me, then he is damned." (Hare 57-58)

He reiterates his complaint that Lionel and a good many others in the Church have become enlightened humanists out of what they feel is a necessary obligation to the poor, but himself feels no compulsion to serve a single class of the population just because they are disadvantaged. Though like-minded people undoubtedly exist, in the theatre, especially in the plays of a decidedly Left-leaning playwright like Hare, Tony represents a rare convolution of character. He is a clear thinking, articulate Conservative, earnestly trying to help people.

In the plays of Hare's contemporaries--Howard Brenton, Alan Ayckbourn, Christopher Hampton, Howard Barker, and others--such a character would likely never exist. Conservatives are an extremist bunch reduced to butts of buffoonery or, at best, straw men propped up by weak dogma and knocked down by righteous Liberalism. At the far end of this treatment is a play like Howard Brenton and Tony Howard's A Short Sharp Shock! Formerly called Ditch the Bitch!, the play is an outrageously irreverent treatment of Margaret Thatcher's first election to office in which the Leader is a deranged powermonger and her Government a batch of sycophantic puppets.

While Hare himself has not been immune to taking easy shots at the Tories, his satire is more sophisticated and characters like Tony prove he has become, at least in recent years, more interested in a balanced look

at issues. It is a quality in his plays that may contribute to their success among audiences of mixed political backgrounds at the National Theatre.

For all his lucidity, however, Tony is not going to convince Harry and Streaky that Lionel should be removed, nor are they destined to change the younger man's energetic approach to what he sees as the primary mission of the Church. As a final warning, Harry tells Tony, "It cuts both ways...That's what we came to say. It's not in your power to get Lionel the sack. You won't even get what you want. Why risk the damage? I mean the damage to your own conscience. Why betray a friend when you don't need to?" (Hare 60)

Their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of Southwark and Kingston. Harry and Southwark greet one another with sincere affection, confounding Tony who assumed they were ideologically opposed and therefore not friendly. They leave him to his appointment with the seed of doubt in his mind about whether his decision is the right one for everyone involved.

As the restaurant scene fades into the background, Streaky appears in the church for the next soliloquy. Still another approach to faith and the work of the Church is found in his comical yet moving prayer. "Drunk, Lord, drunk," he admits, "And blissfully happy. Can't help it. Love the job. Love my work. Look at other people in total bewilderment. I got to drink at the Savoy. It was wonderful. It's all wonderful. Why can't people enjoy what they have?"

For a writer whose early life was, at best, confused by a Catholic school upbringing, and whose later work often shows a wavering tendency toward agnosticism, Hare's treatment of the clergy is

remarkably varied and sympathetic. Streaky continues, "Lord, I have no theology. Can't do it...The whole things so clear. He's there. In people's happiness. Tonight, in the taste of that drink. Or the love of my friends. The whole thing's so simple. Infinitely loving. Why do people find it so hard?" (Hare 63)

The next scene returns to Lionel at his home. Frances has befriended him and they sit playing chess. The attraction Lionel earlier showed for Frances is now a palpable feeling hovering between them both, though it is extremely improper in the circumstances. They have just returned from taking his wife, Heather, to the hospital after she suffered a minor stroke.

Typically, Lionel was absorbed in something else and didn't even realize her danger. "I was in my study, working on my sermon," he tells Frances guiltily, "It's on this terrible poll tax thing. It's very intricate. And it's important I get it right. She fell in the kitchen. I heard nothing...So when the ambulance came, I was ashamed to say, 'Well, actually, look, this is awful, I don't know how long she's been there." (Hare 64)

For the first time the story of Lionel's children is also revealed. Both his son and daughter left under difficult circumstances. His daughter has even broken off contact completely. He asks Frances, whose father is also so involved in the church, why children react so negatively toward a religious upbringing. She responds, "Because it all seems such a waste...Of a human being. To have his mind all the time on something else. Always to be dreaming." The sole voice of outright disbelief in the play, she continues, "If I were a clergyman what I'd find unbearable is to have to talk about what I believe. Press a button and a clergyman's duty bound to tell me. At once. Even if he doesn't know me very well. He has to tell

me his innermost belief. That's what's undignified. That's why clergymen are funny, I'm afraid. Because they're not allowed to be private. They wear their inside on their outside." (Hare 66)

Before they are allowed to get too close to one another their intimate conversation is interrupted by Heather, who has risen from bed deliriously to find Frances, who she doesn't remember, in her home with her husband. Though the relationship has been innocent the moment is awkward because of Lionel's obvious desires. After he puts her back to bed Frances excuses herself, telling him, "You know what it is. It's nice, of course. I enjoy it. sitting here, playing chess. Letting you imagine." But, she says, "You're not allowed any pleasure. Except the pleasure of dreaming." (Hare 69)

From one awkward moment to another, the scene changes to the outside of Harry's home, where he is met in the street by Tommy Adair, still searching for a story on gay clergy. He intimates that Ewan has told his entire story and that, in exchange for cooperation, blowing the whistle on other "deviant" churchmen, Harry mightt spare his own name.

The vicar's response is immediate and aggressive. "I'll send you the synodical paper on exactly the subject you're interested in," he flares, "Yes. The church set up a committee some years ago. A report was commissioned. I can let you have a copy if you like. If you have space you can print it in full. Did you know we had a synodical debate? Are you a theological correspondent? The report asserts that genital acts between men are not necessarily wrong. Do you know those words? 'Necessarily'? 'Genital'?"

He continues his attack, "My big strength is, I don't believe you. No friend of mine would have spoken to you. And anyway, my life is

between me and God. And god, as I may best comprehend him, does not work through the Sunday papers. Not at least if He's who I think He is." (Hare 70)

When he is rid of the meddlesome reporter, however, Harry's show of false bravado collapses. In a soliloquy in the church he begins his prayer, "Lord, I don't know. Of course I'm frightened. What would you expect? But I won't sink to their level." He recalls the difficulty of his sexual orientation in school, remembering, "We all wore flannels. And herringbone jackets...We smoked pipes. Long evenings spent discussing Teildhard de Chardhin, and thinking what's his body like under the tweed?" His troubles run deep. "Oh God, please help me," he pleads, "I don't know. Teach me. Lord. How do you fight without hate?" (Hare 71-72)

Though Frances and Tony have been separated for months now, the advertising agency run by Frances' family reunites them in the next scene. The business has offered the Church free advertising space on billboards in the area and summoned Tony to help design the messages. The former lovers meet underneath one of the boards to discuss the possibilities.

There is, of course, some catching up for them to do. Tony relates his success in starting a weekly Bible class. He also admits he decided to impugn Lionel when he spoke to the Bishop of Southwark. Starting to sound a little less reasonable and more fanatical, Tony now claims that, through all his misfortunes with family and career, God is trying to tell the hapless Lionel something. Furthermore, he claims, Lionel is headed for disaster if he doesn't heed the message.

His decision to turn against Lionel was made easier, he claims, by his recent genuine conversion. After visiting Stella and seeing the harm the Church's neglect had done her, in a drunken fit Tony found clarity of vision. "God told me what I was here for," he claims, "It was as if I'd never heard him. And since then I have this incredible power. Oh, I'm still me. I'm Tony. I'm the same bloke. But now I can throw on three extra generators. Woosh! It's extraordinary. Whenever I want." (Hare 74-75)

Fanatical visionaries of any ilk, of course, begin to lose credibility and sympathy with an audience. Before this happens with Tony, though, Hare brings up some extenuating circumstances that help pardon some of his behavior. Frances reminds him, "This God of yours...He killed your parents." (Hare 75) Though Tony finds a way to make his mother and father's death in a freak automobile accident sound like part of some divine master plan for his own life, it is a weak argument that only makes him more defensive.

Shattering Frances' last illusion about their former affair, he tells her she was only temporary solace for his confused mind. "Don't be hurt," he consoles, "Why be hurt, Frances? It's a fact. Human love passes. God's love doesn't. Can't you find comfort in that?" Vehemently she replies, "I find it disgusting...We live here. On this earth. That's where we have to love one another." (Hare 77)

Discounting the loss of his parents as a contributor to his psychological state, Tony asserts he has found a higher plane through the process of healing. His strict interpretation of the Bible and the Church's dogma have brought him face to face with the possibility of the supernatural on earth. He claims to have found proof of an AIDS patient who was cured through oils, the laying on of hands, and the power of

prayer. His recent "discoveries" have completely usettled him. "I have to keep it down, it's hilarious, I tell you. I get on a bus, I'm sitting there, I think...'A virgin gave birth...' 'Then a corpse walked out of a tomb.'" (Hare 79) Tony's fanaticism is too much for Frances. When he tells her the overriding importance of these miracles on earth dwarfs the struggles of a stumbling believer like Lionel, she runs away, leaving him calling behind her.

While his fervency for his cause is making Tony less likable, the results of his good intentions are pulling even more strength away from his argument. In the following scene Stella is alone at the church. Unlike the other characters with soliloquies in this location, the abused woman is not praying, but mopping the floor. She bemoans her fate and explains the course that led her to this end. "Lord I dun' know," she says, "Two pounds fifty an hour? D'un seem to me religious. It's very unreligious..I dun' know why Tony went to the police. I 'ad to leave the house, 'cos I was so frightened. I 'ave a room ten feet by eight. Jus' 'cos Tony din' know better than to mind 'is own business. I'm never goin' to testify. Whatever Tony tells me. Against my own husband. Why should I?"

Touchingly, she recalls, "It was my life. I liked those days in the big bed when we din' get up. We ate and drank and watched television. Once three days went by. And 'e was kind to me. O Lord Jesus, I miss this man." (Hare 80)

Tony's evident failings begin to show just in time for the climax of the play--Lionel's struggle to keep his position--ensuring there is no neat ending, no tidy lesson to be learned from either man's approach. Arriving at Southwark's cathedral just before he is to deliver his sermon, Lionel is greeted by Kingston who helps him prepare for his meeting with the

bishop. The timing is poor. Southwark is about to react to the ordination of a female bishop in America, an act which may cause a deep schism in the Church of England.

When he arrives Southwark raves, "Christ came as a man. His chosen disciples were men. The priesthood has been occupied by men for two thousand years. A woman was given a very different function. A higher function, even. To be the mother of Christ. Are we saying we now give in to every fad and fashion? Every passing cultural upheaval? On the other side of the Atlantic they have put rochet and chimere on a woman's body." (Hare 82)

The issue the playwright raises is yet another timely concern for the Church, but the bishop's reaction to it is also an important reflection of his character. As he stressed to Lionel in the beginning of the play, his philosophy of church government is to stay the course. The dictates of the Church are not merely tradition, but law. Thus, by not changing his position relative to his parishioners as he was asked to do, Lionel has broken the Church law in Southwark's eyes.

The two men briefly debate the issue of Lionel's dismissal until the bishop loses his patience and rails at Lionel, "You did it, you know...You bring it on yourselves. All of you. Modernists. You make all these changes. You force all these issues. The remarriage of clergy. The recognition of homosexual love. New Bibles. New services. You alter the form. You dismantle the beliefs. You endlessly reinterpret and undermine. You witter on, till you become all things to all men. You drain religion of religion. And then you're so bound up in your own self-righteousness you affect astonishment when some of us suddenly say no...You've politicized everything. Your wretched Synod means exactly that. Everything turned

into an issue. Everyone belonging to a faction. The church has been turned into a ghastly parody of government." (Hare 86)

Southwark's tirade is not only an indictment of Lionel. Speaking from his alignment with the Anglo-Catholic tradition, he is lashing out at all the Liberals who, as Hare indicated in his research, are believed to be the imminent inheritors of Church government control. If Southwark may be seen as a representative of Conservative thought in general, and Lionel the bearer of Liberal ideas, their positions may also reflect Hare's expectations of state politics in Britain. Tories hold the reigns, but may be buckling under the weight of grass root dissatisfaction.

Lionel has come to the meeting prepared for such resistance, however, and turns Southwark's threats back upon him. He claims he has a case for the law to decide, since Kingston promised him job security, and furthermore threatens to involve a clerical workers' union which has just started a clergy section. He promises these actions in return for wrongful dismissal, since Southwark has not given him a reason for firing him.

Just when it seems that Southwark is entirely wrong, though, and about to be overcome by the force of freethinking righteousness, he does provide Lionel with a reason. "In any other job you'd have been fired years ago," he tells the vicar, "You're a joke, Lionel. You stand in the centre of the parish like some great wobbly girl's blouse. Crying for humanity. And doing absolutely nothing at all...You are the reason the whole church is dying. Immobile. Wracked. Turned inward. Caught in a cycle of decline. Your personal integrity your only concern. Incapable of reaching out. A great vacillating pea-green half-set jelly." Pounding the last nail Southwark finishes, "You parade your so-called humility, until it

becomes a disgusting kind of pride. Yes, we can all be right if we never actually *do* anything. I want to send a messge to your parish. Because they are far more important than we will ever be. It's a message of hope. It's to tell them the church does listen. Criteria of excellence do apply." (Hare 88-89)

Apparently Southwark's message reaches the beleagured cleric. Indeed, his words may be the most powerful voice given to Conservative thought in any British play in recent years, certainly in any work by a Labourite writer like Hare. The last few short scenes of the play serve as a denoument, wrapping up all the loose ends and primarily showing the Liberal-minded vicars licking their wounds and heading off for other horizons.

Visiting Harry's apartment after his meeting with Southwark, Lionel finds him packing to leave. He explains that his homosexuality has been revealed in the press and the strain of staying would be too great on his congregation. He is moving to Malta where he can perform baptisms, weddings, and funerals for the expatriate community, "Hatch, match, and dispatch, as they say." (Hare 92) Lionel urges him to fight, but Harry, in a final shot at the media, tells him, "For goodness' sake, don't be such an idiot. They give knighthoods to people who publish this stuff. It isn't coincidence. That's the country we're living in." (Hare 92)

Streaky plans to remain in the parish and continue his work with the community he has come to love. Lionel, meanwhile, must break his bad news to his wife. In a sad, awkward exchange, he returns home with a new gardening book for the woman who has received so little attention from him over the years, and tells her about their predicament. "I'm afraid we lose the house," he says, "We'll have to rent a flat. But that's fine. Now

the family's older. We don't need very much, and we can be together." Becoming a bit of an eleventh hour Christian himself, Lionel tries to convince her that "It's what I've wanted. I've neglected you for so long. It's so long since we were together. I don't know. You're suddenly sixty. What have I done with my life?"

Hesitatingly he asks her, "Will you...I wonder...will you come to bed with me?" In words filled with a myriad of meanings she replies, forlornly, "No. It's too late." Then, returning to the roles they have adopted over the years, Heather leaves Lionel alone in the study with his thoughts.

The last scene of the play reunites Tony, Lionel, and Frances at the church, though they deliver individual monologues played stylistically to the house and do not react to one another. Tony tries to reassure himself he is doing the right thing. "It's numbers, you see. That's what it is finally," he says, "You have to get them in."

Lionel, unchanged from the beginning of the play, petitions God again. In a somewhat existential plea he asks, "Do you remember? I challenged you. Do something. Beside this silence. Begged you. Come here and help. Do we just suffer? Is that what you want? Fight and suffer to no purpose? Yes? Is everything loss?"

Frances, for her part, is putting it all behind her. "I am going, Lord, where no one's ever heard of you," she says, "Another way of putting it, where you don't exist." As she thinks about the trip she is going to take to get away from it all, she says, "I love that bit when the plane begins to climb, the ground smooths away behind you, the buildings the hills. Then the white patches. The vision gets bleary. The cloud becomes a hard shelf. The land is still there. But all you see is white and horizon. And then you turn and head towards the sun." (Hare 97-98)

Two of the most notable things about the publicity generated by Racing Demon in its original run at the National Theatre in 1990 were the sheer *volume* of it and the *variety* of backgrounds of the play's critics. It was reviewed by every publication in Britain with a critic on staff and most major papers abroad, if not in its early weeks then after it garnered the Olivier Award for Best Play (London's version of the Tony).

Generally, response was enthusiastic and positive. The most satisfactory element of the rave reviews was critics' acknowledgement of the production's *unity* of excellence. Very often the play was acclaimed all around for its writing, acting, staging, and design. Matt Wolf in the Wall Street Journal's European edition wrote, "a major work from a premiere playwright, "Racing Demon" is that unique play that catches us all where we live, regardless of what we do or how we pray." He later added, "Director Richard Eyre makes the characters' silences as resonant as their speech, and it's the highest praise to say that the actors communicate the intimacy of an ensemble that has been together for years (which it has not)." (Wolf "Man's Inner Demons...")

In The Guardian Michael Billington agreed with Wolf's assessment of both the writing and acting. "Mr. Hare, for the most part, is extremely successful in dramatising his ideas through people," he observed, "You see, for instance, the good side of Lionel in his softly-softly approach to a young black girl terrorised by her husband for having an abortion: you also see the bad side in the sacrifice of his wife to parish preoccupations." Complimenting the players he wrote, "It is also rare to see English actos play clerics so unpatronisingly. Oliver ford Davies is superb as Lionel: a shaggy, distracted man with a sad-spaniel countenance but a fierce

tenacity when cornered. Michael Bryant as Harry is all sports-jacketed probity, David Bamber as Streaky brims over with pastoral passion and Richard Pasco as the Bishop exudes the security of power." (Billington "Faith in Miracles")

Observer critic Michael Coveney asserted, "The great mastery of *Racing Demon* which is given a National Theatre production of brisk and floating sumptuousness by Richard Eyre, in Bob Crowley's perfectly weightless design and Mark Henderson's transfiguring illuminations, lies in its relating of interesting ideas to a tensile tissue of interactive plot strands." (Coveney "Vicarage Glee-Party")

Perhaps the most congratulatory words for the production team were penned by Peter Hebblethwaite in the Times Literary Supplement who wrote, "Richard Eyre's production makes such skilful use of the symbolic possibilities of a cruciform open stage that one wonders why anyone bothered to invent the proscenium arch." (Hebblethwaite "Pastoral Problems" 172)

In a play filled with such rich, controversial ideas, there is, of course, room for disagreement. Some of the most seasoned critics did not see eye to eye on various elements of the play or its production. In his Guardian review, which was dominantly favorable, Michael Billington still found this to say about Hare's treatment of Tony, the antagonist: "My one doubt is this: whereas in *The Secret Rapture* Mr. Hare entered imaginatively into the spirit of the Tory Marian whose values he despised, he here never quite gets inside the combustible curate, Tony. In fact, I believe he takes Tony's arguments seriously: that you should neither apologise for nor disguise Christianity's dependence on the miraculous. But since Tony himslef is presented as a monomaniac raver and Walworth

Road Judas, he forfeits any shred of intellectual sympathy." (Billington "Faith in Miracles")

Meanwhile, Billington's colleague across the sea, Frank Rich (with whom Hare quarrelled so publicly about The Secret Rapture in New York) wrote, "As always Mr. Hare balances his dueling partners. For all of Ilonel's enlightened humanism, he is often as paralyzed and befuddled by doubt as his adversaries paint him to be, an ineffectual liberal of the type who earned Mr. Hare's disdain in "Plenty" and "Pravda." Tony, in contrast, delivers his extreme fundamentalist views with a boyish vigor that makes him the sexiest figure on stage and the one natural leader among the many clergymen in view." (Rich "British Playwrights Look..." C-13)

Another facet of the criticism surrounding Racing Demon was the playwright's empathy, or lack of it, for the spirit of his subject: the Church. Benedict Nightingale, writing for *The Times*, was surprisingly unaccepting of the playwright's work in portraying issues of faith on the stage. He opined, "Imagine hearing an articulate flat earther lecture on the intricacies of the universe, or a very intelligent blind man talk about the inadequacies of a landscape, or an observant fish mouth about the problems of the ozone layer. The result might be imaginative, or touching, or entertaining; but something central would be missing. So it is with David Hare's latest dramatic exploration of what he has called "the persistence of private goodness in Thatcherite Britain."

