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VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA, 1956-1969.
The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1970
Speech-Theater

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VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA,
1956 - 1969

Dissertation
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INTRODUCTION

Everyone conversant with the modern English-speaking theatre is well aware of the critical reverberation caused by John Osborne's 1956 drama *Look Back in Anger*. Within a comparatively short time, a movement had been signaled, identified and labeled. The "young man" in Britain was angry, and he had a lot to say. In the time that followed, the English stage not only saw a new brace of playwrights, but a clean break with traditional subject matter, form and heroic types.

The "anger" criticism can be summarized by observing that the major critics rather repetitiously pointed out that the plays reflected an unassimilated generation which was seething with "anger" for an Establishment, but a generation also ambivalently saddened by a faint nostalgia for an age past. Thematically, the plays were despairing for a lack of great causes; and for solutions to existence. The plays were a protest without answers, and later critics have wondered if what was thought a revolution was not really a reaction.

Dramatists were both abundant and productive, and bright futures were heralded for many. A recent survey of the major critics indicates that only Harold Pinter, John Osborne, Peter Shaffer, Arnold Wesker and John Arden are looked upon as having fulfilled their early promise. In critical quarters it seems all but admitted that, while the British stage has undergone great change since 1956, the torrent
of angry young men and their plays has diminished. The disturbing
effect of this criticism is that an arbitrary compartmentalization
of the plays and playwrights of the Fifties has taken place. It
would be more correct to regard the playwrights of the "angry era"
as only the first battalion; part of a continuum in which the dra­
matic events of the Sixties must also be considered. For the Eng­
lish drama, the Fifties were the beginning of an epoch that is
still in the making. The young men, their plays and their anger,
have not subsided but, rather, have congealed into more lethal form.

If the theatrical decorum of British audiences was invaded by
anger in the Fifties, it was assailed by an uncommon violence in the
Sixties. The "angry" dramatic events of the Fifties foreshadowed
the violence which found its way into serious drama and comedy. The
manner of violence was grotesque enough to be quickly--and unfor­
tunately--labeled either "theatre of cruelty" or "black comedy."
These terms have been in almost all instances either indiscriminately
applied or ill-defined. This culmination of a theatrical era in
violence has taken such shape and prominence as to warrant examina­
tion and research. It is a significant reflection of the British
state of mind, moral attitudes and life. Such a study should avoid
the danger of compartmentalization by considering the violence not
only in its nature and raisons d'etre, but also in a soci­cal and
theatrically progressive, organic tradition leading to the present.
What is needed is a critical overview of the period in British drama­
tic literature from 1956 with a view that unifies the phenomena. What
has happened constitutes a change of such remarkable proportions from that which had gone before that history will record it as one of those marks at which an era or epoch may be said to have begun. Its end has not been recorded as of this writing. *Anger and After*\(^1\) by John Russell Taylor has become the handbook that explains the "anger." An up-to-date view is needed which explains the violence and joins it to the anger. While violence on stage in the 1960's in England is the subject of this study and its major stimulus, the violence is not viewed as an isolated phenomenon. The thesis then is that the violence and anger are one, differing only in degree. The first general purpose of this study then is to eradicate the misleading critical lines that separate the drama of "anger" from that which follows and to show that there has been a common unity, namely, a deepening and progressive rebellion which has found expression in an ultimate form of action and conflict; that is, violence. This era in British drama can be exhibited as not only historically important but still alive and active. This general thesis will be supported by a descriptive analysis of selected plays from John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* to the present. The particular base for initial discussion will be the nature of comic drama, which shows a progression from "dark humor" to "black comedy." This material, although part of the total picture of violence, will mainly be introductory and a preface to a discussion of greater violence in the Sixties. The first chapter will be composed of a brief tracing of early violence in terms best characterized by

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John Osborne's "dark humor," John Arden's "savage comedy" and Joe Orton's "black comedy." The second, third and fourth chapters will contain a detailed analysis of six dramatic works. These six plays were selected as most representative of the violent action that developed on stage in the mid and later years of the Sixties. The dramas were also chosen because of their dramatic worthiness and significant reflection of deep social concerns. The plays are Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs by David Halliwell, Saved and Narrow Road to the Deep North by Edward Bond, Afore Night Come by David Rudkin, Entertaining Mr. Sloane and Loot by Joe Orton.

The second general purpose of this study is to relate the violence to a social context and in so doing, at least partially to explain that violence. It will be readily evident that the playwrights are once again holding the mirror up to nature. In so doing, they demonstrate that the violence is an outgrowth of a crisis of identity, information exchange and meaning which had surfaced with the decided shift in Britain's role as a world power. To begin with, the political events of the mid and late Fifties left the British people with rampant defeatism. National pride waned among Britons and an identity problem presented itself. A general thematic question is contained in the dramatic expression of this English reality. The question is, "Who am I?" and Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs is an example of its use as dramatic material. Chapter II, in an examination of this question, suggests some rather painful answers.
The violence on stage is also derived from the crises in information exchange and meaning. The problems of communication and meaning gain special intensity as a result of shifting value systems in Britain and the world. The traditional moral code was collapsing; witness the British high court trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover and the 1965 House of Lords bill which legitimized homosexual relations between consenting adults. The celebrated Profumo affair rocked Britain and startled the world. The demise of systems which had limited behavior ensued, followed by a resultant revolution in human conduct. In the drama, value systems were under attack and the writers ground away at the lessening of moral and ethical certainties. Thematically, human existence was portrayed in the theatre as meaningless and human communication was shown to have withered into depressing silence. A second and a third general thematic question may be asked in the light of these real life conditions which the dramas mirror. Saved, Afore Night Come and Narrow Road to the Deep North present rather tragic and anguished events which occur because of the absence of, rejection of, or ineptitude in human information exchange.

It is fair to say the second general thematic question that characterizes this circumstance is, "Who are you?" Chapter III is an analysis of these three plays, and it is implicit in the analysis that the events depicted are a consequence of imperfect understanding of this question on the part of certain characters. The remaining

two plays by Joe Orton, **Entertaining Mr. Sloane** and **Loot** present a world that is in complete chaos. In such a world, the crisis in meaning is reflected. The third general thematic question this suggests is, "What are we doing?" Chapter IV looks at the action of these plays with that query in mind.

A summation of the specific attitudes which will be taken in this study in regard to the social relevance of the violence presented on stage may be stated as follows:

1. The six plays reflect social concerns of Britain as a result of many internal and external political and economic events. The crisis in identity has been caused by misfortunes in the international arena. The crisis in information exchange and meaning has been caused by a collapse of traditional value systems.

2. The plays suggest three general thematic questions that characterize and parallel actual public concerns.

3. As a persistent element of the dramas, violence is an outgrowth of and an alternative to the frustration inherent in these questions.

4. The state of the world as perceived and interpreted by the mind of the English playwright is a partial explanation of the violence on stage and is an understandable consequence of such perception and interpretation.

The third general purpose of this study is to develop conclusions about the nature of the violence on stage: in other words, to
determine what kind of violence takes place, why it is inevitable, how does it transpire, etc. In addition, why is the particular violence in this period so unique when there has been a long tradition of violence in the English drama since Elizabethan times? Does the violence say something about the social order?

This dissertation thus proposes to serve three general purposes:

1. To show that anger and violence are one, however differing in degree and, in so doing, to unify the dramatic era from 1956 to 1969.

2. To show what the plays reflect about the social condition and thus partially to explain the violence.

3. To discuss and describe the special characteristics of the violence in the theatre during this time.

There are attendant "side-lights" which result from developing the material and which directly or indirectly relate to the general purposes. For instance, the playwrights in their dramas do not avoid the critical realities of English life. They are not particularly topical in terms of such modern concerns as miscegenation, the "bomb," the "pill," etc., but they do confront the larger pain and anguish found behind the daily toil in Britain. Positioned against the pre-1956 drama and compared with it, the current drama squarely faces the mirror of reality as the earlier drama scrupulously avoided it.

Lastly, any overview of theatrical work in England since 1956 cannot overlook the changes in the forms of drama. The plays covered
by this research reflect some of these varying forms. Although Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht are acknowledged influences, something must be said about the cultural bed into which their ideas and techniques were implanted. Since cruelty, violence and pain on stage are fashionably linked to Artaud in current criticism, there is added need for explanation on this point. Thus, conclusions regarding dramatic precedents will be offered.

Many other plays in the period under consideration depict violence, document social ills, and attest to the stage revolution underway in Britain. The plays selected, however, seemed the most dramatically viable in terms of reflecting the era. Similarly, although Harold Pinter, John Osborne, Peter Shaffer and John Arden can be shown to be equally as productive as the writers whose works appear here, their exclusion is not an oversight. Rather, the research presented is intended to provide adequate evidence for its purposes, not all evidence. Charles Wood, Giles Cooper, Peter Terson, David Mercer, Frank Marcus, James Saunders, David Storey, David Pinner, and Henry Livings are only a few of others that have written particularly exciting drama. In the final analysis, Mervyn Jones gives each and all their proper acclaim:

If, as a foreigner, I had read Pinter's *The Homecoming*, David Mercer's *Belcher's Luck*, Joe Orton's *Loot*, and David Hallivell's *Little Malcolm*--to name four representative plays which I admire and which I regard as inspired by truth--the last thing I might be tempted to do would be to spend a week in England, let alone live there.