Seemingly insisting that playwrights should write only what they know (a weary adage scorned by nearly all teachers of creative fiction), Nightingale continues, "How can he satisfactorily analyze the Church of England, for all that institution's faults, when he clearly thinks the idea of

Someone Up There is a delusion and distraction, a folly and snare?" (Nightingale "An Outsider's Flawed Vision")

Printed alongside Nightingale's review in the *Times* was an article penned by Clifford Longley, the paper's Religious Affairs Editor. Longley was even less tolerant of the play. "Of the church as an institution it is only a mild caricature," he writes, "but of the Christian faith it is, it must be whispered, rather a mockery. The paly falls short of spiritual accuracy through a failure of empathy and an absence (and ignorance) of grace. There are more shadows and lights, more sublety and depth, to spiritual anguish than one of Hare's insight can encompass, it would seem." He ends his article by saying, "Religion is about soul; and so must plays about religion be, if they are to resonate with reality. What this play lacks is spiritual sincerity." (Longley "Religious Drama Without Soul")

Of course this type of criticism does not react to Hare's ability as a playwright, but to his perceived lack of religious conviction, a failing which did not seem to trouble the Church itself overly much. A week later the *Times* ran an article written by Richard Harries, the Bishop of Oxford. Harries recognized some of the potential hazards involved in writing about religious issues. "First," he warns, "the writing or the acting simply might not match th ehigh theme and the result may be the opposite of what is intended...Secondly, how does one convey that religious dimension anyway? How can one talk about human things in such a way that they point beyond themselves to that which transcends the human?"

Harries, though, feels the playwright succeeded overwhelmingly. Referring to the various plotlines involving each of the vicars he writes, "All this is good dramatic stuff, and an extremely witty dialogue, superb acting and an excellent production make it a totally absorbing and highly

entertaining evening." He even defends Hare against Longley accusation that the play has no "soul." He refers to Lionel and Frances' scene in which they discuss the problems inherent in spreading the gospel and decide there is much they cannot know for certain. "If there is a holy moment in the play this is it," writes Harries, "Both characters are in touch not only with one another, but with a reality they sense cannot easily, perhaps not at all, be put into words. In short, this is a play that hints at the *via negativa*, of St. John of the Cross, and of Eliot in *The Four Quartets*." (Harries "Finding the Soul...")

Opinions on this aspect of Racing Demon, however, are likely to be as varied as the individual belief systems of the audience members who see the production. Indeed, one of the points of the play is that no one, narrow philosophy prevails.

Also, since the production was mounted originally in early 1990, toured the country, returned to the National's repertory, closed, then was revived for the entire trilogy in 1993, many critics had the chance to revisit it and refine their opinions. Benedict Nightingale was one such reviewer. Interviewed shortly before the trilogy's press day, Nightingale had favorable comments for Hare. "I like that he's doggedly gone on with a tradition of dissent in the theatre and that he reaches large numbers of people," he said, "He's done it honorably and with tremendous integrity and has made some fair and constructive points, and he does it in a way that people find him enjoyable." About his earlier criticism of Racing Demon the *New Statesman* writer surprisingly admitted, "I, myself, am an agnostic, but the function of the Church of England seemed something Hare was not interested in. He sees their social attitudes but loses the

spiritual dimension...Perhaps I'll see it more favorably when I see it again. It *is* nice to see a play about the C of E." (Nightingale Interview)

Indeed, in his October review of the entire trilogy performed in a single day (something the critic referred to as a "Harathon") Nightingale grudgingly admired the scope and ambition of the project and even said of the first play, "*Racing Demon* is still the better (sic) of the three. The play may see what is, after all, a spiritual body too much in social terms; but it gets a fine performance from Oliver Ford Davies as a flustered, woebegone vicar dedicated to good works, and another from Adam Kotz as a curate aggressively exuding born-again faith. The strength and commitment of Eyre's company--Michael Bryant, Barbara Leigh-Hunt and Paul Moriarty, too--are never in question." (Nightingale "Dogged Hare's Anatomy of Britain")

Nightingale's assessment of Racing Demon as the best of the trilogy is a fair one. Though the other two plays are certainly dramatic and humorous in turn, as is Hare's wont, and present the theatre-going public, particularly native Britons, with the playwright's usual blend of social satire and criticism, Racing Demon will undoubtedly fare better over time and across national boundaries.

This is probably partially due to the spiritual element Nightingale complained about. Humankind's search for its place in the universe, its origins and its destiny, has been a thematic mainstay for centuries and, for all their earthly importance, transcends issues like justice and politics, the subjects of Hare's next plays. Still, an important idea alone doesn't carry a work of art. As has already been noted, Racing Demon succeeds

because of the way it relays Hare's observations and ideas about God, the Church, and man.

Depth of character, clever and intriguing dialogue, and a compelling plot combine with vital social issues to make Racing Demon an artistic *tour de force*. Then, in addition to the philosophical issues the play raised, it began one of the most important projects in contemporary British drama, providing a revealing look at how a creative process involving a playwright, director, and theatre--David Hare, Richard Eyre, and the National's Olivier stage--can evolve. The integration of these three elements became especially vital for the next two plays, Murmuring Judges and The Absence of War.

Murmuring Judges

The second play in the Trilogy, Murmuring Judges, was not greeted as warmly when it first appeared at the National's Olivier Theatre in October of 1991. Taking to task English law--the police, the bar and bench, and the prisons--Hare attempts to prove the futility of a system that is commonly known to handle less than two percent of the crimes in Britain, convicts even fewer criminals, then recycles them in jails that prove training grounds for further misdeeds.

The intertwining plots of Murmuring Judges reflect the three levels of the law as Hare perceives them. At the constabulary level are PC Barry Hopper, a semi-corrupt officer who will stop at nothing to nab his culprits, including planting false evidence; and PC Sandra Bingham, his sometime lover caught in a moral dilemma: reveal the truth about her rising-star, detective boyfriend or observe *esprit de corps* and turn the other way.

At the bar and bench are Sir Peter Edgecombe QC, head of a law firm and prone to taking on attractive female barristers fresh from law school to handle his criminal cases and act as dinner and opera escorts, and Justice Cuddeford, a career judge enamored of the roast venison and fine wines in the dining halls of the Inns of Court, but averse to actual contact with the public or the prison system he administers. Continuing the trend established in his earliest works, the voice of goodness and moral indignation belongs to a woman. Balancing these unscrupulous characters is Irina Platt, Sir Peter's most recent acquisition. A native Antiguan, Irina is an outsider to her profession in terms of both her sex and

origin, facts which do not prevent her from becoming a cunning legal crusader and ostensibly the play's hero.

Running the gamut through the police, the courts, and into the prisons is Gerard McKinnon. Irish born but raised in England, McKinnon is a product of hard times, desperate to support his family and handicapped child. He agrees to accompany a pair of more seasoned criminals on a heist and is caught after his first larcenous act. He is given an extremely harsh sentence (presumably because he is Irish) and sent to prison where, because of overcrowding, he is housed in the wing for serious offenders. The main dramatic action of the play involves Irina's attempts to secure a lighter sentence for McKinnon and the obstacles she faces, put up by an overburdened, uncaring, sometimes corrupt legal system.

Structurally speaking, Murmuring Judges is the weakest of the three plays in the Trilogy. An abundance of research and overzealous lecturing are hazards Hare encounters in unfolding his storyline. Seemingly, he found it difficult to balance the issues of the play with a well-constructed and compelling plot and believable, empathetic characters, something Racing Demon had done so well. Instead of a Shavian weighing of ideas against a backdrop of personal turmoil, the play provides iconographic mouthpieces and dialogue that occasionally seems more akin to agit-prop drama than Hare's usual brand of contemporary realism.

The process of writing Murmuring Judges began in much the same way as its predecessor. Explaining his ambition to put on three plays and searching for his subject for number two, Hare said, "The law seemed the natural second subject. But when I went to see the lives of lawyers, it was quickly clear that they were only one small part of a process. And it was

the process itself, the three different parts of it and how they relate--or rather how they don't relate--which is what most interested me."

To combine these potentially disparate parts, Hare stumbled upon a structural metaphor. "I wanted to present three different worlds," the playwright explained, "Prison, the Bar and Bench, and the Police. It was painfully difficult to find a structure which could accommodate all three. The whole poiont is that each one is a sort of trade union, and does not connect to the others. So you can imagine my pleasure when I found the operatic metaphor, and in particular when I realised that the triangular structure of the play was reflected in the triangular structure of *The Magic Flute*. Just as *The Magic Flute* begins with those three famous chords--and everything follows from them--so the play, whether anyone notices it or not, is constructed musically: ensemble, duet, aria, duet, ensemble." (Hare Discussion)

If Hare's theoretical explanation of the play's structure seems a little obfuscatory, the practical application of the operatic metaphor in production proved even more elusive. Though a dramatic score was assembled for the play by Richard Hartley, and the first act even ends at a Royal Opera House production of *The Magic Flute*, the connection between the music and the plot of the play is a tenuous one. As for the structure of scenes ("ensemble, duet, aria, duet, ensemble"), it is a pattern for large cast dramas Hare has followed at least since Pravda, perhaps as early as Fanshen, and one certainly not unknown to his contemporaries.

All this is not to say, however, that Murmuring Judges is a *bad* play, or that it lacks societal relevance and dramatic importance. Hare had provided himself a difficult act to follow by beginning the trilogy with Racing Demon. If anything, the topical concerns in the second play

might have been even closer to the writer's keen political interests, therefore making persuasive argument more of a temptation. In Asking Around, Hare explains:

> It was startling to pass from interviewing priests to interviewing policemen and find that both groups were talking in similar terms.
>
> Although the policemen I met were better paid than my inner-city vicars, and of course by instinct undoubtedly more conservative, nevertheless their disillusion with the irrelevance or antagonism of the government was considerably more vocal and certainly more profound. Nothing had quite prepared me for the overt politicization of the police. Of all Thatcher's children, these were the least grateful. By throwing money at them, she had not bought their loyalty. On the contrary. She had only made them more cynical. I already knew form books I had read that policemen had been deeply marked by their experience of being asked to help destroy the miner's strike. Many, especially those from the miners' home towns, were genuinely shocked to find themselves attracting the vociferous hatred of people whom they had known from childhood to be decent and law-abiding. but I did not know until I went out in the squad cars myself that so many policemen, patrolling the hopeless housing estates or trying to keep order on the lawless streets, had developed so clear an analysis of their own role. In their view, they were being used. The Conservative administrations of the eighties had gone hell for leather for economic policies which were crudely biased towards the rich. They had then turned to the police and blamed them for failing to cope with the huge social problems which government itself had created. (Hare 6-7)

The problem Hare relates is well documented. Again and again Thatcher and her followers relied on the power of the constabulary to defend them against social, civil, political uprisings. One particularly notorious example occured during the 1984 coal miners' strike. Ian Gilmour, who served in various capacities in Thatcher's Cabinet, reports in

Dancing With Dogma: Britain Under Thatcherism, "The police, one inspector later told the Police Federation Conference, 'were used by the coal Board to do all their dirty work. Instead of seeking the civil remedies under the existing civil law, they relied completely on the police to solve their problems by implementing the criminal law.' The police, he went on, were being incessantly abused and violently assaulted in order to allow the government 'to maintain a low profile for political purposes.'" (Gilmour 110)

This relationship between the government, the police, and the law becomes an issue more than once in the play. The reverence they demand provides the work with its title. In his preface to the published version of Murmuring Judges Hare explains that the meaning of the phrase is "from a legal expression, meaning to speak ill of the judiciary," and that "it is still an offence in Scottish law." (Hare iii) This warning became the production's striking visual opening. Drawn fully around the six-sided stage in the Olivier Theatre was an enormous red curtain with these words emblazoned on its front by hidden projectors.

When the curtain parted and the play began, it was immediately obvious Mumuring Judges differed from Racing Demon in more ways than dramatic structure and dialogue. While the former began intimately, with a lone cleric in a chapel praying to God, the newer play thundered to life with a bustle of scenery and activity. Hare describes the first scene this way: "An empty stage. Then suddenly from nowhere they're all there--the judge, the jury, the battery of lawyers in wigs, the public, the police, the press, the ushers, the guards, and at the centre of the forward-facing court, the defendants. The entire company has appeared in the blinking of an eye." (Hare Murmuring Judges 1)

Of course, such theatre magic is facilitated by the Olivier Theatre itself. With its enormous upstage and wing space, and rows of vomitoria leading through the audience to the stage, such a company can be assembled in a matter of seconds. While its forerunner began on a bare, crucifix-shaped stage in the much smaller Cottesloe Theatre and only later transferred to the cavernous Olivier, Murmuring Judges was written with the 1,100-seat grand stage in mind.

The new production flair made possible by the change of venue may have salvaged the trilogy mid-life. Besides the simple fact that, chronologically, Murmuring Judges is the center of the work, more interestingly, it became a sort of fulcrum for the entire project, balancing what came before, Racing Demon, and what was to follow, The Absence of War. This involves both benefits and drawbacks. While the script itself is flawed in many regards compared to its companions, the production style, engineered by designer Bob Crowley and Director Richard Eyre, literally set the stage for the future mounting of the entire trilogy.

According to both the playwright and the director, performing in the Olivier Theatre carries with it a certain weight of responsibility, and requires particular qualities from the play that is to be performed there. Firstly, it must have a sense of importance to the audience. As Hare says, "The audience know that it would be wrong to have something called 'The National Theatre' and then present new plays only in the smaller auditoria. It seems to me important to put big public subjects on this stage, which reflect the audience's own lives." (Hare Discussion)

Additionally, the space is not conducive to an intimately styled play. While some smaller cast plays can pull it off (Racing Demon contains only eleven speaking parts) larger ones are usually the bill of fare

(Murmuring Judges has nearly thirty, plus extras, while The Absence of War uses a company of at least twenty-six.) "The production has to have a bit of muscularity to it," says Richard Eyre, "it's got to be robust. It (the Olivier) can't take fragile writing. You have to make bold statements. They can be complex but they have to be bold--visually and in their acting as well. And, of course, it's got to have a public face to it. A theatre where people are sat in a 130 degree arc--the acting has to turn out, not in. Plays with direct address work better in there." (Eyre Interview)

A big public subject, robustness, and a strong visual flair, no matter the flatness of some characters and a few script problems, are certainly things Murmuring Judges has going for it. Almost to a reviewer London critics responded favorably to Eyre's staging and Crowley's design for the play. Of course, the production team had to work from the playwright's model, and in this respect Hare's fifteen years as an occasional film director and screenwriter profitted him. Murmuring Judges, like many of his plays, prescribes certain visual elements and production techniques. There is a cinematic structure to the play--close-up, crowd scene, montage, fade-out--that translates into a varied and compelling stage presentation.

Once onstage, the fluidity of the company's movements and the film-like qualities of the production continue. In the opening scene, a spotlight separates the defendant, McKinnon, from the courtroom as his thoughts are presented at the same time his verdict is being read. While the Judge proclaims a five year prison sentence, the young offender ruminates aloud, "Finally I get it, yes, it *is* happening, these men, every one of them silver-haired, judicious, informed, they will go home to their wives, to wine in fine glasses and the gossip of the Bar, they will walk the

streets and laugh and complain about their lives, and I...And *I*...the stuff of their profession...I will go to my gaol." (Hare 2)

In Racing Demon the method of direct address Hare employed was prayer. One at a time the characters, even the agnostic Frances, found themselves in the church talking to God. Pretenses are dropped for the next two plays, however, and principal characters participate in unabashed downstage center soliloquizing. Like the first play, these monologues are used mainly as expository devices and segues between scenes. In Murmuring Judges, though, they tend to carry the added burden of being the bearer of statistics and incriminating factual information.

When the court disbands, the setting is immediately replaced by a new one. "The court at once melds into the incoming scene," Hare suggests, "led by the defense counsel who walk from the court towards us." (Hare 2) The effect is that of a rapid dissolve, one image replaced by another. This technique, which continues throughout the play, was assisted in production by a triptych of enormous screens, onto which were flashed slide projection images appropriate to each setting. In the charge room, images of fingerprint sheets, a giant wall of clipboards, and mile high piles of file baskets stretched from the stage floor up into the fly gallery. Exterior scenes were accompanied by cloudless skies or leafy trees, while the barristers' offices sat in front of immense library shelves, crammed with legal briefs and texts. The tri-screen approach also allowed the stage to be split into separate, alternating scenes, the live equivalent of a filmed series of dissolves into different locales. Finally, the rear wall projections allowed for a relatively uncluttered floor plan,

clearing the stage of unnecessary settings and props and focussing attention on the actors and the text.

McKinnon's sentencing at the very beginning of the play thrusts the audience directly into the thick of the plot with little expository preparation. Their position becomes like that of a defense attorney or detective with a half-prepared case being rushed through the legal system.

The scene that follows the sentencing takes place in the hall of the High Court. Later in the same day, after his session defending McKinnon and his two cohorts, Sir Peter Edgecomb encounters Justice Cuddeford. When Cuddeford gibes him about losing his case, Sir Peter's attitude is nonchalant. "Good Lord, I'm astonished anyone mentioned it," he says, "It was a very trivial affair. I only took a criminal case as a favour...I came to it late." (Hare Murmuring Judges Rehearsal Draft 3)

He reveals that he picked up the case at the last minute as a favor to his partner, whose horse was running in Paris. As if his own flippant attitude toward his clients' defense and the original lawyer's lack of interest weren't enough, it is later revealed that his partner has a habit of leaving town when the words "legal aid" are mentioned, as they were in this case.

Both Sir Peter and Cuddeford represent the Old Guard network in the Courts. Each indulges heavily in the privileges of his position and protects some of the Court's most archaic traditions. When Sir Peter introduces Irina Platt to the judge, the two men share an anecdote that reveals much about their conservative alignment. "Chugger," a famous old judge Cuddeford relates, "(would) say to a lady barrister, 'I'm sorry I can't hear you.' She's start speaking louder. 'I still can't hear you.' She'd

say, 'Do you have a problem with my diction, my Lord?' 'No, I don't think so,' he'd say, 'I just sense I'd hear you more clearly if you attended the court wearing black.'"

Though Cuddeford's story is meant to be humorous, its moral is not taken lightly. He adds, "There is a serious point, I'm afraid. It's the judge's court. It's his. He runs it as he sees fit. And in English law, it's very important he does." (Hare 7) The extent to which the conservative members of the Court will go to defend their position and privilege is further illustrated in a campaign Sir Peter's office has begun to prevent legislators from deregulating the roles of barrister and solicitor. Spearheaded by Irina they have collected a million pounds collected so far and have hired a public relations firm to campaign against the maneuver. Sir Peter insists, "If we were to merge the functions of barrister and solicitor, if any move were made to dismantle the specialist bar, I don't think the public begin to appreciate just how disastrous the consequences would be." (Hare 8)

Though this concern is couched in one of the play's reprehensible characters, the larger issue, government interference in the professional realm, is one the playwright discovered is a major concern among all the institutions he examined. "There was a common assumption among society's sergeant-major's that they had no chance of influencing policy," Hare observed, "Nor had they any expectation that policy would be sane or relevant to their own day-to-day experiences. Their task was to stand in the firing line, mitigating policy's effects. Everywhere I went I encountered professionals who believed that the government had ceased to listen to them...It had become an article of faith among the ideologues at Number Ten that professionals were incapable of

representing anything but their own interests. What was under attack from above was not just the prosperity of all those whose job it was to help other people, but the idea of professionalism itself." (Hare Asking Around 7)

Of course the issue of professionals defending their autonomy becomes somewhat more sympathetic when it is the constabulary on the line. What Sir Peter is up in arms about is the disruption of a class system within the Courts whereby barristers are privileged lawyers, members of the Bar permitted to argue cases before the High Court, while solicitors are journeymen legal assistants, not allowed in the Bar and employed only in the lower courts until they work their way up.

He even takes a twisted sort of pride in the kind of unscrupulous, symbiotic relationships that have developed between those in the higher Court echelons and the politicians who administer them. Warning of possible consequences should barristers and solicitors be merged, Sir Peter says, "And when some...shady Tory politician is accused of consorting with some doxy behind Paddington Station...Then at that point...when he needs us...then he will know the folly of diluting our profession. he will feel it, oh yes, most urgently. As urgently as if there were no electric light." (Hare 9)

The dubious question of ethics behind Sir Peter's statements is made even more serious by his partner in the conversation, *Justice* Cuddeford. It is the judge who cuts the banter short when his clerk comes to escort him to a session in court. After their singularly biased talk, it is mildly ironic when Cuddeford exits saying, "I must go and do some judging." (Hare 10)

The next scene, near the Inns of Court, provides an opportunity to explain what Irina's position, low solicitor on the totem pole, is like.

Returning to her office, she encounters Woody Pearson, Sir Peter's clerk, who provides her with her daily briefs. "You're in Kingston in the morning. Defending an a.b.h.," he tells her, "Then I hope we're going to get you over to Southwark. It's just for an adjournment." Ascertaining that she has a fast car, he asks, "Can you squeeze in a quick plea in Brighton? You can read it while you're driving." (Hare 11)

Besides the difficult logistical juggling, the schedule Woody presents, which is seemingly meant to be an average daily workload, provides little to no contact with the actual *people* Irina is meant to be representing. Nor does it give her sufficient opportunity to learn about the cases she is arguing, the same reason Sir Peter gave for losing McKinnon's case.

Her life as newcomer is complicated further by a personal affront. Sir Peter invites her, via Woody, to accompany him to the Royal Opera for a production of *The Magic Flute* before working on an interim injunction that evening. "Don't fret," Woody tells her, "It's only for appearances. He goes to Covent Garden, he needs something nice to hold his right arm. To be *seen* to hold his right arm." (Hare 12) Irina immediately sees the offer for what it is, a form of sexual harassment, and declines.

Woody, however, warns her against refusal. He insists, "The time is going to come when you want to make a stand. About something. I don't know what. Don't waste it on something which really doesn't matter. Like whether you're in the Crush Bar tonight. Why put his back up? Why start badly? He's innocent. He's a decent man. He's flash but he's decent. It's good advice. Fight when it matters. Because, surely to God, that moment will come." Recognizing the clubishness of the Bar,

Woody tells her, "The point is, it's a team. There's a lot of latitude. But you play in a team. You want to start inside, not outside." (Hare 13)

For all of Woody's foreshadowing, Irina still declines for the time being. Though she is willing to participate in other schemes of Sir Peter's, such as collecting donations for his advertising campaign, her self-respect will not allow her to compromise her integrity.

To balance his treatment of the three components of the law, Hare alternates scenes in each environment. After beginning with lawyers and judges at the court, he follows McKinnon into the penal system. Arriving at his prison, the young convict is met by Raymond Beckett, a guard. Having encountered so many repeat offenders, Beckett assumes McKinnon has been through the routine of check-in before and is surprised to find he is a first timer.

Hare uses McKinnon's incarceration to illustrate many of the problems with the present prison system in Britain. Nothing seems to go right in the entire process. Beckett asks why McKinnon is so late in arriving:

GERARD: They took me to Pentonville. But then it turned out there wasn't any room.

BECKETT: There's no room here. But we'll make some. Why is it midnight?

GERARD: Then there wasn't a van.

BECKETT: Again?

GERARD: They couldn't find one. (Hare 15)

Beckett is able to do little to alleviate McKinnon's problems. He tells him, "We've put you on D-wing. We shouldn't really. It's for lifers. But it's

that or sleeping in the chapel." Then, after taking his possessions and clothes, he tells him, "You're meant to have a shower. But the water's off. So you can get dressed.' (Hare 15-16) Finally, to visually illustrate the prison's neglect, the uniform McKinnon is given is several sizes too large for him, and he is refused a belt on the grounds that he might try to kill himself with it.

Though Beckett has to, in Hare's words, mitigate the effects of policy, which in this instance involve prison overcrowding and underfunding, and a lack of manpower and organization, he is sympathetic to McKinnon's plight. The young man has a wife at home with two children, one of them struck with Downs Syndrome, and he is concerned about their welfare. He advises him, "I think someone better tell you. Before you get started. You'd better learn. I've seen people go crazy when it's their first time. What you have to do is put the past behind you. Do you understand? You got done. You did wrong. Society's put you in jail. OK, now don't brood. Work to the future. Work to the moment when you get out." (Hare 17)

As Beckett escorts McKinnon to his cell the scene changes to a London police station charge room. WPC Sandra Bingham begins Hare's introduction to the Constabulary with a soliloquy about the problems of policing. Her monologue, densely packed with statistics and sound bytes, begins:

> You see it's all a mess. That's what it is, mostly. If you take the charge room for instance, there's maybe thirty or forty people arrested in a day...Disturbing the peace. Failing to appear on a summons. Failing to carry out conditions of bail. Failing to produce a current car licence. Failing to fulfil

> community service. Getting drunk. Getting drunk and going for a joyride. Getting drunk and then driving home. Attacking your wife. Who then won't testify. Trying to cash a stolen cheque, only being so stupid you don't even try to make the signatures match.

And the list goes on. Like the vicars in Racing Demon, her complaint is that members of her profession are being distracted from actually doing their jobs. "It's the stuff of policing," she says, "All you have to do with it is be a ledger clerk. You fill in bits of paper. Every officer carries thirty-six bits of paper about their person at any one time." (Hare 20) Unlike those same clerics, however, Sandra's expression of grievance is not directly motivated by actions in the play. While the characters' prayers in Racing Demon were a continuation of the dramatic action, many of the monologues in Murmuring Judges seem to be an interruption of that action.

Her list of grievances is better served by the scene that follows her introduction, which actually *portrays* some of those problems. Sandra arrives at the charge room with a culprit in tow. The accused, a noisy young man named Keith, has been brought in on a routine charge of attempting to burgle a car and possible drug possession. He provides a sampling of the difficulties the constables face in dealing with criminals. Vociferously uncooperative, he refuses to answer questions or sit calmly, and claims drugs were planted on him by Sandra.

While the desk officer, Lester, is busy filling out forms with the arresting officer, two more arrests are brought in, a mother and daughter who were caught trying to pass stolen checks. Both women are near hysterics and need special attention from female officers for their bookings. Sandra moans, "I never understand it, you make an arrest, it

takes precisely two minutes, you bring them in and you wait, on average, on *average* four hours." (Hare 29) Then, into the bustle of activity, burst detectives Barry Hopper and Abdul "Jimmy" Khan.

Obviously a department favorite, Barry reminds them of the solution to their paperwork problem, a refrain they all share in: "Don't bring anyone in!" He tells them, "I mean, come on, you boys, just think of it, if you never made any arrests, you'd all be out there on the streets all the time, and London would be so much better policed." (Hare 30)

The involvement of the police in the main plot of the play is now revealed: Barry and Jimmy are the heroes of the station because they managed to apprehend and get the courts to convict a ring of thieves, one of whom was Gerard McKinnon. Though two of the criminals, McKinnon's friends who drew him into the job, were caught red-handed, Barry is still surprised at the conviction. "It's a sort of record," he says proudly, "The Crown Prosecution Service didn't lose the papers. The witnesses actually turned up. There was no psychiatrist to say their mothers never gave them the tit. Three men were actually sent down for a crime they committed. Heavens to Betsy, we got a result!" (Hare 36)

When they are alone, however, Sandra expresses some reservations about the conviction. Barry admits he knew McKinnon's friends from previous run-ins, though not McKinnon himself. Sandra is puzzled that Barry never mentioned this before. She also doubts the younger man's guilt and wonders why his sentence was so severe for a first offence. Barry tells her, "He lied. That didn't help him. Let's face it, he told a pack of lies. What's more, he was, sort of, well, what's the word? He was kind of *Irish* as well." (Hare 38)

Sandra, who is herself studying to become a detective, is still apparently a little naive in the ways of the court. She asks incredulously if judges really think that way. Barry replies, "We are talking about a body of men who sometimes choose to go to work dressed in stockings and suspenders. I'm buggered if I know how their bloody minds work...Next time you're tempted to be serious when you look at a judge. Under the robes. Under the language. Under the gravity. Please remember: he has made a style choice for which any adult male except Danny la Rue would be instantly arrested."

Levity aside, though, Barry suggests, "They don't *know* they're prejudiced. That's not how they think of it...I know it. I've seen it so many times. The judge thought, I'm being nice, I'm being decent, I'm giving him less than the others. In *spite* of the fact that he's Irish." (Hare 39)

Their differences in opinon about McKinnon's case become more important when it is revealed that Sandra and Barry have a relationship *outside* the station. She asks him why he is putting on a front of heartlessness, pretending he doesn't care about criminals and bragging to the other officers about his supposed drunken antics at a party celebrating his success, and tells him she knows another side of him when they are alone together. His answer is similar to Woody's lecture to Irina. "Well, you have to do all that, don't you? If you're a copper, I mean. You've got to *be* a copper. It's expected. You have to give it lots of mouth. Talk about how you go over the side. If you say, oh I just went home, had a Lucozade and thought about Sandra, you're letting the boys down. Didn't they tell you? It's a team game." (Hare 41)

Apparently the chance for individuality and autonomous decision making is something Hare found endangered by not only the

government, but the professions themselves. Though various forms of backscratching and politicking may not be seen as serious threats compared to outside forces, they are still portrayed as disruptive and potentially damaging, at the very least unethical.

Ethics, though, are not the strong point of many of the characters in Murmuring Judges. Returning to her original line of questioning, Sandra asks Barry if he actually lied when he didn't acknowledge his familiarity with the two thieves he convicted. Then she raises an even thornier point. "The problem is, Barry," she says, "You see what I'm asking...Why did they pretend not to know you?" (Hare 43) But before he can answer, the charge room roars to life again with complications concerning the prisoners, a call about a sudden death, and a complaint about a pub fight. Sandra accompanies a group of bobbies out the door in full riot gear, on their way to the brawl, as the scene changes again to the interior of McKinnon's prison.

Beckett leads Irina to a visitor's room in the prison where she has arranged a conversation with McKinnon concerning his case. Though he seems to be tumbling rapidly into despair, Irina buoys his spirits with the hope of an appeal. "Your sentence was harsh," she tells him, "By any standards, it was ridiculous." (Hare 49) She assures McKinnon that she has thought a great deal about the miscarriage of justice that landed him in prison and suggests if she can get the truth of his story she may be able, with Sir Peter's help, to secure him a lighter sentence.

The line the novice lawyer tosses him is enough to get McKinnon talking. As he relates the actual events leading up to his arrest Hare gives the audience the chance to play detective, piecing together bits of his

story and Barry's explanation. McKinnon reports that three days after the heist he still hadn't been paid for his part in it, so he visited his accomplices to ask for his money. That was when the detectives arrived to search the flat. He was asked to leave when Barry emerged from a back room with a bag of what seemed to be explosives. Unfortunately he saw the contents of the bag before departing. Though he is sure the detective planted the incriminating evidence, he tells Irina he has no idea why this would be necessary.

In the original script, the published version of Murmuring Judges, the detective produced a bag of what may or may not have been cocaine. A simple ruse, seen countless times on television police shows, planting drugs on a suspect's person or in his home is a recognized way of forcing a confession to some less serious crime or of getting an habitual criminal locked away for a longer period of time. In the revised script, however, the issue becomes much more serious because of its relation to the English-Irish conflict in Britain.

Though Gerard McKinnon is British, his cohorts in the crime, Travis and Fielding, are Irish and, as Barry tells Sandra, "He may happen to hail from the North. But he did stand with a load of Micks outside the Irish pub on Clapham Common every evening. I think we can guess his primary allegiance." (Hare 38) Found in the dwelling of an Englishman, the dynamite Barry "discovered" may have been a curiosity and cause for investigation, but unearthed in the flat of a pair of criminal Irishmen, it is cause for immediate alarm. Travis and Fielding knew, because of the activities of the Irish Republican Army on the mainland, that any English judge and jury would be *very* hard on them if that evidence were brought to court.

As he nears the end of his story, a bell rings in the prison announcing tea and recreation time. Before leaving Irina comforts him, "I shouldn't say this. It's irresponsible. They teach you at college you must never do this. But you do have a friend now. I promise you." (Hare 57)

All the pieces are nearly in place to tie the three elements of the Law together in a single plotline. The final scene of the first act completes the structural setup. As Irina leaves Gerard in the prison, a lighting change isolates him on one side of the stage while Barry and Jimmy appear on the opposite side at the police station. In a brief exchange it is revealed that, as a result of his brilliant detective work, Barry has been promoted to the "Flying Squad," a special operations branch within the constabulary. He and Jimmy are on their way out to celebrate.

Simultaneously the scene continues in the prison. Beckett enters to escort McKinnon back to his cell and, casting some doubt on what has just transpired between he and Irina, says, "Did someone say something about an appeal? Look, did that lawyer tell you it was terrible? Did she say a terrible injustice had been done? And how awful this prison is? Then what did she do? I'll tell you. She walked away. Walk in. Upset them. Leave them. That's lawyers." (Hare 59-60)

Then, picking up the Mozart motif Hare supposedly used to organize his plot, the overture of *The Magic Flute*, which has been playing softly under these scenes, roars to life and the center of the stage becomes the Royal Opera House where Sir Peter and Irina have just arrived, arm in arm, to see the show. It seems Irina, having stumbled upon the cause Woody told her she would find to fight for, *can* play at Sir Peter's game. Allowing herself to be shown around and introduced to various dignitaries in the

audience, Irina eventually brings up the subject of McKinnon and convinces the elder barrister to accept his appeal case.

Though the significance of *The Magic Flute,* its melody and structure, may not be immediately apparent, the construction and staging of this scene are far more appealing than many of its pedestrian predecessors. The juxtaposition of images and characters--the policemen leaving for a drink at the end of a long day, the criminal stewing in his cold steel cell, and the upper crust lawyers out on the town--speaks volumes more than some of the play's unceasing statistics. As the Mozart crashes to life and the prison warders warn "Lights out!" the play becomes truly thought-provoking and meaningful.

Perhaps one of the reasons the David Hare Trilogy as a whole was such a success with its London audiences is that it sometimes appeals to the same curiosity that makes the Royal family such an obsession. It provides a stolen look at hidden, private, *privileged* lives that most theatre patrons--even the wealthier ones--will likely never see.