But our playwrights are not foreigners. They live in England, and it is hard to imagine any of them making a move, like W. H. Auden and other "angry young men" of the 1930's. Their abuse--and
several critics have discerned that this is notably true of Osborne—is powered and intensified by love. It is the abuse directed by a young man at a drunken and work-shy father, or at a slatternly mother. To put it at its lowest, this is the abuse of one who desperately cares, who can never cease to care. It is the loving anger of a child who cannot bear that his parent should do anything to diminish his love.\(^3\)

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CHAPTER I
THE ANGER AND THE VIOLENCE

It is a contention of this study that in the period 1956-1969 there was an escalation of dramatic violence that began as verbal invective, primarily in the plays of John Osborne and culminated in physical violence, primarily in the work of the playwrights under discussion in this dissertation. The ensuing pages are largely devoted to describing this physical violence and to assessing its import as a particular development of the Sixties. Before covering that ground, some footing must be established. There is no intention to chronicle the "angry era" completely, but rather briefly to document it as the beginning of a movement and to describe the nature and progression of the invective. Significantly, the British never leave their humor behind them, and while the selected plays can be variously defined in kind, there is a comic line which runs through all the work and underscores the deepening of the anger aroused by world events. Thus, this dissertation proposes to demonstrate a unity in the progression of violence. This particular chapter will deal with the development of the verbal invective as it becomes more violent. There is an escalating quality in the invective that can best be characterized progressively as "dark humor," "savage comedy" and "black comedy." This escalation carries us directly into the physical violence which
dominates the discussion in the next three chapters.

The English quandry about how to deal with a world that had suddenly turned on them in the face of the Suez crisis of 1956 was suddenly further rattled and dramatically awakened by one of their own (John Osborne). Jimmy Porter, the protagonist of Look Back in Anger, elaborates his sense of the English environment with blast-furnace monologues that express feelings of apathy, uselessness, impotence, derisive detachment and, finally, downright rage. If one acknowledges the British enjoyment of pre-Osborne humor on such vital subjects as currency restrictions, the expense of keeping a stately home, "tennis anyone," and mixed-up boudoirs, one must surely recognize the pall cast by Jimmy Porter to be the advent of "dark humor." This phenomenon is best exhibited by John Osborne and Shelagh Delaney:

1. as muscular rhetoric. Jimmy Porter (Look Back in Anger) articulates on a wide variety of subjects: sex war, class war, war, evangelism, motherhood, religion, Parliament and anything that crosses his path.

2. as outrageous invective. Jimmy Porter says about his wife, "My God, those worms will need a dose of salts the day they get through her!"

3. by improbable propriety. In A Taste of Honey Delaney creates a heroine, Jo, the off-spring of a carefree mother and a mental defective, who gets pregnant by a Negro sailor.

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He leaves her, whereupon she sets up house with Geoff, a homosexual. Meanwhile, her mother is on a new marital excursion with a drunken boor.

4. as anarchic dialogue. Jimmy Porter's wife Alison says, "Helena--even I gave up believing in the divine rights of marriage long ago. Even before I met Jimmy. They've got something different now--constitutional monarchy. You are where you are by consent."\(^2\)

The English, thoroughly disciplined to decorum, have nevertheless found occasional refuge in eccentric humor and bawdy comedy. They barely had time to clear their heads from the "dark humor" of Osborne and Delaney when John Arden's "savage comedy" *Live Like Pigs* burst upon them. The invective, then, grows more violent and Arden, Brendan Behan and Joan Littlewood are responsible for the increase in violent stage events. The form of "savage comedy" can be characterized,

1. as graphic passion and violence. *From* Arden's *Live Like Pigs*:

Col: (laughing stupidly): Rachel...

Sailor: Rachel. (He batters at the door with his fists, and Col beats on the wall--both shout "Rachel!" Rachel gets up, listens to them a while, then suddenly opens the door. Sailor staggers into the room, and kicks the door shut in Col's face. Col returns to his bottle.)

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 109.
Sailor: Go on, go on then, witch me, you power of fury—you!
(He goes at her passionately and they wrestle. They fall down together and they roll on the floor, biting one another and howling in their throats.)

2. as graphic desecration of sacred opinion. In Oh What a Lovely War the nation's high military command is grouse shooting while men die, munition makers have no loyalty but to profit, and news flashes noting the figures of battle casualties are counterpointed with drum beats to keep the home fires burning. Joan Littlewood has juxtaposed an absurd but sacred national purpose with its awful meaning. And a parody of "Onward Christian Soldiers" is just the ribbon with which to tie such a package.

In Brendan Behan's The Hostage, signs exhort, "keep Ireland black," and a character reminds the audience that the Pope's telephone number is "Vat 69."

The comic line did not remain "savage" long before Joe Orton plunged it to greater depths. Where "dark humor" had been verbally direct and was aimed at Establishment targets, "savage comedy" had mounted the attack graphically. It only remained for someone now to rupture their comic line with open physical violence. Orton's stage was alive with his special desecrations and while his audience laughed, he straightened them up with the fatal stomping of an old man.

The comedy ante had been raised, and critics were quick to stamp and label it "black comedy." At first, there was easy reference to inter-twined comedy and tragedy as "black comedy." Subsequent grotesqueries were called "purple comedy." There seemed to be a lack of precise reference in related criticism. Audiences, however, left the theatres shocked, assaulted and unpleasantly laden with shocking images planted in their memories. "Black comedy" would suffice as a term for critical reference, however imprecisely it was employed. Whatever the case, the term was made wholly comprehensible by the advent of Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* in which a nymphomaniac sister and a homosexual brother blackmail the vicious baby-faced killer of their old father into sleeping with each for six months in exchange for their silence about the murder. "Black comedy" appears to support anarchic action which, in its fullest extension, results in chaos. Thus, Truscott, the police inspector in *Loot* rifles the world of its innocent and licenses the guilty. Order is not restored; rather, disorder in terms of conventional mores is maintained. Mr. Sloane in *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* is an unrepentent killer allowed to live unpunished at play's end. Members of a folk-cultish group in Rudkin's *Afore Night Come* has killed and will kill again to maintain their narrow society, and at the play's conclusion they remain a dangerous contingent of humanity, threatening anyone who happens upon it. At the end of Bond's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, the populace is still in the hands of an inhuman regime and is destined to future arbitrary strife and upheaval. The perpetrators of violence in Bond's *Saved* and
and Halliwell's *Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs* are still loose in the world when the drama is over.

Of course, these plays are not all comedies, though there is much comedy in all of them. And each play reveals a unique treatment at the hands of its author. However, to a varying degree, each playwright essentially upsets a normal world order. In these plays, viewed both as comedy and serious drama, the world is not reformed.

In summary then, the break with English stage traditions prior to 1956, initiated by Osborne, carried into the Sixties with dramatic events which represent a continuity and extension of stage violence and which require illumination. Of course, the political, social and economic fortunes of Great Britain did not stand still since Suez and more recent occurrences provide just as provocative background for the newer playwrights. The deepening woes of England abroad and at home were matched on stage with an outcry that eventually crested into physical violence in the early 1960's. The violent dramas of the Sixties represent not only an extension of the early anger, but, a dramatic expression and reaction to a worsening daily reality for Britons. The second general purpose of this study is partially to explain the violence by relating the drama to its social context. Acknowledging that violence is an outgrowth of some particular frustration, one may speculate that the political events of the era posited a problem of identity for England. The suggestion is that the problem stimulates the general thematic question, "Who am I?" The violent dramas selected are taken to be reflective of particular social
contexts; such speculations are derived from an analysis of the plays. The general thematic questions are first extracted from the dramas and then applied to the society. Thus, a social theory has not been first created and plays later found that relate to the theory. But, as the thematic questions revealed themselves, they have been interpreted and then equated to events of the period. The general thematic scheme is considered to have meaning and relationship to the most troubling concerns of the playwright and of his culture.

The first play of interest in this survey of progressing violence is Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs by David Halliwell. The play is about a lengthy inquiry into self and the subsequent terrifying discovery of "Eunarchy" at home. Ultimately, the protagonist, Malcolm Scrawdyke is avenging himself for the frustrations arising out of a lack of meaning and of importance in his own identity.
LITTLE MALCOLM AND HIS STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EUNUCHS by David Halliwell is a farce comedy about a group of Northern art students in Huddersfield, soothing their small identities with fantasies of power. As performed on stage, these fantasies take the hilarious form of a new fascist organization leagued under the title of "The Dynamic Erectionist Movement." Malcolm Scrawdyke has been kicked out of art school as an undesirable influence. He plots with three other students, Wick, Ingham and Nipple to exact revenge not only on the college principal but on the whole "Eunarchy." Malcolm's plot is bizarre, unworkable and indicative of the random mind. The illusions of effective action shared by the D.E.M. are shattered when Ann, the only outsider to appear in the play, enters their headquarters. She challenges their plan and integrity, and they savagely beat her. This girl, the one reality from the outer world, exposes Malcolm for what he is: as Halliwell has significantly defined him in the title "Little Malcolm." The end of the play finds Malcolm deserted by everyone. His friends have rejoined society (i.e., the art school), and he begins to create a new illusion for the future.

This play can be explored on two bases that will best explain its meaning and suggest one theatrical answer to the question,
"Who am I?" The first base of consideration is the similarity and dissimilarity between Malcolm Scrawdyke and Jimmy Porter. The comparison is important in that both are spokesmen for the individual against the contemporary environment. The second base of consideration is the special and specific thematic triad that powers the drama. These themes are: smallness, illusion and violence. They are interlocked within the plot structure, that is, the pain of smallness leads Malcolm to illusions which, when imperiled, lead to violence.