The opening of the second act is one such instance. Hare's directions read, "As the audience return, we find that guests are gathering in a pannelled ante-room in Lincolns Inn. They are all dressed in white tie and tails, for a formal dinner in the Hall. The High Table is visible beyond, in the Hall itself, laid out magnificently, with each place marked by four different wine glasses. The Inn's best silver is on display." (Hare 64) It is an occasion attended by only the upper crust of British elite. The Home Secretary, Charles Kendrick, remarks to Justice Cuddeford, "What do I see? An ex-Prime Minister, an earl and a High Commissioner...The

Governor of the Bank of England." Cuddeford, used to the company at the Inns, replies, "Yes. We've been trawling." (Hare 65)

As Cuddeford strikes up conversation with the Home Secretary his motives, and indeed the *raison d'être* for the entire dinner, become immediately obvious. It is a time honored way for various inter-related professions, especially politicians. lawyers, and judges, to meet and find ways to help one another. As Cuddeford explains, "The law is a college. We meet. We talk. A judge perhaps has a word with a barrister. He says nothing overt. Nothing critical. Maybe only a look, a chance remark. And yet all the time...there are hints. Thanks to these a barrister is learning. The social *is* the professional." (Hare 68)

The judge's interest tonight, and Sir Peter's as well when he joins the two men, is in the question of merging barristers and solicitors. Cuddeford points out to Kendrick, who assumedly would have a fair amount of sway in the vote, that the Law as an institution is like a great, solid rock that has been built on over the centuries and must not be troubled by fad or fancy--an argument similar to the Bishop of Southwark's concerning the state of the Church in Racing Demon.

Kendrick, though at first seemingly unprepared to defend himself against such lobbying, proves a match for the judge. He grants Cuddeford acknowledgement of the long tradition of the Inns of Court, but suggests that is no reason for the legal profession to become staid. The men debate the problems with each other's positions, thereby arguing some of the themes the playwright feels are relevant to their end of the profession.

In Germany, Kendrick poses, "they've reduced all prison sentences radically, by up to one quarter, even one third, without any effect on the

criminal statistics." Becoming angered that neither Cuddeford nor Sir Peter are aware of this revelatory information, the Home Secretary adds, "To be frank we're reaching a point where we'll just run out of ways of requesting the judiciary to be less *trigger-happy*," suggesting that sentencing practices in Britain are what is overpopulating the prisons and burdening taxpayers. (Hare 71)

In a chilling response, Cuddeford tells him, "Truly it is your problem, not ours. You see, just think, if for one single moment, when I'm at work in my court, if I begin to consider...if I ever consider what prison is now like...then I cannot fairly administer justice. Because my head is full of what we may call failings of society...Which are truly not my concern." (Hare 72)

After Cuddeford and Kendrick are separated in the dinner procession Sir Peter adds to the dilemma, suggesting the one thing they should all be grateful for is the British police. "It is one of the great mercies of your situation that only three per cent of all crimes reach the courts," he says, "Just imagine the scale of your problems if the police began to have some significant success...The system is already strained to breaking point by a force which is catching scarcely anyone at all." (Hare 74)

The scene ends with an ironic grace intoned by Justice Cuddeford in which he asks that "God save Thy Church, the Queen, the Royal Family and this Realm; God Send us Peace and Truth in Christ our Lord." (Hare 75) With the apparent dearth of peace and especially truth in their field, Hare suggests divine intervention may be the Law's only hope.

Shifting the focus back to the police, the next scene begins with a soliloquy delivered by Jimmy in which he reiterates some of the difficulties involved in his day-to-day work. While Hare's research into this area of

policing and jailing should be appreciated, he has found better, less pedantic ways of using the information in the past. Jimmy's monologue covers a more complex scene change than usually occurs in Hare's plays--the set transforms from the Inns of Court dining hall to the interior of the police station complete with slide projections, howling sirens and flashing lights. However, the long list of facts he hurls directly at the audience creates an impression of preachiness that at times in Murmuring Judges is a handicap to the plot.

Jimmy's speech leads into a nighttime scene in the charge room. Two more examples of cases the constables routinely deal with are presented--a non-English speaking couple who have to be held for immigration officials, and a man pulled in for drunken driving who literally grovels on his knees for the charges to be dismissed so he will not lose his license and his ability to work. While these minor crises flow fairly quickly and are at once dramatically interesting and informative, it is not long before Hare's coppers fall into a by now familiar pitfall: becoming uniformed statisticians.

Barry bursts into the station complaining, "Abstracting electricity! Is that the most boring crime of all time?" As he relates the mundane details of his case to his rapt colleagues, he adds, "I read this statistic. If you take all the crime, all of it, every single bit, in money it doesn't add up to what's lost every year in tax evasion. And yet look at us! Here we all are...One hundred and thirty thousand policemen. Twenty-eight thousand in London alone...To collect a sum of money--at incredible expense--which is actually less than the government happily lets rich bastards get up and walk away with every year." (Hare 84-85)

When the shop talk subsides and various characters return to their duties, Hare returns to the plot essentials with a conversation between Barry and Sandra about their jobs and, more particularly, about the McKinnon case. Pressed to the wall by Sandra's probing, Barry admits, "To be honest, he shouldn't be in prison. But then none of them should. Because it isn't a deterrent. He shouldn't be in prison becasue prison doesn't work. I'd dye them...The colour according to what they're found to have done. Give them red hands for a burglary. If it's a sex offence, paint their heads green. There should be a code, so we all know. So we can all laugh at them when they walk down the street." (Hare 90)

While Sandra is initially sympathetic to Barry's views, the part of her that is urging her on to test for officer status, to rise in the ranks and improve the system, forces her to scrutinize his actions further. She tells him point blank, "I took out the file on the Fielding case. Something bothered me. You sent the boy out...But you lied about that at the trial. And then you talked alone with the two who already knew you. Why? Why did you do that?" (Hare 92)

Barry's defense is that "a copper is allowed something. It's all he's got. You're allowed a few private moments with criminals. You're allowed a way of doing things which is actually your own." And, he admits to Sandra, his way of doing things is to carry along fake dynamite to make the suspects think they might be in for more trouble if they don't cooperate.

The issue Hare raises with Barry's vigilantism is indeed a difficult one to resolve. Certainly everyone is interested in justice, but at what cost? The question becomes evern thornier when he tells Sandra the net result of the information he bullied out of McKinnon's cohorts. He points out,

"Three weeks later in the City of London when some Mick bullion robbers--Kilmartin? Remember? Yes, you read about it--on the front page--when Kilmartin and his gang turned up at the bank, thanks to that little package I showed Travis and Fielding, the Flying Squad was waiting!" And, he adds, the second gang showed up with shotguns they were ready to use. He implores her, "Sandra these people are scum...And we're not being given the power we need to deal with them. A policeman without power, that's a contradiction. They're sending us out with *nothing* these days. So we each have to make it. You make your own stick of dynamite. And then you use it." (Hare 97)

One of Hare's interviewees, the real life Ron Walker, agrees in theory with Barry. Walker eventually lost his job by going public with an accusation of high level tampering with crime statistics in the police. Before the scandal that shook the constabulary, though, he was a beat cop just like Barry. "Look, you have to start from the position that the police are very aware of dishonesty and its uses," he told Hare, "A good policeman uses a degree of dishonesty but he knows how to control it. You have to police yourself. Once you yield to temptation, there's a tendency for it to grow. If you steal a pound, you might as well steal a million. It's every day, the temptation. You have to be Jekyll and Hyde." (Hare Asking Around 111)

The dilemma horns Sandra is caught on may be the closest Hare gets in Murmuring Judges to a careful, fair weighing of both sides of an issue. The daughter and granddaughter of policemen, and now an officer candidate herself, Sandra is entirely too familiar with the problems Barry poses. Still, the idealist in her, and perhaps in Hare, struggles for purity of the law's interpretation and enforcement. "It isn't right, Barry," she

finally scolds him, "It's just stupid, it's bloody stupid. That's the thing about you, Barry, you used to be smart. You were really smart. Until your main interest got to be in beating the system. Working out your grievance. And that's when you began to get really dumb. (Hare 98)

Their intimate discussion is interrupted by another officer crashing through the front door, fighting with a bail jumper he has just apprehended. By the time order is restored Barry is on his way out the door, sarcastically telling the desk sergeant he should enlist Sandra's help because "she's a hands-on police officer. She'll always pitch in. She's always there for you...You can trust Sandra." His chastising seems to temporarily work. When Lester asks if she is all right, Sandra ends the scene by telling him, "No problem. I'm one of the boys." (Hare 101-102)

Between Barry and Sandra's conflagration in the charge room and a return to Irina and the courts, Hare provides another glimpse of life in prison for McKinnon. In a brief encounter with a group of fellow inmates in the showers, McKinnon is threatened because of his conversations with his lawyer, then stripped, hauled offstage, and presumably raped. The scene ends with one of the inmates telling his accomplices, "Take him to the showers, and let's get to work," after which the playwright's stage directions read, "As GERARD is seized by the SECOND PRISONER and pulled backwards towards the opening, the sound of the showers drowns out his screaming, and the lights lose them as they go.)" (Hare 105)

In performance McKinnon's predicament is obvious and the scene is frightening, even though, with the exception of his brief nudity, nothing potentially objectionable happens on the stage. Whether it is a sign of refinement and maturation or compromising for a larger, subsidized

audience, Hare's technique in presenting the incident is undoubtedly different from the Fringe Theatre tradition he hails from.

As early as 1965 Fringe Theatre dramatist Edward Bond earned the movement recognition as an often viscerally motivated group of writers and performers who used shocking sexual and violent images in their plays. In *Saved*, Bond depicts the torture and murder of a baby in a carriage by a group of street ruffians as a parable of escalating city violence. Other Bond plays, notably his 1970 reworking of Shakespeare's tragedy, *Lear*, contain extreme acts of violence, rape and torture that many called gratuitous and others found relevant as art.

Two Hare contemporaries, Howard Barker and Howard Brenton, never stopped writing in this vein. In 1980 the National Theatre staged Brenton's The Romans in Britain, in which a young boy is raped by Roman soldiers in front of the audience. Viewers responded with a flurry of letters to the theatre and London papers, and critics generally dismissed the work. One wrote, "Homosexual rape, bloody violence, frequent obscenity and political signifying do not necessarily make for a mature play and so many of his parallels are driven home with a bludgeon that his regard for an adult audience must be questioned." (Chaillet)

Barker, who early on showed literary promise equal to Hare, Griffiths, Poliakoff, and other Fringe writers he worked with, is still relegated to outlying theatres. Unique productions like his 1992 Terrible Mouth, a short opera about the disturbed painter Goya, in which all the characters trudged around a warped stage gurgling hideously, bleeding profusely, and enacting scenes from the artist's macabre work, sometimes attract devoted followers, but are, of course, never destined for West End venues.

In comparison, Hare's treatment of violent prison life is suggestive and believable, while restrained within the parameters of acceptable taste for his audiences at the National. Nightingale is critical of Hare's temperance. "He's become more consciously the critic of England from a very moderately liberal stance," the critic complains, "Has he got more respectable in a way? It's as if he, himself, has become part of the establishment. There was a time, particularly around Teeth N' Smiles, when he could have gone down a different path." But, the critic observes, "He's still fulfilling a useful function. He's reaching large numbers of people when there's very little critical writing in Britain. He puts over fairly critical views to a largely mainstream audience by remaining fairly well ensconced in a naturalistic tradition." (Nightingale Interview)

Following the brief scene in the prison shower, the action returns to Irina and Sir Peter in their offices. The elder barrister, who has just returned from court, grumbles, "You know what's so boring about criminal Law?" Irina sarcastically guesses that it involves real human beings, to which Sir Peter replies, "That's one disadvantage. But also you have to establish the facts. That's why I also like libel cases. Becasue so often they're a matter of opinion. You're arguing about things which no-one can prove. You're juggling with air, pure and simple." (Hare 109)

Detestable as his attitude might be, Sir Peter's disdain of criminal cases is something Hare's research found fairly common among older barristers. One interviewee, whom the playwright dubbed "Raymond," was a circuiteer who played dual roles in the legal system. He was alternately an advocate and a judge. Raymond told Hare, 'Criminal work is muck, though of course criminal lawyers go hairless if you say as much.

Not only is there more money in civil cases, but also you're putting your case to a judge. Persuading a jury is a very different proposition. I don't regard it as a great intellectual challenge, frankly." (Hare Asking Around 126)

Sir Peter's mood is not conducive to what Irina has to say. After finding out about the attack on McKinnon and the conditions he is living in, she demands that they find a way to have his sentence severely reduced or even repealed. The jaded Sir Peter, however, points out that they have hardly a leg to stand on and their best bet would be an emotional appeal, calling on the boy's harsh family situation, his youth, and inexperience with crime.

"I don't want to do it because it isn't right," Irina tells her mentor, "The police were on the fiddle!" (Hare 112) She suggests accosting one of the officers, perhaps Sandra, for inside information about how the conviction may have been fixed, to which Sir Peter replies, "It's called a force. Police *force*, that's the name for it. Everyone knows. It's the wrong word. If I could pass an Act of Parliament, I'd call it what it actually is. 'Club.' Police club. And unless you find someone who's interested in jacking in their membership, you haven't got a cat's chance in hell." (Hare 113)

As their argument escalates, age and experience versus youthful naiveté and energy, Sir Peter defends his assessment of both their client and the situation with the police by calling upon his familiarity with the routine. "After a while you develop an instinct," he tells Irina, "That's one of the things a first-rate advocate has. Your profession, after all, is the judgement of people. It's not even conscious. It becomes animal. It's a gut instinct." (Hare 116)

Finally, risking both her client's case and her own position, Irina angrily accuses Sir Peter, "All this behaviour, the honours, the huge sums of money, the buildings, the absurd dressing-up. They do have a purpose. It's anaesthetic. It's to render you incapable of imagining life the other way round...What about the whole joke of you, who claim this infallible instinct for deception, this forensic gift for detecting the truth? You sit there--what? A Knight Commander of the British Empire. You're conspiring in a lie. It's a lie. What British Empire? Hasn't word reached you? It no longer exists." (Hare 117-118)

They end the scene on a harsh note, leaving the audience wondering if Irina has just quit her post or been fired. "I am conscious...it's in your power to be kind," she icily tells Sir Peter, "At every meal. Throughout every opera. In the morning when I come in. At your wish. By your permission. It's hard to say thank you ten times a day. Because the effort is finally demeaning. I hardly remember, but I was five when my father died. So I've got on without one. I don't need another. Not now. No, thank you." (Hare 122)

The scene dissolves to a hilltop in a well known suburb of London, Crystal Palace. It is the namesake of a monument familiar to most Britons: the Crystal Palace built by Sir Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition in 1851. Irina has chosen this location to surprise and accost Sandra about possible police mishandling of McKinnon's case. The setting is subtly symbolic. Simply alluding to the famous structure conjures images for those aware of its importance in British history. The mid-Victorian era was a time of industrial, agricultural, and foreign trade growth, as well as colonial expansion. The British Empire was still on an upward path towards its zenith. The Crystal Palace represents fortitude, ingenuity, and nobility.

When Queen Victoria opened the structure on May 1, 1851, Britons viewed the achievement as a worldwide coup destined to expand their glory. In England in the Nineteenth Century, David Thomson reports that the *Edinburgh Reivew*, "reviewing the *Official Catalogue* of the Exhibition, described its aim as being 'to seize the living scroll of human progress, inscribed with every successive conquest of man's intellect.' The morning of its opening was described by *The Times* as 'the first morning since the creation of the world that all peoples have assembled from all parts of the world and done a common act.'" (Thomson 103)

Unfortunately, while the name is well known, some of the finer points of its history are undoubtedly fading as generations pass. The actual Palace was moved from Hyde Park to Sydenham shortly after the Exhibition and eventually burned to the gorund in 1936. So, though Hare intended it as a comment on the scene that plays in the foreground, its ironic significance may be lost. When Sandra recognizes Irina as a solicitor in Sir Peter's employ her first reaction is an official knee-jerk. "I don't have to talk to you," she tells the lawyer, "It's against the rules." (Hare 123)

They do converse, however, and not just about the case. The idea of the Hare heroine is dually manifest in Murmuring Judges. Irina Platt and Sandra Bingham each represent what is just and virtuous about their respective professions, and together they briefly offer one of the few glimpses of hope in a play filled with institutional corruption and malice. After hearing some remarks from Sandra about her childhood and how she joined the police, Irina probes her about McKinnon. She tries a rational approach, appealing for justice for the boy; and she attempts an

emotional appeal, citing his hardships and her own, pitted against a profession that no longer values human worth.

They find they have much in common. Both are idealists in brutally realistic worlds, yet each longs to change what is wrong before giving up. Irina admits, "I was thinking I should move to radical chambers. There's something they call the alternative bar. Perhaps it would suit me better." Sandra mournfully responds, "There's nothing called the alternative police...There isn't a kind of nice lot who all read the Guardian and eat salad for lunch. You can't join another lot. Not in my profession. You see, in my line of work there's only one crowd." (Hare 127-28) For all their bonhomie, however, Sandra departs leaving Irina with no clear idea whether she has found a useful ally. The constable has not agreed to help her in any practical way, though the seed has been planted.

It seems for the time being, her efforts have been for naught. The hillside scene dissolves into the High Court room where Cuddeford is arguing his appeal for McKinnon. In another ironic twist of fate, the fund Irina was helping Sir Peter collect earlier in the play was used to campaign against the very legislation that might have allowed her to argue her client's case before the court herself. Since the line between barristers and solicitors is still drawn, however, she must rely on her senior advisor.

Sir Peter's plea is predictably brief and unconfrontational. "We are not here today to appeal against the verdict," he tells the court, "The case was conducted with impeccable fairness by the original trial judge. We have no complaints. Furthermore we have no reason to fault or question in any way the behaviour of the police. The plea we are making is purely and simply a plea for clemency. We are putting ourselves at the court's mercy, asking you to consider the exceptional pressures of circumstance

which caused my client to embark on what I can assure you now will be a short-lived career in crime." (Hare 130)

Interestingly, while Sir Peter's case is being heard Irina encounters Barry for the first time in a simultaneous scene outside the court. She confronts him with his actions, though she knows it is useless by now. Their exchange makes it impossible to tell if Hare's sympathies lie with one or another law-related profession--each is attacked with equal vigor.

Barry demands of Irina, "What do you people want? Except to tell other people how to do their jobs? Listen, why don't you go and sit on a committee? Yeah, isn't that the English way? A lot of middle-class people sit on a committee and then tell the yobs what we're all doing wrong?..I think it's the one thing the police really need. More advice...Especially from people who don't do the job."