There are several instances in Malcolm where one becomes aware that much of what happens and of what is said is an echo of early Osborne drama. Principally, both Jimmy Porter in Look Back in Anger, and Malcolm Scrawdyke in Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs are at war with conditions around them, but neither is capable of acting and moving against them. Where Jimmy Porter seethes against specific institutions of authority, Scrawdyke takes on an adversary of more generalized authority. Scrawdyke is apolitical compared with Porter, and generalizes his complaints against a metaphorical "militant Eunarchy." Scrawdyke's anger is mock-heroic and satirical:

Two years ago I awoke from the troubled sleep of apathy. There was borne upon me a dreadful feeling that something was wrong with the state of our country...On every side I saw decadence, cynicism, apathy and decay...In bed, on the street, at work and at play it was always before me. The spectre of a dying culture, materially fat but completely lacking in any of the spiritual direction, promise and aspiration which made our race great over the millennia.1

1David Halliwell, Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs, (London: Faber and Faber, 24 Russell Square, 1966), pp. 80, 81.
Scrawdyke despairs with more whimpering and agonizing than does Porter, and yet echoes him.

Oh what's goin' t' appen tomorra? Its all nonsense just one long wank, thats all it is, from beginnin' to end.

I'm so weak, no will, supine--...

If only we do something it doesn't matter. I've just got to throw myself into it, do it without thought, in a trance. Yes, that's it. A trance is necessary for action.²

Scrawdyke at the end of the play still verifies the existence of a stagnant society but unlike Porter, he announces some hope, however fallacious, for his ability to surmount it.

Let's get down London. That's where it all is. That's where they all are, millions of 'em. All the dissatisfied, waitin'. We can start all over again, right from scratch. We'll get jobs.³

Porter and Scrawdyke are rebellious, angry, violent protagonists, performing, by license of Osborne and Halliwell, against the nature of things as they are. Ironically, Malcolm is struggling not against the Eunuchs but against the Eunuch in himself. Scrawdyke is a more positive figure in that he plots publicly even though he lacks courage finally to take action. Scrawdyke is less despairing because he builds illusions. He plans to take over his sector of society. That he does not take over and feebly retreats from his plan only indentifies him as the real Eunuch.

In summary, what ultimately makes Porter and Scrawdyke interesting and similar is a soul-scarring identity crisis at the core of both their beings. Porter though educated runs a sweet-stall, unable to

²Ibid., p. 118. ³Ibid., p. 137.
find a place in an environment with no "good, brave, causes left." He knows who and what he is not rather than who and what he is. Malcolm cannot accept a place in the real world and lives outside it in fantasy and illusion. In this outer world he can't see himself at all and literally hides in this attic. What is ultimately dissimilar is that Scrawdyke is rooted in a farce comedy mold, while Porter is waist-deep in serious drama. Scrawdyke creates an outlandish situation, fantasy language and improbable illusion. Behind this comic smoke-screen resides the serious, real crisis.

The second basis for consideration and analysis is the specific thematic elements of smallness, illusion and violence. To begin with, Halliwell demonstrates an individual's smallness can only be assuaged with illusion, and this illusion when defied can only lead to violence. Malcolm exudes pain, the pain of being small. He finally cannot lead others, approach Ann, nor kill himself. He feigns stabbing himself and then says:

A travesty of a death to finish off a travesty of a life. I'm still 'ere, I'm still 'ere! Oh I can't stand this silence. Malcolm refuses to be ordinary even though the order of his life proclaims it. Ann, in a moment of tenderness tells him that she came to help him, that she believes in what he could be. He refuses the stigma of mundane existence:

Oh no! Listen to you and I'd be finished. Reduced to a slack mouthed nonentity, wanderin' about grinnin' at babies, sniffin' flowers, pattin' dogs on t' 'ead. Well that's not for me. I'm a man of a diff'rent stamp. When I'm angry I know 'at I'm alive, my blood runs, I tingle, I am something.

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4 Osborne, p. 104. 5 Ibid., p. 141. 6 Ibid., p.127,128.
In a desperate, agonizing plea to self, Malcolm struggles against the smallness and admits, though fearfully, his terrible illusions:

An' I'll never dare try, not even try! I'm so weak, no will, supine—I feel so ill, gnawin' in me stomach, constipated--

I've got t' try, it doesn't matter 'at it can't succeed, it only matters 'at I lead--.

Just before Scrawdyke, Wick and Ingham launch their brutal assault upon Ann, they preface their whole act with a monumental cry against their smallness: "p'r'aps we aren't just things after all." This vivid statement explains the fundamental action of the play. Starkly lucid, the words bare the souls and inner terrors of Scrawdyke and his companions. Hilary Spurling, writing in the Spectator, quite accurately explains the roots of their pain,

Malcolm...can see perfectly well where the trouble lies; there must be millions of people all over the country annoyed that people haven't discovered them yet.

In a sad, closing monologue, Malcolm acknowledges the essence of their reality and confronts it. He is documenting the smallness of their lives, an insignificance which is reason enough to build illusions.

They'll all be all right, they all live lives of their own in some way. As Irwin trudges 'ome through t' snow 'e is something, 'e 'as authenticity. 'E'll go on, get a menial job, find a bird, get married, 'owever inadequate 'e'll keep goin'; 'e'll 'ave an identity.

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7Ibid., p. 118.  
8Ibid., p. 130.  
10Halliwell, p. 140.
The sense and pain of smallness is the seedbed in which illusions gestate. Illusions of individual human importance pervade Malcolm and are a second special theme that Halliwell explores as Scrawdyke parodies a miniature Hitler in a Fascist state. The parody is replete with purges, rallies, claw-like salutes, haranguing monologues and brutalities. Not the least of the brutalities are the illusions Scrawdyke erects in the minds of his somewhat passive followers. In a sure way, Malcolm layers a promise upon promise, slowly putting together the illusion of power and of political structure. With the tools of a party flag, an archivist, a platform, a tribunal and most importantly, an enemy to be eradicated, he gives shape to the illusion and camouflages his frightening insecurities.

Our ultimate goal'll be t' realize all our dreams, take our proper place in the scheme of things, an' achieve absolute power!¹¹

Malcolm summarizes the enemy by saying: "We're against the Eunarchy."¹² Malcolm focuses the future:

I am fighting for a new clean day, when young people can stand upright in dignity,...

...I pledge, I promise, I will. I offer you one thing and one thing alone, I offer you Dignity.¹³

Halliwell not only neatly composes this power-laden melody for Malcolm but has it played to a receptive but somewhat less than effective constituency in the persons of Wick, Ingham and Nipple. Ann says:

I see three timid little men. One 'oo leads the other two along becos 'e's got a louder voice that's all, an' fills 'em up wi' big ideas of 'emselves. One 'oo's very quick at ev'rything but standin'...
up for 'imself. 'E's another great lover. I once caught cold waiting for 'im t' make a move in a freezin' yard. And a third--well, 'e's only ever anywhere becos 'e's not somewhere else. In the final parting of ways there is no promised dignity, only self reproach as Ingham admits the responsibility of his own complicity in allowing the illusions to grow.

A mean if we're goin't to' start talkin' about 'oo's to blame,...
I knew all along, like, from when y' suggested it, as 'ow it couldn't really work,...
But anyway A just went on, A kept me mouth shut, A joined in--So really, y' could say like, 'at I'm the one 'oo--

In a structural way, the illusions are the cause of violence which is sometimes physical, sometimes psychological. Scrawdyke employs a psychological violence on the others which grows from his illusions. He tries Nipple for treason against the party, cruelly expels him, and decrees he be ostracized. While this is a mock situation and the violence not physical, it, nevertheless, severely injures Nipple and is the end to his illusions. But Scrawdyke's delusions of power are reinforced by this act. The violent psychological damage that Malcolm inflicts on the others is even more evident when he shows that he lacks the courage to carry out the plan. Wick wildly explodes with disbelief and in his exit from the play, spews forth his hurt:

All this for nothing! Well this's the end.
I was waitin' for you. You were the Great Leader.
Well, y're spell's broken....
I'm off through that door an' A'm not comin' back. You bastard, y've ruined my life.

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14Ibid., p. 125.  15Ibid., p. 136.  16Ibid., p. 135.
The biggest threat to their illusions, however, comes from Ann, an outsider. Her threat results in a scene of the most bizarre violence wherein the group savagely beats and kicks her into unconsciousness. Scrawdyke is overtly challenged when Ann enters his studio and blatantly offers herself to him. He retreats, unable to handle the situation, claiming a sense of propriety. Ann answers:

Don't tell me there's a Victorian gentleman lurking beneath all that angry young muck.17

When Scrawdyke tells her of his plan, she responds, "Sounds difficult."18 His confidence is shaken. Ann compassionately entreats Scrawdyke saying she wants to help him. His response presages the beating:

When I'm angry I know 'at I'm alive, my blood runs, I tingle, I am something.19

And then, quickly, the group moves in about her and in a rather terrifying, tribal way, assault with warnings, ominous inuendos and finally dog howls, then,

They pounce on her violently, howling at the top of their voices...She screams. They savagely beat her down. Doubled up and under a rain of blows she tries to escape their frenzy...Ingham seizes at her and tears her coat off. A blow from Wick across the face sends her reeling back. All on top of her they beat her down relentlessly, she crumples to the ground as the blows stun her. Scrawdyke kicks her prostrate body...She lies motionless.20

Confronted with action of this nature, one feels that the drama has strayed completely from the comic spirit. But Halliwell, fortunately restrains events allowing us finally to sympathize with the frustrations in his characters. Importantly, the violence is an

17Ibid., p. 123.  18Ibid., p. 85.  19Ibid., p. 128.  
20Ibid., pp. 131, 132.
integral part of the plot and functions as the climax, John Chiari writes...

Violence in a naturalistic context must be justified by the situation and by the nature of the characters involved. The physical beating of Ann is a direct expression of violence, not merely symbolic and not ritualistic. The violence mounts throughout the play from verbal invectives and psychological brow-beatings to physically inflicted pain. And all because Malcolm cannot answer the question, "Who am I?"