Irina, though, is not fazed. She counters, "You don't bullshit me. I see right through it...You broke the rules...The police have got to do better than that." Then, just as Woody arrives to pull her into the court for the verdict, Barry gets the last word. "You may be right," he tells her, "It's not important. Call me stubborn, or what. But I tell you what, I tell you. I don't take lectures on ethics from lawyers." (Hare 132)

By this point there is little suspense as to what the decision of the court will be regarding McKinnon. Fittingly, Justice Cuddeford himself delivers the verdict. "We are satisfied the prisoner's inexperience, his youth, his gullibility, the tragic circumstances of his young family, all these should weigh heavily, and were not, in our opinion, taken sufficiently into account," the judge magnimously begins, "For these reasons, we are pleased to say, we have no hesitation in reducing the prisoner's sentence from five years to four and a half." (Hare 133)

Cuddeford's condescending decision validates nearly all the cynical opinions of the judiciary expressed in the play. He proves that, contrary to the Home Secretary's request, judges are not interested in relieving prison overcrowding or in penal reform. He also opens himself up to accusations of prejudice because of McKinnon's questionable Irish background and cronyism because of his close relationship with Sir Peter, the barrister in the case.

At this point in the play *no one* is the winner. No single branch of the legal system has proved itself the best or worst at what it does and no hero has saved the day. The police and judiciary have merely proved themselves corrupt and innefficient, and the prison system is obviously coping as best as it can, and failing, with the criminals they are sent.

Like Racing Demon, Murmuring Judges includes an epilogue that catches each of the principle characters in an important final moment. The last scene begins with short exchanges between groups of characters and moves toward simultaneous monologues, with each speaker separated in areas on the stage.

Irina visits McKinnon in jail with the news of his appeal. He accepts the token graciousness of the court resignedly and tells her his wife has returned to Belfast with his children. When she offers assistance, such as bringing him some books to read, McKinnon tells her, "I've got books. It's a book on Irish history. I've never been interested. But I'm sort of interested now. When I was brought up, it was always a background. But I laughed it off. It's funny. I wonder why I did that. What I'm saying is...I'm not laughing now." (Hare 136) McKinnon's sudden interest in his heritage, and all the potential mayhem it implies in British society, is meant to be indicative of what the supposed "rehabilition" system actually does for

criminals. Instead of setting them down a new path, Hare suggests, it hardens them and turns them toward worse acts of destruction.

Back at the station house the constables are all having a laugh at a newspaper article about underwater policemen who caught a man having sex with penned dolphins, while Sir Peter in his office brags to Woody about defeating a rival in a court case. Barry talks to a committee about expenses for detective work and Irina addresses the John Wilkes Society, a group she has formed comprised of lawyers concerned about the state of Britain's penal system.

One at a time they conclude their monologues then, as the stage begins to grow dark and the music crescendos, suddenly all the noise halts and a single spotlight picks out Sandra center stage. Hare's directions read, "She straightens her uniform, turns and takes a few paces to the centre of the stage. She stands alone." Then she says, "I want the Chief Superintendant...I wonder. Could I have a word?" (Hare 141)

In a play so confusingly filled with dire crises and complex ambivalence, it is doubtful Hare meant for Sandra's appearance to be taken as a tidy ending. He has clearly shown that anything one person might say or do is not likely to affect the system as a whole. This does not preclude, however, Sandra's gesture as an offering of hope. Like other Hare plays, notably The Secret Rapture and Racing Demon, hope is found in unexpected places and interpreted differently by each viewer.

Predictably, in light of the various writing deficiencies mentioned, critics were very hard on the *script* of Murmuring Judges in its premiere run, though they were often quite complimentary of other aspects of the production. Even usual Hare supporters found themselves disappointed in

this showing. In American Theatre magazine, Matt Wolf wrote, "Billed as a work about he clergy, *Racing Demon* was much more than that; *Murmuring Judges*, though, really is just what the blurb on it says: a play about the law, no more, no less. Hare has certainly done his homework, and the work of his researchers (two receive credit in the program) is amply evident. Characters are forever spouting statistics they'd be unlikely to possess in real life, and declaiming position papers rather than holding conversations. By the end, one wonders whether the National bookstore should bother to stock the text or, instead, opt for a point-by-point agenda entitled *Murmuring Judges: The Pamphlet*. American theatregoers weary of the absence of politics in homegrown plays will have a field day here. In Hare's legal world, all anyone does is opine; gone are the private lives that gave *Racing Demon* its troubling and heartbreaking pulse." (Wolf "Miller and Hare in Less than Top Form" 52-53)

The *Independent*'s critic, Paul Taylor, agreed with the comparison to the trilogy's opening play. He begins his review, "The most striking thing, alas, about *Murmuring Judges*–David Hare's play about the legal system and the second in an intended trilogy about British institutions–is its marked inferiority to *Racing Demon*, his wonderfully evenhanded exploration of the Church of England." Taylor points out character and structural flaws and raps up his comments by suggesting, "The play has a fair share of good jokes that point up the ironies in our criminal justice system and its depiction of the legal profession is often enjoyable. But a great deal of it is too pat and it never deepens your thinking by disconcerting your emotions like *Racing Demon*." (Taylor "Verdict in the Balance")

Benedict Nightingale, writing for the *Times*, found grudging admiration for Hare's project, though his compliments were laced with complaints. He comically opined, "At a time when the mental horizons of most dramatists seem to be shrinking, give David Hare credit for thinking big and broad. He has appointed himself the all-purpose ombudsman of hte British theatre. already, he has delivered *ex cathedra* judgments on the press and the church in *Pravda* and *Racing Demon*; and soon he will switch his attention to parliament. After that, who knows? It may be the turn of agriculture, the military, dons, dentists, undertakers, or the Astronomer Royal. No part of our slippery establishment can expect to elude the Hare brain."

His verdict on Murmuring Judges, though, is that it is "A story that lets his characters introduce disturbing facts, make critical comments and embody his own likes and dislikes; yet one that remains oddly unsatisfactory in itself." Still, Nightingale relents somewhat when he concludes his review by saying, "Hare can be awkward and unsubtle when he argues his thesis: that, starting at the top, British justice is a cruel, foolish, destructive mess. But against that must be counted his energy, his passion, and the questions he intrudes. If the police were more efficient, and more than 2 per cent of crimes ended in convictions, what would our prisons be like? Now there is a paradox worth pondering." (Nightingale "Hare Brained Confusion")

Other theatre journalists who agreed with Nightingale on issues of Hare's plot chose to cite specific grievances. In the *Times Literary Supplement*, David Papineau complained, "We are clearly supposed to view Barry's sharp practice as the work of a rotten apple. But Barry doesn't actually frame Gerard's accomplices, he only says he will, and

thereby prevents an armed robbery. This seems to me a clever piece of police work. Moreover, the notion, integral to Hare's plot, that Barry's career will be ruined if the girlfriend tells the Detective Superintendent about his trickery, is risible. Equally implausible is the idea, also integral to the plot, that Gerard would succeed in an appeal if only the drugs story could be proved. Exactly why the appeal court should be interested is unexplained, as indeed are a number of other details of the plot."

Still, Papineau was one of the critics who also found laudable elements in the production. He concludes, "Theis warming tale may well prove popular with National Theatre audiences. There are plenty of jokes, the acting is of a high standard, the staging is imaginative, and there is a real text in the opera scene. But it is disturbing to see all these resources devoted to an easy entertainment about a subject that cries out for something more." (Papineau "Turning to Crime")

Richard Christiansen, penning an article for the *Chicago Tribune*, found even more to appreciate. He wrote, "The National, drawing from a company of about 120 actors, has empeccably cast the production's 25 roles, from the relative newcomer Alphonsia Emmanuel as the determined attorney to the wily veteran Michael Bryant as a sleek, cynical judge. All of them forcefully press Hare's arguments with extraordinary passion and, at times, wicked humor. What's more, Richard Eyre, the National's artistic director, has invigorated the drama with virtuoso theatrical design on the Olivier's large thrust stage, projecting huge slides to cinematically shift the many scenes and summoning up everything from a steamy prison shower room to a production of "The Magic Flute" at the Royal Opera House. The National, a mighty engine of

theatrical production, is roaring along confidently with this bravura display of "Murmuring Judges."

Like Racing Demon before it, Murmuring Judges also drew its share of broadsides in the press from professional pundits. The *Daily Telegraph*, a Conservative-aligned newspaper, enlisted the aid of former Attorney-General Lord Rawlinson to write an article titled, "The Case Against Mr. David Hare." In it Rawlinson snidely remarked:

> I retired from the bar some years ago after nearly 40 years of practice. Sitting through Mr. David Hare's play *Murmuring Judges* at the National Theatre and seeing the extraordinary lives of the lawyers whom he has portrayed, I began to think that had been a mistake.
>
> For if I had stayed, I too--like Mr. Hare's appalling QC--might have appeared on *Desert Island Disks;* I too might have become a Knight Commander of the British Empire, whatever that may be; and I too might have had a pimp and a procurer for a clerk to fix me up with all the newest and choices of the lady barristers who had just loined chambers. These certainly are the days--at the bar invented and peopled by Mr. David Hare.
>
> It is, of course, all theatrical nonsense. Judges and barristers just do not talk and certainly do not act like Mr. Hare's preposterous caricatures, who are merely puppets made to say and do abominable things so that Mr. Hare can read the public a lecture.

Rawlinson's solution to the problem the playwright poses?

> Because of his travesty, the sentence on Mr. Hare by at least this judge is that he should attend every day for three months at the Old Bailey, Snaresbrook Crown Court and Bow Street, the sentences to run consecutively; and that each day he should be obliged to record what punishment he personally would inflict on each of those convicted--and, finally, that as a good democrat he should publish his sentences to the public and to his neighbors in particular.
>
> He then might understand the dilemma of the judges he has so caricatured and he might even have to encounter

> the public, whose homes have been ransacked, elderly relatives assulted and young relatives raped.
>
> I doubt that when he had served this sentence he would write another pantomime like *Murmuring Judges.* (Rawlinson)

Even participants in the staging process of Murmuring Judges found it the least manageable of the three in the trilogy. Richard Eyre, who claims his involvement with each play was "extensive conversation from the first draft, sometimes even before the first draft," admits, "Murmuring Judges was the most difficult to write. It went through a number of drafts. It was quite unlike The Absence of War which was read in a studio in January and nailed down in script form in April." (Eyre Interview)

Murmuring Judges was one of Giles Croft's first real projects as Literary Manager at the National. He says, "Racing Demon existed as a play when I came here. I had no relationship with David before that. David is a private person and secretive about his work up until the time to present it, and Richard is a long-standing relationship of his. He is David's director and effectively his dramaturg, in keeping with the long English tradition of directors acting as dramaturgs. With Murmuring Judges, David was the least interested in the minor plotting of it. He wanted to write a big play about the law, but actually plotting the minor parts was not as interesting to him." (Croft Interview)

For all of its faults, however, Murmuring Judges definitely found an audience on the South Bank. One of Hare's earlier big successes at the National, The Secret Rapture, was placed into the Lyttelton Theatre's repertory twice, in 1988 and 1989. It ran a total of 126 performances and played to 79,122 audience members according to National Theatre Press Officer Stephen Wood. Racing Demon, meeting even more unanimous

critical acclaim, played all three National theatres for a total of 177 performances, attracting 124,353 viewers. Logging in fewer performances than either, a mere 103, Murmuring Judges surpassed The Secret Rapture, and edged close to Racing Demon. It was seen by 98,862 National Theatre patrons.

On the positive side, Murmuring Judges does accomplish a few things. It adds to the discussion and general knowledge of problems in the criminal justice system--a topic of worldwide importance. It is occasionally thought-provoking beyond mere statistical information and it provides a look inside levels of society many Britons never see, something the last play in the Trilogy, The Absence of War, was destined to do even more thoroughly.

The Absence of War

From the Church, to the Law, to the State, David Hare's ambitious trilogy culminates in an examination of one of humankind's most complicated and important endeavors: politics. The final play in the project, The Absence of War, is an attempt to combine the best elements of the first two. Visually as grand and cinematic as Murmuring Judges, it nonetheless maintains a simple, single plotline, reminiscent of Racing Demon.

While planning the trilogy's apex Hare was somewhat evasive. During a discussion with Richard Eyre following a production of Murmuring Judges the writer was asked if his next play would be about politicians. "Yes," he responded, "In Western democracies, politicians and those around them are currently held in such low regard that I was fascinated by the prospect of trying to look at the world from their point of view. More than that at the moment, I don't want to say." (Hare Discussion)

Part of his reticence may have been due to the political and social regrouping Hare and members of Britain's Left had undergone in the past year. While researching and writing Murmuring Judges, the playwright, along with the rest of the world, was shocked by the unexpected resignation of Margaret Thatcher in November of 1990. Though she had been experiencing difficulty within her party for a few months, and had lost a great deal of popular support by continuing to fight against European unity and instituting the dreaded poll tax in place of a tax on property, Thatcher was expected to rally from behind and turn her party around again.

Hare did not have to rethink Murmuring Judges in light of recent events. The conditions described in the play were results of Thatcherite Britain that would certainly last into the next administration, particulary when the new Prime Minister turned out to be John Major, someone the Iron Lady had groomed for the post herself. However, the political upheaval undoubtedly had an effect on the way the Labour Party would be viewed in his next play, since Thatcher's sudden departure after more than eleven years in office had a galvanizing effect on Labourites, giving them their first honest chance at an election win in decades.

After the play had been written and he was ready to discuss his work, he explained in Asking Around, "I was some time deciding the subject of my third play. By now my methods had been established and there was no shortage of volunteers stepping forward to offer their own institutions as possible subject matter." Some of those volunteers, the playwright says, represented teachers, doctors, the Army, and even the royal House of Windsor. Still, he felt drawn toward the State, even though he realized it was a very broad subject. "As usual," Hare says, "it was a chance encounter, this time with a couple of Labour apparatchiks, which made me realize that I should abandon any absurd ambition I had to describe the workings of the State. Instead, I set out to capture that strange moment at which a small part of the State is compelled, for a few weeks at least, to offer itself up to the public's inspection." (Hare 161) The play, Hare decided, would be about a national election.

Hare's initial hesitation to discuss his new work may be quite understandable given the task he had chosen. The Absence of War is not just a play about *an* election and about politicians in Britain in general. More specifically, it is about the Labour Party and their attempts to win

power in the general election of 1992. While his research for Racing Demon and Murmuring Judges involved shadowing and interviewing parish vicars, policemen, lawyers, and judges, his subjects were mostly low-profile professionals whose personalities, even if duplicated on the stage, were not likely to be recognized or slandered. An up-to-the-minute description of the Labour Party's inner workings, however, would likely produce events and characters immediately recognizable to a politically conscious theatre-going public.

In actuality, there was some friction. Hare has been a supporter, albeit a critical one, of the Labour Party for years, and even developed a friendship with Labour Leader Neil Kinnock. In the research stages of his play, Kinnock gave Hare access to his campaign team and made him privy to behind-the-scenes meetings. He was allowed to conduct interviews with important Labour figures and record all that he saw and heard. It wasn't until the play was announced, along with publication of Hare's research materials in Asking Around, that Labourites became suspicious and defensive.

Suddenly there was concern that the Party's support for the project might be withdrawn, a prospect that, while not damning for Hare the playwright and his artistic creation, could be messy for a heavily subsidized theatre and a company made of largely Labour supporters. The *Evening Standard* reported one party insider as saying, "I knew he was researching a play but I didn't know he was going to repeat whole conversations in a book. He would not have been allowed that sort of access from the start if we had known about the book." (Hooberman 11)

Reportedly, the issue was resolved when the playwright presented his work to Kinnock, not for censoring, but for reassurance. "David has

battled with the Labour Party all summer," his publisher was quoted as saying, "but Neil Kinnock likes the play, and everything seems to be hunky-dory now with the high command." (De Johngh 31)

The play does bear many similarities to recent political figures and events in Britain, and it certainly takes it share of broadsides at both leading political parties. In some ways, though, it still manages to transcend simple immediacy. Certainly Hare's depiction of a struggling Labour Party, inches away from capturing the top seat in government during a drastic financial crisis only to fumble once again and cede to Conservative sensibilities, is familiar to anyone who voted in the last election. However, there is more to it. The Absence of War raises perennial and universal questions about the relationship between the governors and the governed, the ethics of politicking, the integrity of belief, and more.

What Hare hopes the play offers that none others before have is an honest look at the people who legislate our lives, not just in Britain, but all around the world. It does not devote itself full time to celebrating or satirizing a particular figure or group of people, but, rather, attempts a balanced assessment of the pros and cons of politics. And, indeed, most of the characters in The Absence of War are much better defined than the legal caricatures of Murmuring Judges. Many are at least as dimensional as the clergy in Racing Demon.

While both Hare's earlier attempts involved three or more simultaneous stories, this one revolves around a single person and a single event: the Right Honorable George Jones MP, leader of the opposition Labour Party, and his attempt to win the seat of Prime Minister. The other characters in the play--Labour Party officials, campaign workers,

reporters, and political adversaries--all contribute somehow to the saga of the rise and fall of Jones' ambition.

Symbolically, the multi-scene play opens during a Memorial Day ceremony at the Cenotaph, Britain's monument to its fallen soldiers in the wars of the twentieth century. Hare's use of such significant settings in the trilogy is usually astute. With the exception of the less obvious Crystal Palace reference in Murmuring Judges, his strategically chosen locations evoke feelings common to most Britons that help in understanding the scene that plays before them.

While a news broadcaster narrates the ceremony of the Cenotaph, which involves the leaders of the three main political parties in Britain laying wreaths of poppies on the monument, the audience is given time to reflect on the importance of the ritual to the play's title. Then, following the chiming of Big Ben and a cannon salute, Andrew Buchan steps forward and addresses the audience. His opening soliloquy immediately establishes the nature of most of the characters in the play, the politicians, and it provides some insight into Hare's feelings about "the absence of war."