The scene of the greatest violence happens because Ann offers belief in Malcolm the man and in what he could be. But Malcolm realizes that he cannot play that role and screams his rejection of it. He cannot love her; he is afraid. He cannot take her help; it could reduce him to a "nonentity." Ann, then, at the offering of herself, is too close and too threatening. Malcolm is the Eunuch, the castrated one, and he can only perform an act of reactive aggression. He even openly admits "our destruction of her threat." If Malcolm is the answer to the question, "Who am I?", then it is a painful one for England. For Malcolm Scrawdyke is small, unknown in the world, intimidated by reality, humiliated in front of his friends, powerless and incapable of effective action. He is the model of Robert Brustein's anti-hero.


22 Halliwell, p. 133, 134.

CHAPTER III

THE DRAMATIC QUESTION, "WHO ARE YOU?"

It has been shown so far that violence can be one alternative to the frustrations resulting from a struggle to find self. But also, violence can come about when there is either imperfect communication, for whatever reason, or when a point of stress is reached in a search for meaning. In the three plays taken up in this chapter, there is a less than perfect exchange of information between persons which has unfortunate results for those involved. In simple terms, if one party had the compassion to care and ask, "Who are you?", a good deal of human anguish would be avoided. *Saved*, by Edward Bond, presents individuals lacking the ability to empathize in a demonstrable way, and a certain personal isolation is the result. Bond's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* places large masses of people in the hands of rulers who are arrogantly sure of what is good for the populace. Death, misery and suffering come about because information travels one way, that is, from the rulers to the people. Only in *Afore Night Come* by David Rudkin does someone seek answers to the question, "Who are you?", but they are threatened by the implications of the answer. Hence, the questioners reject the reply and brutally kill the respondent. While two-way communication exits there are limitations. In all three plays, death and unhappiness come because of communication (of whatever nature) in which a basic empathy is lacking.
In the next chapter, the plays discussed relate to the problem of finding meaning in the world. This problem will be characterized by the question, "What are we doing?" At this juncture, however, it is important to remember that the proposition has been advanced that underlying the problems of information exchange and meaning are the shifting and collapsing of value systems in England and the world. Traditional governmental, religious and class structures have been at odds with public opinion regarding things ranging from Princess Margaret's desire to marry a divorced man to arbitrary censorship of the Arts by the Lord Chamberlain. The underpinning of these plays about failing communications and intolerable meaning and reality is a world-wide social order which is convulsively changing. The playwrights and their plays rise out of this condition.

Returning then to the concerns of this chapter, Saved will be the first example illustrative of stunted communication and feeling. Saved is a play that joins that notorious contingent of works distinguished for the public furor which they succeeded in arousing. Saved gained such credentials through the dramatic enactment of "the ugliest scene I have ever seen on any stage--where a teenage gang daub a baby with excrement and stone it to death."¹ The Times critic was not the only one so wounded: the London press almost to a man has howled the play down. ² Public reaction was so intense that the

critics held a "teach-in" on Saved. Laurence Olivier and Mary McCarthy were among many who defended not only what the play said but the right of the playwright to say it. When Saved became a public issue, a certain artistic justice was properly served; Edward Bond was not hesitant in declaring the social purposes of his play. Clearly, as Bond's preface to the play indicates, the violence in Saved is to be set against a more extensive debacle of human horror in the bombing of German cities and the "cultural and emotional deprivation of most of our children." Directly, Bond intends a social statement regarding the scope of human responsibility.

Saved portrays the nature of domesticity in a South London home. Harry and Mary are working-class parents of Pam, a sluttish daughter who picks up men and brings them home to her room for a night of love-making. Within the family communication is practically non-existent. Len, who is a fairly decent person, comes home with Pam and stays on as a lodger, listening to his successors in Pam's bed. One visitor, Fred, fathers an unwanted off-spring which Pam leaves in a park for a time, unattended. A gang of youths stone the baby in its pram. Fred is a participant, Len an on-looker. The play ends with Fred returned from prison, having served time for the crime and refusing to have anything to do with Pam; Harry and Mary unwilling to talk directly with one another; and Len refusing to leave the household in spite of Pam's rejection of him. The curtain descends

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on this silent, domestic stalemate.

Violence is so directly associated with the publicly held conception of this play that one feels compelled to consider the quality of the play from that base. In so studying this dramatic work, three values stand out above the rest, two thematic and one structural. The most notorious violence in Saved (i.e., the stoning of a baby in its pram) has regrettably diverted attention from other equally deadly violences in the drama. These "other violences" are one theme. A second theme is found in the observation that the characters continually exhibit, however obliquely, a "need to feel." Both themes as will be demonstrated, have their origins in violence. Another attribute of the play is structural, not thematic, and concerns the way in which silence counterbalances violence and gives it added impact. This silence also contributes to a more vivid reality.

The first thematic value of "other violences" can be demonstrated through viewing four characters, Pete, Harry, Pam and Fred. "Other violences" for purposes of this discussion means acts of violences other than that done to the baby. The phrase refers to violences that have occurred either prior to the time of the play or occur during it but to the mature characters. And the violence in its consequences impairs their emotional and intellectual perceptions. What Bond establishes is a bleak picture of a humanity whose sense of compassion is irreparably dulled by the quality of their life. As such, they are nearly unreachable. Pete, for one, is a truck driver and one of the gang who kills the baby. Early in the play, we
learn that Pete has caused the traffic death of a ten or twelve year old boy. A totally callous discussion of this event takes place among the gang, a conversation which in a sense foreshadows the killing of the baby. The scene ends with these lines:

Mike (to Pete): Time yer're round the church they'll 'ave 'im down the 'ole or up the chimney or wherever 'e's goin'.

Pete: I reckon they wanna put 'im down the 'ole an' pull the chain.4

Pete's final line stands as a summary of the worth of existence in this environment. And Pete is a representative of this milieu which has failed to impart any measure of human compassion to him. He has been rendered inhuman by its violence.

Harry, Pam's father, is a second character who has been so assaulted by life's "other violences" that his wants are now reduced to a simple plea for "peace and quiet,"5 seemingly a minimal demand of the Fates. But, in light of the evidence given in the exposition, it is a rather large request. The death of a young son in the war, presumably because of the bombing of London by the Germans, and the categorical estrangement of a wife, Mary, who he confesses was formerly satisfying has leveled Harry to a state of disciplined silence. In addition, his daughter has slipped through his hands into a life of watching the "telly," enticing men home, and what is more seriously aggressive, ignoring him! Similarly, Mary, the wife, has lost a

4Ibid., pp. 28, 29.  5Ibid., p. 85.
husband, a son and a daughter, and only the money she collects as rent is a tangible holding that may not be lost or taken away. If "loss" appears too frequently here, it is because violences have their price and leave their victims diminished by the experience. "Loss" would be a good alternate title for this play. But the major and continuing "other violence" sustained by Harry and Mary comes through their mutual refusal to speak to one another. Ironically, the "peace and quiet" for which Harry and Mary everlastingly call comes in the final scene when they reach a "silent social stalemate."6

Pam, their daughter, is a third example of a character who has the blemishes of the others—an insensitiveness and a lack of feeling. She brings Fred to her room and, consequently, subjects Len, who is now only a lodger, to all of the "night noises" that tell him all too well what is going on in the bedroom below. This is, however, only a brief affair for Pam, as Fred later openly chooses another girl. Pam has reached adulthood in an environment where "other violences" take the form of perpetual silences. The answer to the question, "Who are you?" is not even considered. Peace and quiet are goals preferred to inquiry into the welfare of others.

Finally, Fred is a character so dulled by "other violences" that he participates in the killing of his own baby. He leaves prison, unrepentent, to begin a relationship with a new girl. Len, however notes a change and regression in Fred:

6Ibid., p. 5.
Yer ain' seen what it done t' 'im. 'E's like a kid. 'E'll finish up like some ol' lag, or an' ol' soak. Bound to. An' soon. Yer'11 see.

Fred is even more unreachable than ever.

In summary, Pete, Harry, Pam and Fred are characters so lacking in sensitivity and in concern about others that their condition evidences "other violences." They are too humanely underdeveloped to be interested in the needs and welfare of others.

Bond says he is, "a pessimist by experience, but an optimist by nature," and will go on being true to his nature. In Saved, he has shown a portrait gallery of persons so lacking in positive, life-affirming interaction that at their very worst moment, they are seen unleashing their crippled, frustrated inhumanity against a helpless unguarded baby. With that atrocity alone, Bond has presented his audience with the product of his pessimistic experience. But Bond, in the end, proves more generous to the human condition than that: because of his optimistic nature, we are treated to what is a major thematic quality in Saved. That quality is the "need to feel." The proposition is posited, then, that there are, "other violences" depicted in this play, and that even they constitute only a part of a life-long sentence of violence which has stunted human development and left its victims "strangled literally in a lack of concepts, a lack of words..." The obliteration is not complete, however, as the signs of a struggle for some meager expression of compassion and life are there. Edward Bond in talking about Saved

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7 Ibid., p. 91. 8 Ibid., p. 6. 9 Bryden, p. 759.
The whole point about the violence in the play is that it was, or, at least I tried to place it, in a context. So it wasn't the act of violence that was important but the context it was put into, the consequences that came from this violence and the sort of society which the violence indicated. Just talking about the act of violence, I shouldn't think, would be much use.¹⁰

Thus, the first thematic value, "other violences," is the context of the play. From this context, a second thematic value comes into perspective; that is, a "need to feel." This theme, when explored through the characters of Len, Pam, Harry and Mary, gives minimal, yet positive, evidence that the characters in their meager way, make a feeble attempt to find answer to the question, "Who are you?"