"I love this moment," Andrew says, referencing the Cenotaph ceremony, "The two minutes' silence...It gives you a breath, just to question. The questions everyone in politics asks. Why these hours? Why these ridiculous schedules? Up and out of our beds at six every day. Read the papers. When you know already what the papers will say...Then the first meeting of the day. Seven o'clock and I'm there. And outside that meeting, another meeting, already beating, bulging, pressing against the door. Your mind's already on the next one, the one you are

already late for, the one which may--God help us--achieve a little more than the one you are at now. What is this for? This madness?" (Hare Absence of War rehearsal draft 2)

The idea Hare is getting at through Andrew's questioning is one familiar to several of his characters. It is the notion that success in any endeavor--politics, policing, or whatever--can often be achieved just by persistence. In The Secret Rapture Marion tells Tom, "Someone said, 'Do you know what politics is? Finally? Politics is being there every day.' And you know it's true. You have to be there. I'm there every day." (Hare 61) In Murmuring Judges Barry voices a similar belief to Sandra when he comments about policing, "The hard way's the other one, the one that's taken by all the poor bloody footsoldiers, like Lester and Jimmy and Dave...Who'd never even think of betraying their pals. But they have a talent which no-one seems to value. Their talent is for turning up every day. Yeah, for being there." (Hare 94)

Perhaps by way of explanation, Andrew continues, "I have a theory. People of my age, we did not fight in a war. If you fight in a war, you have some sense of personal worth. So now we seek it by keeping busy. We work and hope we will feel we do good." (Hare 3) Besides being a comment on Andrew's life in politics, this statement is also an obvious reference to Hare's background and view of the world. Though the play primarily concerns itself with the General Election and there are really few references to war of any kind, the title and Andrew's somewhat existential justification hover in the air. Hare is certainly no warmonger, but admits the drive to make war is part of human nature and suggests society is very different in times of peace.

As in Murmuring Judges, the scene changes are rapid and fluid, cinematically dissolving from one time and locale to another. As Andrew concludes his comments on the Cenotaph ceremony the stage quickly changes to the Lobby of the House of Commons where George Jones' staff waits for him prior to Prime Minister's question time in the next session.

Again the surroundings are appealing for an audience because of the air of mystery about them. Hare describes the area: "Four corridors meet in an octagonal Gothic space with marble statuary and a tiled floor of many colours. To one side there is a desk, rather like a maitre d's, and attended by men in tails and white ties and by a couple of policemen. All around, MPs, summoned by the small chits they hold in their hands, are mingling and meeting with members of the public." (Hare 4) While many people in the audience may have glimpsed the very halls the playwright describes during a visit to the House, few have been privy to the inner workings of the politics that take place within them. Seeing the politician characters interact in the space is like tugging away a veil from a curious, lightly shrouded object.

The Leader's office staff arrive one at a time to await their eccentric leader's late appearance. Gwenda Aaron, Jones' diary secretary, and Mary Housego, his press secretary, frantically scour the halls of Commons searching for their missing leader while the Members of Parliament, including Jones' Shadow Chancellor, Malcolm Pryce, begin to assemble.

In the midst of all the bustle Andrew meets Lindsay Fontaine, a public relations manager Jones' office is screening as a candidate to organize publicity for the upcoming campaign. Early in their conversation about Jones there is the first indication about the flaw that will plague him until the end. Lindsay says, "When you meet him of course he's

fantastically impressive. I found myself wondering why am I surprised? He's so authoritative...You meet George, you think: 'this man is dynamite.' So then you ask the next question. Why on earth does this never quite come across?" (Hare 5)

George's continued absence allows Andrew to introduce Lindsay to Malcolm Pryce, the Leader's second in command. Though George hasn't even arrived yet, there is an obvious perceived contrast between he and Malcolm. George has been described as occasionally absent-minded, less than impressive in public appearances, and apparently a twinge irresponsible when it comes to meeting his staff. Malcolm, on the other hand, is "in his late forties, laconic, smooth and extremely sharp" and is accompanied by his "minder," Bruce, a young aide with a portable phone who sticks to his every move.

There is also the hint of dissent in Malcolm's behavior. He is outraged to hear that George is "out of control" and missing, and reacts coldly to Lindsay's presence. Before Lindsay has time to defend herself and her job a cry goes up that George has been spotted and is on his way in. The excitement and confusion prior to Jones' actual arrival lend a sense of anticipation to the moment. When he finally appears he feigns an air of unassuming innocence. "Were you looking for me?" he asks, "I was in the park...It was like spring. I looked round. People were walking. And kissing. And talking. I thought, you lucky people...You're free and I'm not." (Hare 13) Though George's mannerisms initially seem to be borrowed from Chaunce the gardener in Being There, his real stature is obvious from the reactions of those around him. Hare has managed to create in Jones a unique fictional, political figure. He is not a man of straw, designed to be propped up and knocked down for his ideological

bent, nor is he a mythological hero, lionized like Churchill or Lord Nelson. Rather, he is a multi-faceted human being.

After George and Malcolm and the other MPs wend their way into the hall, Hare presents another public ritual some may not have seen and others may find archaic, patriotic, or merely interesting: the Speaker's procession prior to the opening of the meeting of the House. After a policeman quiets the crowd in the lobby, it is described:

> (There is a moment's pause, then the back doors are flung open. Standing already waiting to pass through the lobby is the SPEAKER's procession. A man in full 18th century fig--stockings and knickerbockers--is carrying the mace and behind him the SPEAKER himself is bewigged. The POLICE have assembled on either side as the procession takes a few steps forward. There is a great cry.)

CLERK: Speaker!

> (In the silence now, the whole group pass through the lobby, the public watching in awe)

CLERK: Hats off, strangers! (Hare 14)

For someone as critical of British society as Hare, it might seem paradoxical for him to present so many of his country's revered rituals in plays without making some direct comment on their validity. He is a writer, though, who recognizes the dramatic potential of these places and events. Furthermore, allowing his audiences to simply view the spectacles without comment and decide for themselves what the traditions mean to them is not contradictory to his role as social commentator. Hare is not out to destroy British heritage. As he notes, "The one thing I have learnt and understood from five years' study is that

British society needs not to abolish its institutions, but to refresh them. For, if not through institutions, how do we express the common good?" (Hare Asking Around 8)

Once inside the House of Commons, George's political convictions are presented in a speech to the Prime Minister. From his position on the floor the Leader harangues his Conservative opposition, accusing them of running down the country with ineffective policy and taking advantage of their constituencies. Yet his rhetoric reveals a politician with a sense of humor and human foibles. He compares the Tories to "a lonely drunk wandering through the streets at four-thirty in the morning, muttering to itself, blaming its misfortunes on others and desperately searching, scrabbling through the early morning trashcans for any political ideas it might still be able to lift." (Hare 15)

Toward the end of his tirade, however, he loses his thread of thought and stumbles to a conclusion by likening his adversaries to a chicken with its head cut off. Immediately following George's speech, his staff is divided on his effectiveness before the assembly, but everyone feels he has gained them much needed news coverage with his colorful comparisons.

As they go about the business of running the Labour Party office more details of George's leadership practices are revealed. When Gwenda presents him with a stack of documents about transport and technology in Europe to prepare him for interviews and debates he replies, ""I'm not reading this...Don't bog me down in detail. Push the work away. Push it away... You can't reach me. No-one can reach me. I believe in order and calm." (Hare 19) George, who is an avid playgoer,

insists everyone in politics should go to the theatre; then they would understand his working method.

Though there is something of an elitist quality about what George suggests that doesn't seem to fit the Leader of the Labour Party, his boisterous, friendly demeanor implies his intentions are noble. He honestly feels most capable and invigorated when a large part of the responsibilities of his office are delegated to others. George's struggle with Machiavellian principles of leadership are another sign that The Absence of War is not a pro-Labour propaganda drama. The fictional Labour Party in the play is obviously as fallible as any of its real-life counterparts.

One of the issues George *does* have to take up is whether or not to use Lindsay Fontaine as their PR representative. The question of her candidacy allows Hare the chance for more comments about politics in Britain and in general. When Oliver Dix, George's immediate advisor, questions whether Lindsay is a Labour member Andrew, in a comical jab at the playwright's own party, answers, "Yes. Just...She only joined ten days ago...but be fair, George. No-one's a member. Do you know any members? I mean, outside people like us? She didn't get round to it. It's like hang-gliding, or learning a second language. Joining the Labour party is something people mean to get round to do." (Hare 20-21)

Mary points out that Lindsay ran the campaign for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and gave the people T-shirts to wear reading "Vote Sandinista." Reminding everyone that that the Sandinistas lost the election, Oliver angrily suggests, "The truth is, the people do stupid things. Like wear your bloody T-shirt and then vote against you." Touchingly,

George counters with, "It's their right. It's the only right they've got. You can never depend on them." (Hare 21-22)

George's admonition is at once a portent of things to come, like Frances' premonitions about Lionel in Racing Demon and Woody's presentiments about Irina in Murmuring Judges, and a comment on his true egalitarian nature, refuting any suspicions that there might be a conservative wolf hiding beneath his liberal sheep's clothing.

For all his grumbling, though, Oliver is not set against Lindsay, merely ambivalent about her. "Lindsay Fontaine?" he says, "Sure, I've seen her. I saw her once on TV. Lindsay's who people are...Professionals. A lot of front maybe. With a lot of confidence. Maybe...OK...underneath a bit lost. Not knowing what they think. Used to affluence. And things not being difficult." Getting to sound a bit like the characters on the front lines in Racing Demon and Murmuring Judges Oliver continues, "The big difference is: she just hasn't been through it...She hasn't known what it's like to be powerless. And take this crap every day. Always under fire." (Hare 23-24)

Oliver's comments about Lindsay suggest she is similar in nature to previous characters in Hare's plays. Elaine Le Fanu in A Map of the World, Grace in Wrecked Eggs, Marion and Rhonda in The Secret Rapture, Frances in Racing Demon and Irina in Murmuring Judges all share some of her qualities. They occupy high profile jobs, are either wealthy or surrounded by affluence, question their roles, and sometimes seem like outsiders to their professions and relationships.

In one of the first constructive criticisms of the Conservative Party, George agrees with Oliver's assessment of their predicament. Returning to the issue of '80s Thatcherite avarice he complains, "Life's much less

tricky for the Tories. They have the advantage over us. They simply ask, what school did he go to? What bank did he work in? Is he a QC? They use all the people who sell them their shares. Hell, they have whole troops of infantry. Who wear the same uniforms. And gather round flags. Rock solid infantry who all understand... the point of it all is one thing. One objective. Which everyone knows. And is loyal to. Money's a simple master in that way." (Hare 24-25)

Returning to the question at hand, Andrew tells George that Malcolm disliked Lindsay and gave her a hard time. Playing devil's advocate, he suggests there might be a personality problem to contend with. Oliver, however, shrugs off Malcolm's complaint with a casual, "He doesn't have to like her," and describes his reaction as "textbook number two behavior."

Oliver's advice does not sit well with George and, in another foreshadowing of bad things to come, he tells him, "I won't hear a word against Malcolm. Is that understood? Not a word. Malcolm's all right." (Hare 27) It is this allegiance to his party and his peers that earns him respect as a character later in the play, but also loses him the election.

Lindsay does win their confidence, or at least their approval, as she explains in a short soliloquy bridging the fourth and sixth scenes. "I joined two days later," she recalls, "I had a short interview. George talked about everything except the actual job. As I remember we talked about why nowadays there are five productions of RICHARD III to every one of HENRY V." (Hare 29)

The scene Lindsay walks into takes place in the Leader's offices a few days later. Mary bursts into the room with the alarming news that the

value of the pound is dropping again, forcing both political parties into the limelight. The usual staff--Oliver, Lindsay, Mary, and Andrew--are joined by Bryden Thomas, an old guard party member who serves as the Deputy Leader. Collectively they prepare their attack. The Labourites' strategy is simple, tried, and true. They plan to put both Malcolm and George on television saying the same reassuring things about the economy and the stability of the country.

Lindsay, however, in her role as public relations consultant, questions the wisdom of putting *both* Malcolm and George before the public on the issue. Stating one of the unfortunate truisms of the beleagured organization, Oliver tells her, "This is the Labour party. We all have to say the same thing." It is an example of contemporary politics in Britain being coerced by the press, and one no doubt familiar to most developed democracies. George explains, "If Bryden or I use any different words then it's a hostage to fortune. The DAILY EXPRESS says we're split." Worse, he explains, if they say nothing the headline will read, "JONES IS SILENT. JONES DOESN'T UNDERSTAND ECONOMICS." (Hare 36-37)

Lindsay attempts a variety of tactics to dissuade George from making an appearance she thinks is doomed to fail, including throwing some derogatory poll statistics at him and suggesting that, if the Labour Party has to look weak, they should let Malcolm be the front man alone. In the end, though, Oliver and Andrew convince the Leader to tow the party line and adhere to the strategy. He tells Lindsay, "I have to do it. The reason is simple. It's what Malcolm wants. And Bryden will tell you, politics isn't just about strategy. It's also down to personal relationships." (Hare 40)

This sentiment was similarly expressed by Lionel, then Harry and Streaky in Racing Demon when one at a time they entreated Tony to stick with his friends in the parish and not make waves with the Bishops. It was also echoed by Barry in Murmuring Judges, used as leverage against Sandra's accusations of impropriety. In three plays that deal so thoroughly with huge public topics, it is perhaps the most persistent reminder that the playwright places immense value on personal relationships, for better or worse.

After George leaves to make his scheduled appearance on the air, his advisors assess the disagreement they just had. In another wry jab at Labour, Oliver tells Lindsay, "I'll say this for you. I understand why you joined the party two weeks ago. You're a natural Labour party member. You just made four enemies in under five minutes." Andrew agrees, "She was like a veteran. She brought back memories of the great days," and Bryden adds, "When I joined, we had people who were so offensive they could dispatch a whole Party Conference to the tearoom." (Hare 41)

Hare's frequent mild rebukes of the Labour Party are a reminder that he is not a propogandist, but an occasional thoughtful dissenter. Were he interested in pure slanderous slapstick the result might have been something along the lines of Brenton's A Short, Sharp Shock! that depicts the *Tory* party as bumbling incapables, not the liberals as middle-of-the-road, struggling idealists.

George's staff continues their debate, concentrating on the Leader himself. "We know there's a problem of public perception," Oliver admits. In order to make George look better, they place him next to Malcolm who is "unarguably clever. I don't just mean clever. I mean Oxbridge. Incisive." (Hare 43)

Lindsay points out that George rose to his position by inspiring crowds of people with his oratory skills, not by parroting tired dogma. In this regard she has a real life counterpart in Julie Hall, Labour Leader Neil Kinnock's Press Secretary for the 1992 campaign. After Labour lost the '92 election Hare spoke with Hall and made some of the same observations about Kinnock that Lindsay makes about George Jones. "I agree absolutely," she said, "Ever since I joined, that was my message. Be yourself. But there were also pressures on him not to be his natural self, to hold himself in. So we didn't get the real Neil--the more they got to know him--the more they liked him." (Hare Asking Around 227)

In the play, Oliver represents one of the pressures that worked against the Leader's natural expression. He points out to Lindsay, "The danger is, emotion plays havoc with thought" when George is speaking. "Oratory's like poetry," he insists, "Nobody asks what does poetry mean? You can say, OK I sort of get the *feeling*...But TV, you see...TV functions quite differently. On TV you actually have to make sense." Putting it carefully and mildly Oliver finishes, "He has a problem, all right? With actual consequential factual coherence. He has that problem. From time to time...He also has problems judging his length." (Hare 45)

The can of worms Oliver has opened is one that has plagued the Leader's office since George took over the post. Owing to the boom in mass communications in the twentieth century, every major political leader since Franklin D. Roosevelt first appeared on television at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City has had to contend with "imaging" or "packaging." It is the stuff of Lindsay's profession. Unfortunately, it is not something George does well.

Nor, from what actual Labourites say, is it something the Party as a whole has had good experiences with. After stepping down from the Leader's post following his defeat in the '92 campaign, Neil Kinnock spoke with Hare on a variety of topics, one of which was the press. He commented, "The media in this country can basically be relied on to back them (the Tories) up in good times and not to make things bad when times get hard. I know people think it's weak to blame the media for everything, but they do determine the environment of politics. I know it seems like alibi hunting, but for the Labour Party all the trails trace back to the media, because at any point, if there is the slightest difference between any of us, they can point to the terrible damage of the past. The Labour movement has one basic fault. It denounces the capitalist press on one hand and yet on the other it accepts what it reads in it." (Hare Asking Around 234-235)

Oliver and Andrew take turns relating the horrible debacle that occurred when George was last on the Linus Frank program, a prominent interview broadcast. Letting his emotions get the best of him, he stuttered and backtracked under the questioner's intense scrutiny, then lost himself and his audience trying to extricate himself from the mess he had made. Everyone wants to avoid a similar spectacle in the future.

Returning from his recent appearance, however, George admits just such an error was made. When the reporters asked him if he supported the present government in its crisis, he found he couldn't say yes or no, but instead rambled on, just as Lindsay had warned.

Perhaps mercifully, the group is left no time to dwell on the problem. Trevor Avery, a burly agent from the Special Branch, nearly follows George through the door with news that he has arrived to protect

the possible future leader of the country. Unbeknownst to George and his crew, while they were busy planning Labour's response to the devalued pound, the Tories, led by Prime Minister Charles Kendrick, were preparing to announce a surprise general election, a privilege granted the incumbent party in Britain.

In this regard the events of The Absence of War approximate the real events leading up to the election of 1992. Hare explains, "The General Election of 1992 was unusual in that it had been so long anticipated. Although a British government is technically allowed to run its full five-year period, it is commonly expected that an incumbent prime minister will use the advantage of surprise to go to the polls well before the end of his term. But because in late 1990 he had suddenly inherited the leadership from the markedly unpopular Margaret Thatcher, John Major had judged that he needed time to establish the authority of his own régime before risking it with an appeal to the electorate. The result had been a long and slightly unreal period of waiting." (Hare Asking Around 162)

Indeed, the announcement comes as a surprise to everyone in the office, who all thought the election wouldn't be announced for weeks. They react with varying degrees of alarm. Mary is immediately on the phone setting up press conferences while Oliver stands in the middle of the room cursing the opposition's sneakiness. Andrew is too flabergasted to take any action while the seasoned Bryden is relatively calm. A wave of trepidation, then excitement washes over George. When asked if he expected the sudden announcement he admits, "No. I'd booked for HAMLET this evening," and curses Kendrick, saying, "I really wanted to go.

He does it to annoy me, he knows, he *knows* I'd been looking forward to it all week."

When the reality of the situation finally catches up with him, however, he is inspired. Throwing his arms in the air and dancing he around he cries, "Oh God, let it come, yes, let it come, let it come now. Please God let it come." At the end of the scene he soberly faces Malcolm, his number two man, and tells him, "This is what we've been waiting for." As they embrace, however, the playwright suggests an uncertainty and awkwardness meant to reveal the enormous differences between the two men and suggest the rough times that lay ahead. (Hare 50-52)

The next scene provides the first glimpse of the opposition. Prime Minister Charles Kendrick announces his decision to call an election to the press. His remarks, like those of the Labour Party so far, are stale and predictable. "We cannot have prosperity, we cannot have sound financial practice until the danger--however remote--of a possible Labour government is removed from the back of people's minds," he insists. Then, summoning patriotic verve, he continues, "I am tired of the relentless negativity, of listening to an opposition which does nothing but run Britain down. That tires me. Becasue this is a great country. I believe, the greatest on earth."

Kendrick's short appearance covers a scene change that relocates the action to George's flat in a London suburb. His staff is arriving one at a time for a meal of scrambled eggs and a strategy meeting. While Lindsay prepares the meal George passes a few more comments about the politics in general and British practices in particular. "Whatever happens,

politicians always say they welcome it," he complains, "Everything that happens, we pretend it's what we foresaw. It's why I dislike us. The job's inherently undignified. We have to pretend we're in control."

Responding to Lindsay's questions about Kendrick and his unexpected announcement, the Leader rails, "There is no constitution. It's one of those words which Kendrick will use. It means 'doing what I want to.' But saying 'constitution' makes him feel big. I've watched him. 'Massive troop movements.' That's another favourite of his. He'll comment on any war. Anywhere. However obscure. I think, why's he making a statement about some piddling little country ten thousand miles away? And then he'll say 'Overnight there have been massive troop movements.' He loves them." (Hare 55)

Of course, George's condemnation of politicians and his opposition come as no surprise to observant voters. People don't like to be fooled but, Hare seems to suggest, their need for confidence in their leaders often overcomes pride in their wisdom of choice.

For the first time since Andrew's speech at the Cenotaph Hare brings up the title of the play when Lindsay asks George about his fondness for the Army. He admits his admiration for the armed forces and adds, "I'm afraid there's a sense in which I even quite like a war." He claims his military constituency follows him because "they know I'd pull the trigger. In a fifty-fifty, I could do the deed. And then I'd be able to live with it." (Hare 56) Though his boasts seem to be innocent bravado, they are destined to haunt him later in the campaign.

When Mary, Oliver, and Andrew finally arrive there is one conspicuous absence: Malcolm. Remarking on the missing Shadow Chancellor Oliver says, "He said you should go ahead. It's your show. He

doesn't feel he should interfere." (Hare 58B) Erroneously shrugging off the significance of Malcolm's gesture, George continues the meeting with a look at "the war book," Labour's campaign strategy recently completed and pressed in an enormous ring binder.

From sitting in on planning sessions Hare learned some of the strategies campaign parties employ on a daily basis. Gwenda goes over the itinerary briefly, "This is the digest. You'll see if you look, the plan is like last time, each morning's press conference establishes a theme," and the members of the group pick up on the thread, "Tuesday health, Wednesday education, Thursday health..." (Hare 59)

The strategy does seem akin to generals plotting battle plans. Oliver observes, "Elections, you see, people think they're about arguments...They think when politicians speak it's an act of sense. But it's not. It's an act of strategy. It's taking up a position. It isn't like debate. We're not actually debating...The only true analogy is with waging war." As he gleefully relishes the comparison his comrades join him, chanting their tasks like a mantra:

ANDREW: Keep it tight...

OLIVER: Yeah...

ANDREW: Keep it focussed...

OLIVER: Yeah...

ANDREW: Keep it on track. Hit hard. Hit constantly. Give them a good pounding.

MARY: Don't get distracted.

ANDREW: Never respond. Never let them set the agenda.
And get off their ground as soon as you can.
(Hare 63-64)

In this particular war, Hare wishes to acknowledge some of the weaknesses of his side. Perhaps subtly prodding the Labour Party, Oliver insists, "The economy is always going to be a Tory issue. It's theirs. They own it. However unfair it is...George can speak all he likes on the caring issues. Health. Education. He plays to his pluses, that's fine. What he mustn't do is in any way is remind people that when he's elected he's going to be in charge of their money. Because that's where people don't trust him at all." (Hare 60)

Oliver's point has been a sticky one for the Labour Party ever since various liberal reforms failed to materialize due to financial entanglements following the Second World War. The Labour Party, like the American Democratic Party during roughly the same era, has been on the ropes again and again, straddled with "care issues" like health, schools, and welfare, while struggling to find funding without angering and alienating voters.

In this election they feel they might sneak it past them. When Lindsay wonders aloud how exactly they plan to institute their reforms *this time* if and when they achieve office, Oliver admits, "We will abolish mortgage tax relief on our first day in Downing Street...But this is not something which we can say." Not to be left out, Mary adds, "Because it's too dangerous...Mortgage tax relief is the homeowner's perk. It's unearned, it's inequitable, it grossly favours the propertied class. In the name of common fairness it should be withdrawn." (Hare 62)

Ethics aside, they feel that persistently pushing their reforms, keeping this secret under their hats, and keeping George in careful

control will win the Labour Party their first election in two decades. Lindsay is not only surprised by the mortgage tax relief issue, but frustrated by the group's continued efforts to stifle George. Her battle is a losing one, however, for even George agrees he needs to represent the Party first and himself last. "You can never lose sight of the problem that when this Party fell into my hands, it was torn, idsfigured, unelectable," he tells Lindsay, "With a matchless capacity for meaningless squabbles and fights. So changing that culture, changing that disastrous habit of anarchy, controlling the Party, getting it to speak with one voice, this has been my historical legacy." (Hare 65)

Like Neil Kinnock and the real Labour Party, George and his gang feel that the first election of the '90s is their first chance to change their luck. "In opposition you're always waiting," George points out, "You go into politics to get something done. And in opposition you do precisely nothing. But for these three weeks (the campaign) at least you exist." They end the scene with a toast to George, lauding him as the questing hero of Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress.* "To Pilgrim," they exclaim, "May he win through!" (Hare 67-68)

The final scene of the first act is based on an event Hare witnessed: a Labour rally shortly after the 1992 campaign began. He describes his experience:

> In some haste, the Labour party has prepared one of its slightly ambiguous events, which is part-launch, part-photo opportunity, and part-parade of all its most distinguished supporters. Needless to say, these seem to me to be exactly the 'usual suspects' I heard them say they wanted to avoid. The event is at the International Press Centre in Shoe Lane. Backstage everyone is issued with red roses. Then Neil

> Kinnock does his piercing imitation of a referee's whistle to call the politicians and celebrities to order. They march on to the stage, where the press and television people are already assembled. Hilariously, the celebrities are put on a strange little dais at the side where nobody can see them. A large sign which will eventually read 'IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE' is currently reading 'IT'T FO A CHA'. Workmen are still putting the letters up. (Hare Asking Around 171)

In the play similar conditions exist. The first sight of the conference hall the audience gets is from a rear perspective. Behind the stage where all the politicians and celebrities will gather are chairs, boxes, and filing cabinets and a backward view of a sign that presently reads: IT'S YO LABO PAR.

The scene begins with an elderly Labour member's reminiscences about the old days of the party. Vera, a woman in her sixties, seated by herself to one side, reminds the audience of what the Labour Party meant in the years just after World War II:

> The most exciting words of my life? "Common ownership." To hold things in common, this was our aim. This single phrase produced a thrill in me, like grasping a thin electric wire. Another phrase: "moral imperative." This was the language of after the war. Millions and millions of us. Most of us dead now. Went to war and for the first time met the officer class. The result of meeting them was returning to England and throwing them out. (Hare 69)

Vera's theme, disillusionment at mid-century, is one Hare has dwelt on before, most notably, of course, in Plenty, but also in The Great Exhibition and some of his films.

When the conventioneers begin to gather confusion reigns supreme. Malcolm arrives with Bruce, his minder, following his every move and announcing his actions to some unknown party at the other end of a portable phone. Bryden and Andrew are busy scurrying about trying to

organize speeches and speakers while Mary corners top Labourites with their travelling itineraries for the coming weeks. In the midst of it all Lindsay arrives with various groups of people who have agreed to speak to the conference about the horrible state of their jobs under Conservative governments. They represent a consortium of the professionals Hare might have neglected when writing the trilogy: doctors, nurses, and teachers.

The logistics of the hastily-constructed event seem overwhelming. Besides gathering everyone in one agreed upon place and mounting a worthy spectacle, supporters like Bryden and Andrew have to contend with problems of decorum and personality clashes. Malcolm is upset because he has to speak third and refuses to even sit on the same platform with "flaming Vera," the old Labourite. Lindsay has enlisted too many guest professionals, all of whom have prepared speeches, and everyone is worried about technical difficulties.

In the end, though, they manage an orderly line behind the platform. George prompts everyone, "This is it. Let's do it like last time. Only this time we win." And with his words of encouragement the entourage mounts the stage, with the exception of Vera who, suggestively, has been left behind asking, "When? Someone tell me. When do we start?" (Hare 77)

The second act opens outside a television studio with a soliloquy by Trevor Avery, George's security agent from the Protection Branch. Trevor mentions some of the hazards of his job, his likes and dislikes, and makes some topical references that sound familiar to both the '92 election in Britain and recent American presidential campaigns. "The Protection

Branch is good," he insists, "It's a good posting. According of course to who you get. There are certain Ministers--I'm not going to name them but let's say they like climbing in and out of tanks wearing flak jackets--they're the ones who treat you like dirt." (Hare 78) In Britain a member of Major's cabinet was fond of the photo opportunities provided by army vehicles, while his American parallel was, of course, the ill-fated Michael Dukakis, running against George Bush in 1988.

The inside of the television studio just before George goes on the air to be interviewed provides Hare with another interesting location to catch his audience's imagination. There is a tremendous amount of bustle preparing the Leader for his appearance. Mary, Lindsay, and Gwenda arrive almost simultaneously with refreshments for their point man--water, soup, and orange juice--while George performs vocal warm-ups, glimpses a stack of newspapers Mary has brought him and listens to poll results from Lindsay. Arriving with a stack of notecards containing possible questions he might be asked in order to brief George, Oliver speaks with the voice of gloomy reason amid the upbeat titters of his comrades.

Once again, Oliver's concern reflects a problem that hindered the real Labour Party in '92. "Wars aren't going well when nothing is happening," he tells George, "There's no defining issue. It's been seven days. In every election there is one crucial engagement." If Oliver knew the harmful outcome of his prescience, he might regret his forthrightness. He warns George about the potential hazards of the program he is about to appear on, the site of his previous Waterloo, *The Linus Frank Show*, but before he can prepare him any further Linus himself appears and hustles George off toward the set.

It is obvious from the beginning that the interviewer is a Conservative supporter and primarily interested in baiting George on the air. Having already interviewed the Tory Prime Minister, Linus tells George before they go on the air, "You know, Kendrick is good. At one-to-one interviews. I mean whatever your differences, you would have to say...just as a pro...I'm an old pro myself...this man is pretty terrific." (Hare 89)

Once on the air, the situation only gets worse. Linus immediately goes on the attack. He asserts, "There's a question, now, Mr. Jones, I'd like to raise with you...to do, if I may, with your policies...and the feeling perhaps you've now changed policy so often that no-one quite knows where your Party stands." Initially George withstands the offensive. He counters, We can't win on this. When Tories change policies, it's called flexibility and it's said to show strength. When we do it, it's vacillation and people say that we're weak." (Hare 93)

Soon, though, Linus manipulates the conversation into a heated argument about the interference of the press and George's education and leadership difficulties, with neither side making clear points through the din of shouting. Then, in the midst of the debate, the reporter drops his bombshell. "Let's look at mortgage tax relief," he slyly suggests.

Caught unaware, George cannot coherently respond to Linus' questions about this supposedly secret aspect of Labour's strategy. He denies the allegation, then backpeddles, and finally confronts the interviewer, asking if he is calling him a liar. Linus' debilitating *coup de grace* is, "I'm calling you nothing. That is for the public to decide. Thank you Mr. Jones." Then the show ends and the scene returns to backstage.

In the wings George's entire staff is both worried and angered, concerned for their leader's emotional state but ready to berate him for

his susceptibility to Linus' attack. Mary rants, "You've handed them their issue. LABOUR'S SECRET PLAN TO RAISE TAX. You've handed them their headlines." (Hare 100) It is Oliver, though, who fumes the most. He accuses George, "He sets the trap and you walk right in...I gave you the cards, it was on the cards I bloody gave you, be careful, it said, watch for it, watch for martgage tax relief...But oh no! You're too vain to do your bloody homework...Of course you're standing round wasting time with these bloody girls...Will you never get it? Giggling with girls who are in love with you...That's not the bloody job, you idiot." (Hare 101)

Already wrought with tension, his chief advisor's explosion is too much for volatile George. The Leader loses control and physically assaults Oliver, landing a punch in his face. The scuffle is immediately stopped by Trevor and the staff, fortunately before anyone notices, and the two men are dragged to another part of the building where they calm themselves and try to sort out the disaster.

Oliver reveals the dramatic device Hare uses to turn these largely accurate events into a fictional play. George, it seems, through a vain personal flaw, has brought this trouble on himself. Oliver tells him, "Before the interview started. I took you aside. Then I thought, no, it's not fair. And you'd made a rule. You gave us a warning...Never speak ill of Malcolm Pryce." (Hare 102-103) Thanks to George's blind faith and heedlessness, the "defining issue" Oliver sought is now in the open. Malcolm Pryce, he discloses, had lunch with Linus Frank and likely blew Labour's cover on the Mortgage Tax Relief issue.

Though no one wants to think Malcolm did it to sabotage their efforts, everyone believes it happened. As Oliver points out, "He does have a weakness. And it's one which is common among Labour

politicians...He'll say anything if you give him posh lunch." Andrew adds, "God, don't you hate socialists? You buy them so cheap! You give them one drink or one meal. Then they open the door." (Hare 104)

The playwright's mildly humorous perturbation concerning the eating habits of leftists is especially significant given his own experience with the press at business lunches. Reporters from right-wing publications like the *Telegraph* are fond of pointing out elitist qualities in Hare when, on rare occasions, they find reason to profile him. Even the *Sunday Times* has unearthed a bias. John Mortimer met Hare at a restaurant on October 6, 1991 for an interview about Murmuring Judges. He couldn't help but remark, "I found him sitting quietly in a corner of the restaurant, wearing a blue suit and a tie and looking less like the sort of radical writer who troubles Bernard Levin's sleep than the ex-head boy of a public school...who has taken up a profession that keeps him quietly amused." His mild rebukes continue through the interview. Mortimer reports, "'The English ruling classes are still brought up to be cynical, moderately ironic and detached,' he told me over the squid," as if political dissenters and socialists were not meant to eat from the entree listing of menus. In this light, Oliver and Andrew's comments seem a likely jab at both foolish leftists and biased reporters.

Still, George's loyalty doesn't flag. "We can survive this," he tells his crew, "But only if I get Malcolm on side. That's the priority. Mary, I have to see Malcolm myself. Yes if necessary we both stop campaigning. The issue is me. I'm now the issue. And Malcolm's the only man who can help." He finishes by asking everyone present to ignore what has taken place and respect his example of allegiance to the Party.

The following scene takes place in an aircraft hangar after one of George's speeches on the road. It is the location chosen for his showdown with Malcolm. The dialogue between the two men is probably the most extended writing of the play constructed entirely from Hare's imagination and least dependent on actual events. The distinction is evident. The exchange is more personal and dramatic and the points raised are clearly not ones Hare would have been privy to at even the most top level meetings.

Malcolm begins the conversation by immediately denying rumors that he leaked secret information to Linus Frank before George's unfortunate appearance on his show. Anxious to get at a deeper issue, George shrugs off the whole affair and makes an appeal to his Shadow Chancellor. "This is the moment I turn to my friends," he implores. (Hare 108)

George's real complaint is that he needs enthusiastic support now more than ever, and Malcolm and other speakers on the campaign trail are not giving it to him. Malcolm revealingly protests, "There is an intelligent electorate out there. If I suddenly start screaming George Jones is a genius, do you think they won't know there's something odd going on?" (Hare 109) He argues that George always tries to find a scapegoat for his problems and is too surrounded by "George's sycophants" to let news of the real world reach him.

For his part, George contends that the unelected cadre of supporters who surround him and nourish him became necessary when, after years of answering to every little problem and complaint that arose, he couldn't take any more and needed a buffer in order to function. Furthermore, he claims, the real Party members often failed him out of

snobbery. "The Peoples' Party," he challenges Malcolm, "Never underestimate its capacity for sheer condescension. They don't like a leader without a degree...One of my own backbenchers said to me 'This absurd love of the theatre you fake.' Fake? *Fake*? 'Of course,' he said, 'You can't hope to understand Shakespeare when you don't have the tools." (Hare 114)

Summoning the big guns, Malcolm tries to convince George, "Everyone respects you. Everyone likes you. No-one will ever deny you've got guts. But finally, people don't follow you. Because they know you can't cut it." (Hare 116)

The final blow, however, is Malcolm's assertion that the Labour Party has carried George to his present position. "This party, of which today you seem to be so contemptuous...the people you think are self-obsessed and absurd...these very people still love you, even while they despair of you. They said George deserves this...He deserves one more shot at this thing." In an obvious reference to Margaret Thatcher's premature departure from office, Malcolm adds, "If you ask me why I would say our reasons were honourable. The Tories get rid of their Leaders when it's clear they might not win. But we hold on to ours. I call that decency." (Hare 119) His ego severely bruised, George attempts a gesture of reconciliation but is brushed off by Malcolm who insists he will tow the line from that point onward, talking up George's leadership and not creating a row.

George's reputed power as an orator, his natural charisma with audiences, is finally addressed and put to rest once and for all in the scenes leading up to the play's finale. After George's clandestine

meeting with Malcolm the action moves to Election Party Headquarters where Lindsay, with Bryden's help, has secretly summoned all of the Leader's staff except Oliver. His absence is crucial to Lindsay's new marketing strategy which runs counter to everything Oliver has been preaching. Breaking with the Party's tradition of rehearsed speeches and parroted dogma, she suggests they let George off the leash to dazzle the crowd at a Manchester rally.