Their efforts are not so noteworthy as to endanger the general thematic framework of this chapter, which is, that a crisis in information exchange is reflected in these works. But, to completely assess the play, this optimistic note must also be considered.

Ronald Bryden in his criticism on Saved says the play "about poverty in Britain now...poverty of culture."¹¹ Accepting that judgment, one can look at the overt and psychological violence in the play as not the only expression of that hopeless condition. Bond has given us characters who pathetically and feebly try to feel and in so doing, are reaching out for their humanity. This is the hopeful picture Bond draws. It is true particularly of Len but, to a lesser degree, of Harry, Fred, and Pam.


¹¹Bryden, p. 759.
Len is the most persistent in his groping for interpersonal experience and human contact. When Fred returns from jail after the baby has been murdered, Len wants to know, "Was it feel like when yer killed it?" Len asks him the same question four times! It is the basic query of Bond's characters and the play. What does it feel like to live, to experience, to have meaning—to feel? The action of Saved arises out of a lack of meaning. It is a "spine" of both Len and the play as a whole. He asks Harry about the war. "What was it like?" And in the same conversation with Harry he asks about Harry's wife, "Was she all right?...in bed." He says to Pam, "Why did yer pick me up like that?" After Pam has dropped Len for Fred, Len asks Fred, "Why's she go for you?" Len is forever on a quest—for feeling—that seems to have priority for him.

Pam is a character who on the surface appears heartless, particularly towards her own baby. There is, however, sufficient dramatic evidence to support her need for human interaction. She screeches at the end of the play fully five different times, "Baby dead. No friends." This is expressive of her sense of loss, though in her earlier actions, one is led to believe that this girl is quite numb in most respects. Ronald Bryden has said,

12 _Saved_, p. 81.  
13 _Ibid._, p. 92.  
14 _Ibid._, pp. 91, 92.  
15 _Ibid._, p. 18  
16 _Ibid._, p. 41.  
17 _Ibid._, p. 88.
...the nearest Pam can come to confessing love is 'I might knit yer a jumper. If yer buy the wool'. They have no words for tenderness...18

She does reach out, if only through a succession of pick-ups which she brings home to her room. In the kindest way, she tries to tell Len that he should find a better living situation for himself. Pam, like Len, needs to feel and in her ineffectual manner, tries to make personal contact.

Lastly, both Harry and Mary, as father and mother to Pam, have provided the immediate context or condition which strangles life within and about them. And yet, each in his separate way, particularly in approaches to Len, builds bridges of feeling or at least haltingly attempts to do so. Like Pam and Len, they both give early evidence of thwarted relationships, of cold crass attitudes. Mary doesn't mind what Len and Pam do sexually:

Len: She don't mind?

Pam: Don't 'ave to. Your money comes in 'andy.19

Harry doesn't even respond to loud taunts from Pam and Len who are having intercourse in his living room: Pam explains "Ain' got the nerve."20 And yet, by the end of the play, after the seemingly eternal silences, Harry extends friendship to Len: "I'd like yer t' stay. If yer can see yer way to."21 Mary as well, expresses friendship for Len and even compassion for Pam and the death of her baby.

18Bryden, p. 759. 19Saved, p. 17. 20Ibid., p. 16. 21Ibid., p. 93.
Whatever the blocks to feeling between Mary and Harry, they do not exist when these people turn to Len. They are capable of a genuine appeal for contact.

Although this group of characters is dulled by violences other than the celebrated baby's death in the pram, they are not stagnant in this condition. In their deformity they reach out for others. Bond calls this play an "Oedipus comedy" as he sees tragic fury unleashed and an Oedipal atmosphere. The comedy evolves because Len turns away from the tragic pattern by revealing his insecurity and further by refusing to banish himself at the play's end. Rather, he "stays on" creating a faintly hopeful tone. The characters of Saved, though dulled, are not dead; they do feel, they do touch, ever so faintly.

The two values in this drama, discussed so far, have been related to theme. A third value is structural and like the other two, is a quality born out of consideration for the violence which is at the base of this work. The structural quality is found in the balance maintained between violence and silence. The critics not only talk about the violence in Saved, but also, the terrible silences. William Gaskill, the play's director, emphasizes their importance in a play which has unfortunately garnered the most attention because of its single sensational act of violence:

We wanted to show the whole of life that includes the sudden accident, but also, the hours and hours in which nothing happens.23

22Ibid., p. 6.

In a theatrical era in which audiences are obviously learning much about the dramatic meaning of silence through the works of Harold Pinter, Gaskill successfully counterpointed Saved's violent infanticide. As Ronald Bryden states, "William Gaskill has directed it lovingly, loading its silences with pressure...." In an examination of the script, there are revealed ninety-six specific directions for pauses and twenty-nine for silences. Additionally, there are six significant periods of lengthy stage action with no dialogue. The final scene has only one three-word speech, surrounded by nearly two full pages of stage directions for the characters to follow.

Harvey Wheeler reminds us of "Milton's proposition that God needs the Devil to show Him off. (John Stuart Mill later said that truth needs error to show it off.)" And in Saved, violence comes resonating out of silence. Pervading silence is played behind awful violence thus pointing up the latter. In this play, a silence—violence pendulum exists that at various times reaches the extremes of its arc. Much of the action of the play can be regarded as a journey by the characters out of the silence of their lives, to feel (that is, to love, to kill, to hurt), only to lapse again into silence (where they are found at the end of the play.) At one farthest extreme, they perpetrate mindless violence against a defenseless infant. Their

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24Bryden, p. 759.

action accelerates in intensity and adds participants as the attack develops. The baby is faceless, not really a character, but, rather, an object serving a greater purpose than character: it symbolizes Death. The introduction of death illumes the character of the killers rather than that of the killed. Their society lies open before us.

Dramatically, the killing is a part of the plot and though theatrically sensational, it is not by any means a climax. The whole event, as performed, is rather like dancing around a maypole or as Mike says, "Stick it up the fair!" (i.e., set it up as a target, as in a fair). A revel is in progress. The violence functions within the plot structure organically and is integrated thematically. Symbolic or ritualistic functions for the violence are not apparently intended. The climax and resolution are welded together in the final scene in which the major characters all return to the other end of the pendulum arc-silence. With an eye turned to violence, an ear must be turned to the silence.

Saved is, in summary, the seeking of aliveness as a counterpoint to the deadly dullness of life. The need for experience and feeling, the consequences of thwarted efforts to live, the "other violences," are major themes delineated in the dramatic work. The themes are strung on a structural line established in the swinging arc of the pendulum which has silence at one end and violence at the other. The play is a dramatic continuum of silence: halting, abortive, conversation; attempts to connect or touch; and silence. As stated

26Saved, p. 55.
earlier, Bond meant to set the horrors of *Saved* into relief against the more pervasive inhumanities of the world. The silences of *Saved* mirror the deeper and lengthier silences that permeate all human attempts at communication.

As Ronald Bryden has noted,

*It seems to me the best new play of its kind since Roots.* With his finer ear and stronger rein on language, Mr. Bond might yet become the playwright Wesker promised then.27

A second play that can be regarded as a dramatic expression of inadequate information exchange is Edward Bond's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*. As in *Saved*, the consequences are frightening and violent. However, a different communicative process is at work. Pete, Fred and Pam are minimal achievers in human emotional exchange, and the final silence illustrates the crisis in *Saved*. They are mindless characters and unable to care about, "Who are you?" In *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, the perpetrators of violence are not mindless, but confident in their ability to bring stability and happiness to the world. In achieving this goal, people are sacrificed through war, famine, cruelty and abandonment. The characters in *Saved* are inept in finding the needs of others; the characters in *Narrow Road to the Deep North* are confident in their answers to the human predicament. Both fail: in one case because of a lack in effort and ability, in the other because of excessive effort and ability put to illogical ends. Both sets of characters fail to sense, see and care about, "Who are you?" The gap is unbridged in both cases.

27Bryden, p. 759.
At first glance, Edward Bond's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* seems far removed from his earlier more notorious play, *Saved*. The settings of *Saved* and of the more recent work are separated by both a time and a geography that takes us to an earlier century and from London to Japan. *Saved* is in the mode of naturalism; *Narrow Road to the Deep North* is Brechtian in conception. However, in the later piece, Bond is reworking some rather basic premises established with *Saved*: namely, the condition of mankind is cruel instead of loving, alienated rather than joined, and mindlessly stunted in feeling and moral behavior.

*Narrow Road to the Deep North* is composed of what might seem to be very inharmonious and dissimilar elements: that is, a Victorian Imperial Commodore; a tambourine-banging, female Elmer Gantry; an oriental, murder-purging dictator, and assorted priests, poets and philosophers. Regarding the *dramatis personae*, one might say that East, in the persons of seventeenth-century orientals, meets West in the persons of the Victorian militarists and evangelists. *Narrow Road to the Deep North* is "...a model of Brechtian clarity,"\(^{28}\) with bare stage, poems, chorus, songs and an unreal mixture of time and place. The play is "a comedy."\(^{29}\)

The essential structure of *Narrow Road to the Deep North* is Brechtian and therefore episodic. The drama begins with a baby left

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\(^{28}\) *New York Times*, (June 27, 1968), p. 49.

abandoned on a river bank by its parents unable to afford its care. A philosopher, Basho, passes it by, too busy with his self-seeking to aid it. Later a city has risen on this spot dominated by the murdering tyrant, Shogo, who proclaims his goal to be a good city. To obtain this goal, he does not shy away from slaughterous methods. Shogo has by his side another philosopher, younger than Basho, by the name of Kiro. Kiro seeks to be a disciple of Basho.

Offended by Shogo's administration, Basho travels to the Deep North and secures the military services of a British Commodore and his evangelical concubine, Georgina. They overthrow Shogo, but in the see-saw process of battle, Shogo seeks the son of the emperor whom he had earlier displaced and killed. Shogo wants to eliminate the possibility that the son could be installed as a new emperor by the Commodore. Georgina has the heir in tow along with four other children when Shogo finds her. When Georgina will not point out the royal son, Shogo kills all five children and Georgina goes mad. When Shogo is subsequently overcome by Basho's forces, he is executed. Basho reflects that Shogo is the baby he ignored on the river bank years before and who having grown without love, has exacted a terrible revenge. Kiro, who has witnessed these events, is finally unable to decipher any meaning, and commits hara-kiri just as a man calls for help from the river nearby.

Within this structure, Narrow Road to the Deep North presents an attack on current ranking religious and governmental institutions. Secondly, through the method of identifying parallels, it is possible to make observations about the care of children, the care of a city
and the elementary personality characteristics of the two philosopher priests. Out of these observations, the nature of the violence in the play and the state of the world according to Edward Bond is revealed. Essentially, then, this is the pertinent content of the drama and the order of consideration here.

Bond's attack on the government and the nature of Christianity, would do honor to Osborne. For example, the Commodore gives Basho the task of seeing that the royal heir is not brought up as royalty but as a peasant:

"Bring the little fella up to the quiet life. If he never knows what he is, he'll never know what he's missed. Is that right? Haw haw. In England we have a saying: ignorance is bliss."30

And Georgina tells Basho about her brother the Commodore:

"My brother has a lot of good qualities—yes he has—but no one could deny he's a bore. That's why they sent him out here. The English send all their bores abroad, and acquired the Empire as a punishment."31

Basho himself comments on the English; "Their military caste use the language of the nursery. It protects their confidence."32 When Shogo exhibits a rifle of the English, he says, "It's a firing gun. Made by barbarians."33

The Commodore and Georgina bring not only government but English Christianity with them. They have no illusions about its ultimate meaning. After retaking the city from Shogo, Georgina gives each priest a clerical collar and a tambourine dispersing them among the faithful with the admonition, "Ours is a religion of love, that

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30Ibid., p. 34. 31Ibid., p. 41. 32Ibid., p. 40. 33Ibid., p. 46.
means we teach sin and--."34 Continuing, later she says, "We need the devil to protect people from themselves." Bond strikes hardest when Georgina and the five children are pursued by Shogo and his soldiers and are in imminent danger. She has the children kneel, shut their eyes, place their hands together and pray: "Eyes shut, children. Nice and tight. I can see your prayers going up." She repeats: "Eyes shut, children. Jesus sees us."36 These directions might be an effective way to keep children from seeing the horrible fate that is approaching them in the shape of the murdering Shogo, but the orders say something on another level about Christian attitudes. Within Bond's gunsights, Christians are on their knees with hands clasped and with their eyes tightly shut; in short, in a position to do absolutely nothing. This last example is, within the context of this play, the climax of an attack on the futility of religious teaching.

There are other mockeries about stupid politicians and heathen priests. But they are given lighter emphasis in Bond's larger canvas which shows religion and government as having no significant relevance to the greater well-being and needs of man and no ability to cope with problems and forces that tear at the social fabric.

Further, the parallel considerations within the play give interesting contrasts in the moral dilemma faced by the two persons given responsibility for the care of children. Contrasts are evident also in the conflicting managements the city endures at the hands of

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34 Ibid., p. 39. 35 Ibid., p. 42. 36 Ibid., p. 49.
Shogo and then the Commodore. Lastly, there are two philosopher-priests who vie for attention and although their paths meet, they go separate ways in the end.

In the first scene in the play, a peasant couple, hard-pressed by famine, leave their baby on the river bank in the hope that someone will care for it. The father says,

We're poor and there's no food. We have five other children—and if we let this one go perhaps the others will live. Better lose one than all of them. People do it every day.37

Basho, the poet-priest, sees the abandoned child but refuses to help and passes by in his journey to the Deep North to get enlightenment. Thirty years later, a city has risen on the spot, and Basho remorsefully recalls how he might have prevented the evil of Shogo's administration:

Now I come to the worst of all—I, Basho, saw that child, I saw it in its rags by the river, already lying in its own filth. I looked at it and went on. O god forgive me!—If I had looked in its eyes I would have seen the devil, and I would have put it in the water and held it under with these poet's hands... (The Crowd groans...) I am a poet and I would have known...38

Ironically, the child to be sacrificed by his parents so that five other children might live, was not sacrificed, but survived, and lived to kill many innocents himself.

The parallel situation regarding the care of children is just as complex a dilemma as the first: Georgina is given responsibility for the son and heir of the Emperor whom Shogo has slain. Shogo's forces are trying to retake the city that they have lost to the

37Ibid., p. 7.  
38Ibid., p. 56.
Commodore. Georgina has five children with her on the river bank, one of whom is the heir. She refuses to point out the royal son to Shogo and his soldiers, because she knows they will kill him. Shogo then orders all the children killed, and the soldiers carry out his command.

On the surface of both actions, we have one guardian who will sacrifice one child for the good of all and another guardian who will not. Importantly, a greater tension lies beneath this action in not only the choice that has to be made but in what becomes of that choice. Throughout the play the decisions made concerning infants order all the later action.

A parallel is presented by the way in which Shogo rules his city and the manner in which the Commodore and Georgina govern. Basho fumes about Shogo's administration:

He's imprisoned innocent women, orphaned children, made the men soldiers, and killed them. His city is hell, ruled by atrocity. I could put up with that if I could still hope. But how can I hope if he destroys religion?39

Shogo argues that his city strives for perfection, thus giving people a purpose which occupies their time and prevents chaos. When asked why he kills and imprisons people, Shogo answers, "To prevent suffering. (He laughs.) It's true. It stops the chaos."40 When told that punishment causes crime, Shogo counters,

No, life makes people unhappy, not my city. You think I'm evil. I'm not—I'm the lesser of two evils. People are born in a tiger's mouth. I snatch them out and some of them get caught on the teeth—that's what you're blaming me for.41

39Ibid., p. 27. 40Ibid., p. 29. 41Ibid., p. 29.
Kiro asks Shogo if he loves God, and Shogo tells him, "no."
Kiro accuses the tyrant of forgetting a man whom Shogo had put in a
sack and drowned in the river. Shogo simply explains, "But I'm
proud of him—he was a hero. He died for the city—to protect the
rule of law and order." Shogo thus neatly defends all of his evil
actions. But more than defending them he rationalizes with the
argument that such activity has brought a significant social gain
and public betterment.

Georgina and the Commodore believe in the same ends as Shogo;
that is, keeping law and order among the people. Georgina and Shogo
bleat about good streets, sewers, schools, churches and the like
in the standard manner of politicians. And, in a really brilliant
monologue, Georgina explains how her regime, unlike Shogo's, achieves
law and order. Basho and Georgina are talking:

Basho: You run the city better than Shogo.
Georgina: How?
Basho: Well, you don't use the sack.
Georgina: O, there'll be a few hangings.
Basho: But the people are happier.
Georgina: Of course they're not! You sound like my brother.
Basho: I don't understand.
Georgina: Well, Shogo ruled by atrocity.
Basho: Yes.

42 Ibid., p. 29.
Georgina: It didn't work, because it left people free to judge him. They said: he makes us suffer and that's wrong. He calls it law and order, but we say it's crime against us--and that's why they threw spears at him. So instead of atrocity I use morality. I persuade people—in their hearts—that they are sin, and that they have evil thoughts, and that they're greedy and violent and destructive and--more than anything else—that their bodies must be hidden, and that sex is nasty and corrupting and must be secret. When they believe all that they do what they're told. They don't judge you—they feel guilty themselves and accept that you have the right to judge them. That's how I run the city: the missions and churches and bishops and magistrates and politicians and papers will tell people they are sin and must be kept in order. If sin didn't exist it would be necessary to invent it. I learned all this from my Scottish nanny. She taught our Prime Minister, the Queen, the Leader of the Opposition, and everyone else who matters. They all learned politics across her knee. I am enjoying this conversation.

Basho: You don't believe in God?

Georgina: Yes. But we've been talking about the devil. We must get our priorities right. We need the devil to protect people from themselves.43

Two savageries exist here, one under Shogo and one under the Commodore, and both are for the purpose of solving human disorder. People fear one form of savagery for what others will do to them and fear a second form for what they will do to themselves. In either case, a hideous villainy is at work exacting pain and suffering in exchange for promised public order. Bond has equated the inverse teachings of Western Christianity with the direct barbaric behavior of an oriental who neither knows nor loves God. The care of the city like the care of the children lays open for judgment those who do the

43Ibid., p. 41, 42.
caretaking. Their means are determined by expediency, by a lack of moral perception and by inhumanity. Their proposed ends are a blissful humanity. Between their ends and means lies the human tension and anxiety that man finds unbearable.

Basho and Kiro are the two philosopher-priests who provide the last of the parallels. Kiro is the apprentice who seeks to be a disciple of Basho, and failing in that, attaches himself to Shogo. Basho is the professional who seeks the services of the Commodore and Georgina, and attaches himself to them in order to overthrow Shogo. In short, both priests serve murderous rulers and in no way stem the advance of those who cause suffering in their erroneous assurance about the answer to the question, "Who are you?" First, observe Basho; his behavior speaks for itself. When the peasants leave their baby on the river bank and hope for the best, Basho comes by. He listens, and after the parents exit tearfully, says:

It's true. They're hungry, and they must feel--some relief because they've got rid of one of their problems. She's untied its clothes. (He adjusts the rag.) Ha! He stares at me as if I was a toy. What funny little eyes! (Turns away.) It hasn't done anything to earn this suffering--it's caused by something greater and more massive: you could call it the irresistible will of heaven. So it must cry to heaven. And I must go to the north.