Andrew protests both the idea and the exclusion of Oliver but Bryden, the *elected* campaign chariman, overrides him. Lindsay argues their present policy is self-defeating. "The public aren't stupid," she exclaims, "They know he's been programmed. It's not hard to work out why this man's ratings are low. The public see only one thing when they look at him, and that's six rolls of sticky tape wrapped round his mouth...What's wrong wtih us? Are we really so cynical...are we so arrogant, that we truly imagine the pubic can't tell? The strategy's ridiculous. Keep George in a box. And meanwhile try to out-Tory the Tories." (Hare 128)

Between Lindsay and Bryden they push all the right buttons. She encourages him to let out "the George we once knew," and Bryden inspires him by showing him a volume of all the speeches he gave before he was leader--before he even began writing them down. "My father...my own father taught me," George recalls, "He said to me: speak, just speak from the heart...Without notes, that's right. On the backs of envelopes. Like a Quaker, I simply stood up...And when I stood up, the words always came. And then people said to me, now you're the Leader, everything you say must be written down." (Hare 130)

The temptation to return to the glory of his yesterdays is too great and George succumbs. At the Manchester Rally the audience sees the platform from a forward perspective. The huge letters suspended above the Leader's head proudly proclaim, "IT'S YOUR LABOUR PARTY," and an enormous video screen flashes George's every word and move to the far reaches of the arena.

His speech starts out strong, with firm resolve and a respectable verbal flair. He thunders, "It is said to me: there is no longer hope in our future. No sense of potential. No sense of possibility. In our own lifetime a whole generation has been effectively abandoned and dispossessed. They have been told to fend for themselves. Comrades, my socialism is the socialism that says these people must not be let go!" (Hare 133) It is not long, though, before his eloquence mysteriously fails him. He falters, trying to find the right words to explain what he feels. Finally he must resort to the speech Andrew wrote for him, safely tucked in his pocket.

Backstage, after his appearance, George is pure frustration. Trembling, he reaches for a scotch and a cigarette and ignores pleas from his staff to get ready to meet the mayor and the public of Manchester. What began as a seemingly minor problem to base a character and, indeed, a play on, has now become a major thematic issue. In one of the play's most important speeches George rants:

> There's nothing you can say...You're not allowed to say anything. How can I say what I feel in my heart? All those hours in hotel rooms working at speeches, drafting, re-drafting, polishing, changing every word and all you're doing is covering up for what's really gone wrong...I got up there, I thought all the things I truly care about...Northern Ireland. What can you say? You can't say anything. Not publicly. The whole bloody country's been bleeding for years...It's

> been dying and we can't speak, we can't say anything, you're not allowed to say *anything*...I thought, you know, out there I was thinking, Northern Ireland, it's "above politics." That's what we say. Well what sort of politics is it which says that certain things are too important to be spoken of? So what are we left with? All the other stuff is a game. We can't speak of history, you can't say Britain happens to be trapped in historical decline. You can't even say that. But it's true...Defense! Abandoning nuclear weapons, which everyone knows we should do, I could make a great speech about that. My god! If only I could! But of course if I say it, that's fifty thousand jobs.

He continues, touching on the economy, Germans, the Welsh, and even the royal family, finally concluding by asking, "Why can't I speak of what I believe?" (Hare 137-140)

While all along it seemed George's charismatic impotence was just a personality quirk, perhaps one shared by Neil Kinnock, his supposed model, it now appears that it is a metaphor for the stifling effect government, the press, and the campaigning system have on real feelings and potential progress. Hare's chief complaint, and one shared by American political pundits, is about the homogeneity of government thanks to a two or three party system that must pander to an increasingly large, media-influenced public. Furthermore, the burden of blame rests not just with the Tories, Labourites, Liberal Democrats, or the Green Party. The desire to win at all costs is shared by all, as is the responsibility for the result.

At the end of his tirade George is finally snapped back into line by Gwenda, who scolds him into straightening up and going to meet the public. After he and the others leave, Andrew quietly admonishes Lindsay, "Thank you, Lindsay. Now put him back in the box." (Hare 141)

The play ends, fittingly, where the campaign trail ends: late at night in a hotel ballroom where the Labour Party has gathered to watch the voting results. It is a foregone conclusion. Oliver delivers the news to George that, though the tally has not officially been reached, Labour is far behind in the exit polls. All that is left for the play is to tie up a few loose ends.

In his first onstage conversation with his campaign lieutenant since before the Manchester disaster, George attempts to patch things up with Oliver. Initially recommending they put the whole thing behind them, under pressure Oliver suggests they would have won if they had stuck to the gameplan *and* if George had firmer resolve. "You should have seen Malcolm six months ago," he fumes, "And if he wouldn't back you, if he wouldn't come out for you hot, strong, and cheering, you should have sacked him. You should have fixed him...I've heard you so often. In a fifty-fifty you always say you could do it. You can pull the trigger, that's what you say. But you can't. Let's face it. When it actually comes down to it, you don't have the nerve." (Hare 145)

Ironically, this is the same accusation Malcolm levelled at George during their face-off in scene sixteen. This time, though, George has a surprising reply. He tells Oliver he was thinking of the Party. "Malcolm is the next Leader this party will have," George says, "I had to hand him the Party in good order." (Hare 146) When Oliver, incredulous, calls his actions a weakness, George counters, "I believe in the Party. I'm not sentimental. The Party is not my whole life. But it's all we have. It's the only practical instrument that exists in the country for changing peoples' lives for the good." (Hare 147)

George's fealty to his party, his constituency, and his profession suggest that in the end, despite his tragic errors in judgement, he still deserves the audience's sympathy. He makes a decision, Hare seems to suggest, that every politician should be expected to make, but one that is seldom seen in real govenrment.

As Mary, Lindsay, Gwenda, and Andrew join the Leader to prepare him for his concession speech, George briefly assumes a comical air. "You know what I think?" he asks rhetorically, "I think let's all just be Tories. After all, they always win. So what's the point of having other parties? Given that they never get in? Whereas, you know, if we join the Tory Party, we could do something. I'm beginning to think it's our best chance. Why not? Let's join the Tory Party. And then let's all fuck it up." (Hare 152)

The epilogue to the play occurs after a brief monologue scene by newly re-elected Prime Minister Charles Kendrick, who praises his "worthy opponent" George Jones as a "decent and honourable man," then proceeds to tell the public that the economic dangers they forecast are actually worse than they let on, but the Conservative Party will see them through.

The last scene of the play takes place almost a year later, back at the Cenotaph on Memorial Day. This time, however, as the three party leaders lay their wreaths on the monument, Malcolm Pryce represents Labour and it is George who addresses the audience. Somberly, recalling images of Lionel at the end of Racing Demon asking if everything amounts to loss, George ponders, "In the year since my own bruising experience I have found myself asking a question which will always haunt us and to which no easy answer appears. Is this history? Is everything

history? Could we have done more? Was it possible? And how shall we know?" (Hare 154)

As the culmination of Hare's efforts, The Absence of War draws effectively on its predecessors, continuing the production style trend set by Murmuring Judges while reaching back to Racing Demon for depth of character and theme. Its structure is sound, following the lone character of George Jones and his single action, the campaign for the Ministry. The deficiencies in the play are largely the fault of Hare comingling too much fact with fiction, or perhaps a perceived need on the audience's or reader's part to sort reality from the world of the play.

The problem is not the same one he encountered in Murmuring Judges when an abundance of statistics and dilution of plotline caused the play to veer off toward docudrama. As has been noted, the problems faced by the Labour Party in The Absence of War are quite real in the world of the play and handled with the same dramatic élan as the crises that plague the vicars in Racing Demon. Rather, because the events he portrays are so jarringly familiar to most of Britain and much of the world beyond, they occasionally distract from the enjoyment of what is essentially a work of creative fiction.

Thus, a few nagging questions are left at the end of the play. *Is* George Jones a direct knock-off of Neil Kinnock? If so, what message is the audience meant to receive? Does the play laud Kinnock and the Labour Party, or attempt to shame it and change it from within? If it is truly affective drama, do Tories sympathize with George at the curtain's fall? Nearly every reviewer was quick to come up with some kind of answer to these and other questions of veracity.

In *The Times*, Benedict Nightingale weighed in on the side of creativity. "Research has been transmuted into what is a fiction plausible enough to grip those of us who are not political insiders," he wrote, "and, after a laborious introductory scene, lively enough to keep us gripped." (Nightingale "Dogged Hare's Anatomy of Britain") John Mortimer in the *Sunday Express* agreed. In a review titled "Left Rediscovers the Power to Thrill," he asserted, "David Hare's play is not that ghastly telly invention, the 'drama-doc.' It deals with a Labour leader who is funnier, braver, tougher and more original than the press or his own party will wallow him to appear." (Mortimer 30)

Like Racing Demon and Murmuring Judges before it, The Absence of War drew its share of criticism from the people it claims to represent. In the press, nearly all the major papers running reviews also published a column by a politician or pundit remarking on the relative truthfulness and fairness of the play. Often, these were some of Hare's biggest detractors.

Roy Hattersley, an aide to Neil Kinnock during the 1992 campaign, wrote a lengthy article in the *Evening Standard* in which he provided several examples of dialogue and actions that Hare allegedly "stole" directly from Labour's back rooms and closets. Hattersley warns, "Some of his (George Jones') outbursts may remind the audience of Neil Kinnock--as Mr. Hare clearly intends they should. But they are reflections from a double distorting mirror. It is the Kinnock of the gossip columns, not the Kinnock of real life, that they caricature." He complains further that the people in Hare's play "abuse each other. They scream, they shout and they weep. There is nobody in George Jones's retinue (with the possible exception of his Special Branch detective) who I would trust to help run the country." (Hattersley 9)

Meanwhile, in the *Independent*, Gerald Kaufman MP chose a rather mean-spirited, nit-picking approach in which he attempted to discredit Hare and his work by claiming the playwright *meant* to reproduce what he saw, but erred egregiously. "No Labour leader would waste a minute in unwinnable Kidderminster," Kaufman gripes, "Likewise the real Shadow Chancellor would never need to complain that the party leader spends too much time in the Commons tea-room with his personal staff: MPs' staff are not allowed in. On the other hand, while staff as well as MPs are admitted to the Central Lobby (as indeed is everybody), leading politicians would certainly not conduct private discussions there." (Kaufman) Others took a more sensible approach. An unattributed editorial in the *Times Leader* suggested "Hare is a playwright, not a reporter, and playwrights tend to write drama, not recycle press conferences."

The question of art imitating life aside, the play and its production met with mainly favorable reviews, especially when viewed in the context of the trilogy as a whole. After viewing all three plays in a single day Nightingale, with his usual blend of subtle sarcasm and insight, remarked:

> A mere marathon stretches for 26 miles and takes a good runner two-odd hours to complete. The Harathon is a much more daunting haul. On Saturday it started at 10.30 am, ended at 10.30 pm, and covered some knotty terrain. The morning was spent criss-crossing parish churches, vicarages and a bishop's palace. Then it was off to a prison, a copshop, and the lawcourts for a long, gruelling afternoon. As for the evening, that was the most challenging of all. The House of Commons, Television Centre, the hustings in Manchester, Labour Party headquarters in London: by the time the Harathon was over, it seemed that half

> Britain had been exhaustively and exhaustingly traversed.
>
> And so it had. Whatever the objections to David Hare's trilogy, and they are not a few, its scope and ambition are scarcely in doubt. Whatever the cavils about Richard Eyre's productions of *Racing Demon*, *Murmuring Judges* and the new *Absence of War*, they are a collective credit to his theatre. Never has the National justified its grandiose name more thoroughly. The Hare-Eyre axis has in effect transformed the theatre into a forum where national institutions--the Church, the Law, Her Majesty's Opposition--are being articulately examined. (Nightingale "Dogged Hare's Anatomy of Britain")

The Financial Times' critic Malcolm Rutherford agreed. He wrote, "David Hare and the Royal National Theatre go together. Without Hare, the RNT would be hard put to find a contemporary British dramatist writing about contemporary British subjects on an epic scale." He commented on Hare's latest work, "On Saturday quite the best of the three plays looked to be *Absence of War*, esecially in the second half. One suspects that is becasue it is the most topical, dealing with a subject that people still talk about." (Rutherford)

Rutherford was one of few critics who actually favored The Absence of War over the rest of the trilogy, but stood in the solid majority of those who found good and bad points in its construction. *The Guardian*'s Michael Billington acknowledged, "Where better than the National Theatre to discuss the state of the nation? We can all argue over the merits and demerits of individual plays. But the David Hare trilogy at the Olivier not only offers a vigorous, bracing, provocative portrait of modern Britain, but also a coherent vision: Hare pins down, with mordant wit, the institutional clubbiness, the increasing reliance on PR, the sclerotic ancestor-worship, the decay of any core belief that he sees as symptoms

of our current malaise." He said The Absence of War is "undeniably enjoyable and contains plentiful examples of Hare's bilious wit...But the difficulty with the play is that it is both too journalistic and yet not journalistic enough. By that I mean, it is hemmed in by recent history and yet shirks many of the key issues: what, for instance, is the precise role of the British Labour Party in a rapidly changing world where socialism is in retreat?" (Billington "Labour's Hare Shirt")

No matter what the tenor of the reviews from the major critics, to a writer they applauded Hare's efforts in conjuction with Richard Eyre and the National Theatre to create a dramatic project unparallelled in the pantheon of modern English writers. The final product, the Hare Trilogy, represents a culmination of experience and refinement of technique that catipulted the playwright from the unknown edges of the Fringe to a position as one of England's foremost dramatists and filmmakers.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the evolution of David Hare's theatrical work, concentrating on his produced plays from 1979-93, and to arrive at some understanding of his success as a "playwright of popular dissent" in Britain. An important factor in his early development was his association with England's theatrical avant-garde, and his most valuable career asset in recent years has been his relationship with the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain.

As one of the founders of the rebellious Fringe Theatre movement in the late 1960s and '70s, Hare shares communal roots with Edward Bond, Howard Brenton, Trevor Griffiths, Christopher Hampton, Howard Barker, Stephen Poliakoff and a host of other anti-establishment artists. This group holds similar political beliefs--strong Leftist support for the working poor, a disdain for affluence, and a hatred for England's class system. In their earliest works they also exercised comparable dramatic techniques and writing styles--epic structure, a Marxist sense of history, thin plots with strong, didactic themes, and a tendency toward shocking scenes of absurd behavior or violence.

From his first few unpublished plays with the Portable Theatre ("How Brophy Made Good", "Lay By"), through his maiden Fringe Theatre productions (Slag, The Great Exhibition, Knuckle, Brassneck, Fanshen, Teeth 'n' Smiles), Hare displayed artistic ability and popular appeal analogous to his confederates producing plays off the beaten path. In 1978, however, Plenty marked a change of course for the playwright as he began his artistic association with the Royal National Theatre. This connection with such a popular, subsidized theatre immediately

distinguished him from most Fringers, whose work has never been seen at the RNT or on a West End stage, and even from more popular dissidents like Brenton, Griffiths, and Bond, who only occasionally surfaced in London's more prominent venues.

Hare had transcended sweeping dramatized dogma and found a way to interest audiences in a microcosm of British lives. In Plenty, Susan Traherne's dejection at the compromised lifestyle of Britons following the Second World War mirrored an entire generation's disillusionment with post-war prosperity. Moreover, she was the first full embodiment of the Hare heroine--a unique, intelligent, sympathetic character with a full range of emotions and experiences; one that audiences may pity, yet still criticize for her actions. She provided a rough model for several important characters that followed: Peggy Whitton (A Map of the World), Sophia Yepileva (The Bay at Nice), Isobel Glass (The Secret Rapture), Irina Platt (Murmuring Judges) and perhaps a few others.

Still, Hare's politically and socially conscious edge was not dulled by mainstream popularity. The election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 provided ample material for Liberal-minded writers across Great Britain. While initial response from extreme leftists was predictably severe (e.g. Howard Brenton and Tony Howard's 1980 polemic Ditch the Bitch! a.k.a. A Short Sharp Shock!), Hare's delayed response was a more carefully crafted satire of the Fleet Street press, his 1985 collaboration with Brenton, Pravda. The playwright pursued his critique of contemporary society with the subtle inferences of The Bay at Nice and Wrecked Eggs, set Thatcherite Britain on its ear with the damning resonances of The Secret Rapture, then mounted the most ambitious modern dramatic

examination of social institutions in Britain: The Hare Trilogy (Racing Demon, Murmuring Judges, and The Absence of War).

In the final analysis, Hare's popularity with mainstream audiences despite the sometimes pessimistic, anti-establishment messages he seems to send, may be attributed to several factors: Like other masters of social "problem plays" (e.g. Ibsen and Shaw) Hare is able to intimate a group of people, a government, a country, or the world-at-large using only a few unique, articulate, and empathetic characters. This simplifies plots, streamlines production styles, and focuses audience attention on the meaning of his plays. Furthermore, while his opinion on a given topic may be extremely different from Britain's voting majority, he has learned the Shavian art of weighing ideas and providing strong arguments for his protagonists and antagonists alike, thus providing a lively, albeit prearranged, forum for his plays' themes rather than the mud-slinging, polemical approach favored by other Leftist playwrights.

An added bonus is the subject matter of Hare's plays. He has developed a knack for finding issues and milieus that appeal to his audiences' concerns. The national soul-searching of Plenty, the behind-the-scenes look at the sensationalized world of the yellow press in Pravda, the near-soap operatic greed and cynicism of The Secret Rapture, and his *tour de force* examination of the Church, Law, and Government in Racing Demon, Murmuring Judges, and The Absence of War all draw the theatre-going public in for a closer look at hot topics rendered into art. Finally, Hare creates *intelligent* yet *accessible* plays. While his characters are mostly successful professionals of one kind or another, often educated and always opinionated, and his dialogue is infused with literary references, allegory, and symbolism, he is careful not to slip into pedantry.

He is ever mindful that an audience can not respond to something it doesn't understand.

Without sacrificing political ideals or artistic vision, Hare has managed to forge a career as one of England's premiere playwrights. Profiling the dramatist on the opening day of the Hare Trilogy, *The Observer* noted, "We no longer produce world-class moralists. But any twenty-first-century historian looking for the most *representative* Englishman of the generation alienated by the Left's failure since the 1960s will surely include the playwright David Hare among the finalists." ("Moralist of the Establishment") Truly, in a rather unique way, this artist with childhood roots in the High Church and Cambridge, and professional beginnings as a voice of conscience for the radical Left, has managed to ensconce himself in the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain as a representative of the *people*, as Britain's one and only playwright of popular dissent.

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