When Shogo's soldiers are marching the prisoners off to be drowned in the river in sacks, Basho says, "I'm going to watch. (Afterthought.) Perhaps I can say something that will comfort them." Finally, Basho in talking with Kiro gives the benefit of all his learning:

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Kiro: Where have you been?

Basho: The deep north. I went there to get enlightenment.

Kiro: Did you get it?

Basho: Yes.

Kiro: Tell me what it is!

Basho: For twenty-nine and a half years I sat facing a wall and staring into space. Then one morning I suddenly saw what I was looking for—and I got enlightenment.

Kiro: Yes?

Basho: (smiles). I saw there was nothing to learn in the deep north—and I'd already known everything before I went there. You get enlightenment where you are.46

When Basho does go into action, though, he proceeds with an unlikely logic and with murderous consequence. He wants to get rid of Shogo:

Basho: I don't like meddling in politics, like most people I have more important things to do. But if politicians can't solve this problem, someone must. (He looks round and than turns back to the Prime Minister.) When I was in the deep north I met someone who's more ruthless and powerful than Shogo.

Prime Minister: There is no one!

Basho: Yes. Five times more ruthless, and he understands magic.

Prime Minister: (interested). 0?

Basho: He asked me if there were any people in the south, and I said no. I knew he'd attack us if I said yes. I told him it's a desert. But even a witch is better than that man. We can't wait for the river to flood and drown him.47

Kiro is younger than Basho, and seeks to learn more and to become a protege of someone who has greater enlightenment. Early in the play, his ideas are rather conventional and traditional having been

46bid., p. 10.  
47bid., p. 28.
fashioned by the old priest who raised him. Kiro demonstrates this when Basho asks him to describe God.

Basho: (looks closely at Kiro). How many feet has god?
Kiro: (hesitates). Two?
Basho: How many hands has god?
Kiro: (slighter hesitation). Two.
Basho: How many eyes has god?
Kiro: Two.
Basho: How many ears has god?
Kiro: Two.
Basho: How many lips has god?
Kiro: Two.
Basho: How many hairs has god?
Kiro: How many hairs...?
Basho: (losing patience). How much patience has god?
Kiro: I...
Basho: Kwatz! You don't know anything about god. You've only been looking at men. Your old priest was an ass.  

God, then, exists in the image of man or vice-versa; at this point Kiro is providing general support for a traditional Christian thesis. Years later though, Kiro and Shogo are trying to escape the Commodore's forces posing as innocent priests. The Prime Minister acts as interrogator to determine their legitimate status. Kiro prompts all of Shogo's answers in the following sequence:

Prime Minister: How many hands has god?

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48 Ibid., pp. 10, 11.
The Prime Minister, the Gunner Tar's Mate and the Soldier look at Shogo. Kiro is behind them. He holds up ten fingers.

Shogo: ...Ten.

Prime Minister: How many feet has god? (Kiro holds up six fingers.)

Shogo: Six.

Prime Minister: How many ears has god? (Kiro holds up three fingers.)

Shogo: (slight surprise). Three?

Prime Minister: How many eyes has god? (Kiro holds up one finger, but Shogo speaks immediately.)

Shogo: One.

Prime Minister: How many tongues has god? (Kiro holds up seven fingers.)

Shogo: Seven.

Prime Minister: How many...how many--noses has god? (Kiro holds up two fingers.)

Shogo: Two.

The Commodore and Basho come on and join them. Kiro and Shogo see them.

Prime Minister: How many testicles has god? Silence. Kiro tries to gesture. The Prime Minister, the Soldier and the Gunner Tar's Mate look at the Commodore significantly.

Shogo: (desperately). Eight thousand seven hundred and five--

Prime Minister: (turning back to Shogo in triumph). Ah!

Shogo: --not counting the right one.

Prime Minister: Yes. Good. (To the Commodore). They're priests.49

49Ibid.. pp. 37, 38.
Kiro no longer sees a God that looks like man. When he finally moves to act, it is to commit hara-kiri and, ironically, because he does act, he is unable to aid a man calling for help. The man does save himself, however. Comparatively, it can be said that Basho secures the services of a conqueror to kill others and Kiro kills himself. The two philosophers in their only positive acts beget killing, an ultimate kind of action.

Out of the contrast between philosophers, between those caring for children and those caring for the city, emerges the picture of violence within the play and the state of the world according to Edward Bond. The violence in Narrow Road to the Deep North is just as harrowing and graphic in its own way as the violence in Saved. This time, however, Bond did not have to contend with the censorship problems engendered by the Lord Chamberlain. In Narrow Road to the Deep North, prisoners are marched off in chains holding sacks into which they will climb and be tied for drowning. Five helpless children are slaughtered when Shogo is frustrated in his search for the remaining heir to the throne and is unable to identify the one child from among his companions. The brutality occurs as follows:

Shogo: All right. Let's go on. I don't know who's the Emperor's son so I kill them all.

Georgina: Monster!

Shogo: Then help me! Tell me--

Georgina: I don't know!

Shogo: Why do they all look alike? (Georgina cries.) Kill them!
Georgina: He's not there, my brother took him away, they've gone!

Shogo: Liar!

Georgina: No.

Shogo: Kill them! Kill them! Kill them! The Soldiers take the children out. Georgina tries to follow.

Shogo: Stay there. (A Soldier keeps her back.)

Georgina: (sings) God be with us in our labour... She stops and listens intently. A brief silence. Then the sound of Children's voices, like polite surprise at a party. It dies into silence. A wait. The Soldiers bring the bodies on and put them in a heap.50

The shock of hearing the children executed is gruesome enough, but for sheer theatrical shock, it is exceeded by the moment when Shogo's dismembered body is displayed. He has been found guilty and butchered by the people. A disorderly crowd accompanied by a band playing out of tune comes on carrying a huge white placard mounted on two poles with a smooth white sheet covering it.

Commodore: (shouting through a microphone) The head of the city has paid for his sin. The city is purged. (The sheet is dropped.) Feed your eyes and rejoice!

Shogo's naked body is nailed to the placard. It has been hacked to pieces and loosely assembled upside down. The limbs have been nailed in roughly the right position, but the whole body is askew and the limbs don't meet the trunk. The head hangs down with the mouth wide open. The genitals are intact.

People mill round shouting and waving. Someone rings a handbell. Some hit tambourines.

Crowd: Hallelujah! Rejoice! Hip hip!51

Finally, the directions for Kiro, overwhelmed by all that has happened,

50Ibid., p. 51. 51Ibid., p. 56.
put a final touch on the play and on the violence. He unfastens his robe, letting it slip off, draws out a knife, and then,

Kiro sticks the knife blade in the left side of his stomach, draws it across to the right on a line just below the navel, twists it and gives it a little jerk. His face has been expressionless, but on the final jerk he stretches his neck, bends his head back and a little to the right, flattens his lips and inhales— as if he was trying to stop a sneeze. (If the actor is left-handed the cut can be made from right to left.)

These acts of violence, like those in Saved, are horrifying but like those in the earlier plays, they imply a greater violence on a world scale carried out by people who do not really understand anything at all of love, sin, the devil or God. Not understanding them, they can only instruct masses in substitutes. To teach about God, they preach the devil; to preach love, they teach about sin. The violent tension lies between the unreality of the teachings and the realities of moral behavior. In Bond’s play, Narrow Road to the Deep North the dilemma is wonderfully visible and agonizing.

Edward Bond mirrors society with special emphasis upon certain sociological and moral phenomena. There is a uniform "state of the world" according to Bond. His plays, Saved and Narrow Road to the Deep North, can be jointly linked in their deep thematic concern for this condition. The state of things according to Bond, as evidenced by these plays, is insensitivity, human abandonment, moral bankruptcy and alienation. These elements constitute the context in which occurs the violence of the world. The context both cradles and harbors the savagery until it is unleashed in an uncommon individual

52 Ibid., pp. 57-58.
Abandonment is a fact of life for Pam's baby in *Saved*, who is left by her mother in a park unguarded, and for the baby left on the bank in *Narrow Road to the Deep North* who matures into a tyrant. In a specific way, the act of abandonment means turning one's back and refusing to be involved. Pam turns her back on her baby because of a mindlessness borne out of her poverty. And Basho turns his back on the baby and the dying prisoners because he prefers "...a detachment which he crudely identifies with enlightenment." In *Saved*, Fred, the father of the ill-fated baby abandons his responsibility for Pam and the baby; and Harry and Mary, Pam's parents have turned away from one another and left each to shift for himself. Only Len, will not abandon hope. On that note the play ends; which is to say that Bond is optimistic, but recognizes that abandonment is a fact of life. Of course, *Narrow Road to the Deep North* has three babies left for better or worse, Shogo, Kiro and the Emperor's son. And all three meet violent ends. Being as complete works more significant than the individual events depicted, both plays present man as abandoned by political institutions which either impoverish or execute him and by religious organizations that teach about the pain of sin and evil all in the name of human betterment and happiness.

Not a speck of moral intelligence exists in the characters of either play. Strangely enough, despite this lack, both dramas are

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deeply moral, allowing the audience to view conditions wrought by the absence of such values. Pam plows ahead in her hedonistic search for pleasure and Shogo cooly mangles humanity in his quest for the perfect city. In fact, all characters in both plays chase anything and everything unhindered by moral conscience. Self-interest dominates each choice. In *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, one can look at things with a historical and geographic perspective in which Asiatic nonchalance about life in the person of Shogo parallels Western nonchalance about moral acts. The latter results in a devaluation of life as personified by the actions of the Commodore and Georgina. The moral bankruptcy of our world is at the core of both these plays. Thus *Narrow Road to the Deep North* as John Elsom states, is really "a debate play."54

Lastly, the inability to feel continues to be the state of things in *Narrow Road to the Deep North* as it was in *Saved*:

The SS man who kills a Jew just lacks the insight and imagination to picture his victims' feelings, the bomber pilot who drops bombs on civilians does not see his victims, and therefore does not trouble to think about them. The baby in the pram is neglected because his mother cannot picture him as a human being like herself;...55

Shogo, the Commodore and Georgina fail to empathize with their victims. Basho, who professes more idealistic aims is even more guilty in his avoidance of and detachment from what goes on around him. He is finally moved to involvement but, alas, it results in his acceptance

54 Ibid., p. 86.

of a greater killer than the one who then occupied the seat of power. Prisoners are marched into the river to die, children are executed and war is waged. The inability to feel remains in both plays an abidingly grim reminder of a prevalent human condition, and is at the center of the themes of "abandonment" and "moral bankruptcy" which they dramatize. It would be inconclusive, however, to leave, "the state of the world according to Edward Bond," without reminding ourselves that both dramatic works end on a faint hopeful note.

The world condition in the Bond plays is such that successful relationships are not attained between individuals. A purposeless insensitivity prevents them from developing. The nature of things is such that the social order (in the case of the family in Saved and the city in Narrow Road to the Deep North) never coheres as a viable unity. In Afore Night Come by David Rudkin, just the opposite is true. A unified social order exists and is quite sensitive to anyone approaching it from the outside. The members of this order want answers to the question, "Who are you?" When those answers are threatening to the social order, the outsider is killed. When this point of violence is reached, the killers become allied in their insensitivity with the characters in the Bond plays, and involved in the crisis: that of information exchange. Communication exists but with strict limitations. Ultimately, the three plays express the impoverished state of man, and demonstrate that the root of this condition is man's failure to create and sustain an integration of interpersonal emotional patterns.
I'm very melancholy and the world does not inspire me with confidence and joy. I am simply afflicted by images, by things that are seen, pictures of things. They are extraordinary, momentary, but they stay with me, and slowly accumulate around them some hardening of dramatic ritual life, and I find that my plays, tend to be processions towards climaxes which are the enactments of such images. I don't think about them any more than that. I daren't.56

The "procession" by David Rudkin called *Afore Night Come* mounts the dramatic path to a climax which "ranks as British drama's first fully-fledged contribution to the theatre of cruelty...."57 Whether this drama is fully theatre of cruelty or not, it is chillingly violent. Audiences prior to its first performance were treated to violence primarily in the form of verbal welts and purposeful psychological menace. *Afore Night Come* is a landmark play for the purposes of this dissertation because the violence within the play escalates the spoken invective and blasphemy of the earlier plays in this era to an orgiastic physical level. This play premiered in 1962 when English audiences were yet to see *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, *Saved*, and Peter Brook's experimental theatre and the importation of Marat/Sade. (The last two qualify more directly for the label, theatre of cruelty.) David Rudkin's "Procession" carries us beyond the climax of his own play to represent the beginning of a more ubiquitously violent procession through all of the Sixties. Like Edward Bond's play, *Saved*, which produced a storm of fiery criticism in 1965, Rudkin's drama when revived in 1964, merited central


attention in the "Dirty Play Controversy." An article which quotes theatre impresario Emile Littler on the subject is exemplary:

I have told the executive that we are ruining our Stratford image. And we are depleting our funds by giving the public plays like *Afore Night Come* which they simply have no desire to see.

Any tape-recorder in a tough men's factory canteen could pick up the sort of dialogue which the public have to pay thirty shillings a seat to listen to.58

But happily, David Rudkin also packaged language in his play which was rich with symbols, images made vivid by mood, and a climax enhanced by a ritual of terrible beauty. He received the *Evening Standard Drama* Award for the most promising playwright of 1962.

*Afore Night Come* takes place in a rural cove of the Black Country not far from the industrial centers of Midland England. The specific locale is a pear orchard overseen by a foreman named Spens. There is a regular work force, but into it are introduced a teddy boy, a wandering Irish tramp and a student. Spens and his regular group are a very closely knit folk cult and treat the new additions with derision, jocular scorn, and with menace. The workers have six-hundred boxes to fill "afore night comes." The essential conflict arises because Roche, the Irishman, assumes all the alien dimensions in an outsider. He is filthy, lazy, educated, pretentious, verbose and ominous in word and appearance. Several disastrous events regarding the work schedule occur, and Spens and his men attribute their bad luck to the presence of Roche. Roche is a threat to their

livelihood, virility, hierarchy, and self-esteem. Out of fear, they ritually surround, cut and murder him. After finally decapitating Roche, they carry away and erase all traces of him. The order of the group is restored. The scapegoat has served as their expiation and night descends over the Black Country. This action is enveloped in a dramatic mood so pervasive that the ritual killing does not stand alone as the signal mark of the work, for when one removes himself from it all, one is left with more than just another shocking scene in the theatre. Rudkin's triumph is that he leaves his audience with more than violence. He leaves them with imagery, mood, symbols and a thematic line. Along with the violence, these other elements deserve equal examination and discussion.

The mood is achieved mainly through sound, light, silence, geographical references and workingman language. The sounds, exclusive of vocal elements, are either industrial (i.e., machines, working implements, etc.) or meteorological (i.e., thunder, wind, etc.). Mervyn Jones tells us:

One of the most persistent delusions of the English is that they are country folk. In hard fact, that is nonsense. Farming itself is mechanized--industrialized...The old rural England--imaginatively glimpsed by David Rudkin in Afore Night Come, ...is not far below the surface.59

The rural isolation in Afore Night Come is continually penetrated by the machines of the industrial civilization: a tractor, a tractor motor, a helicopter, bicycle bells, road traffic, and a factory horn.

The workers on the pear farm add to this cacophony by piling and weighing crates, sharpening knives, and folding and unfolding ladders. One is struck by the tantalizing juxtaposition of a naturalistic, foreboding, rural setting with the sounds of a more urban environment. Indeed, old rural England is not far below the surface. However, again and again, the metallic sounds are brought into the play, mounting to a kind of machine orchestra that finally with the whirling, churling, vibrating blade of the helicopter rings the climactic death knell for Roche, the Irish itinerant.

Atmospheric sounds of thunder and wind reinforce the noise of machines and of the workers laboring. The rumble of thunder in the distance ominously ends the first act; a slight wind rises and finally dies into silence, ending the play. The characters unceasingly refer to the elements of rain, clouds, sky, heat and thunder to support the stormy sounds we hear. Carlos Baker says, "The literature of no other people is quite so weather-conscious." David Rudkin has his characters, as well as his audience, looking skyward.

Lightning, stormy darkness, light glare, sunset glow, abnormal light, a pale shaft of moonlight and unnatural light fading into darkness are utilized to encase the orchard, foreshadow the frightening event, and grimly warn us of dark deeds. The faint flickers of lightning, the stage darkening, light turning unnatural,

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light unsettled, etc., unnerve and serve to disturb the audience prior to the murder. Once the murder is done and things are edging toward normalcy again, we are calmed as the (Light turns richer, into glow of sunset.) At the end of the play, the characters have gone and darkness is almost complete, except for the slight intrusion of some moonlight, which finally fades—leaving black night.

While light and sound are enormously effective as elements of mood, they are countered with either grave silences or an empty stage. The setting is a clearing in an orchard. The proscenium arch is disguised by shed fronts with practical doors. At different times the stage is left empty by exiting workers, and there is a void of both word and action before other workers come on. This emptiness has the effect of isolating and focusing the clearing at times, particularly at the end of the play when (Stage empty,...) is specified by the playwright. Moreover, silence and/or stillness is called for nine times during the course of the drama. Roche himself tells us of it in one instance, "There's a terrible silence fallen over the place. The birds are stopped." Two other moments are quite free of dialogue, but the silence is broken by action with knives. In one case, knives that will be used in the murder of Roche are being sharpened by one of the workers in a fairly detailed and lengthy stage action. And at a later time, just prior to the

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62 Ibid., p. 65.
63 Ibid., p. 25.
64 Ibid., p. 46.
killing, the stage directions read:

(Pause. Ginger, Albert, and Jim, in silence, don oilskins sit on ground, surround themselves with tyres, unaffected by storm which now begins. Enter Jeff. Jumbo and Taffy hover, uneasy, showing discomfort in squalls and rain. Jeff between these states, but soon attains the stillness of the three with knives; using his own, a flick-knife, on tyres. Enter, limping, exhausted, bent, Roche.)

But the most meaningful silences are placed at the act break and the end of the play. They are dramatic exclamation points to terminate painful action. Thus, at the end of Act I:

(Spens tears page out of notebook, gives to Roche.)

Spens: Your wage. (Exit.)

(Roche gapes at paper. Determines. Crumpling paper, exit after Spens. His voice is heard protesting off, into distance.)

Roche: ...Another chance...I want another chance... (Further)

Another chance...

(Silence. Stillness. Distant long rumble of thunder off.)

And then the elements of light, sound and silence are joined again to achieve skillfully a dramatically cogent ending to the play:

(Silence. Almost dark now. In distance, rumble of traffic; sound of heavy industry; slight wind again. Larry hoists shoulder-bag; goes slowly; pauses; turns; sees Jeff's knife on ground; takes it up; carefully cleans blade, closes knife; thinking, pockets it deliberately. Exit. Stage empty, except for hayfork, standing, prong-fixed in ground, in a pale shaft of moonlight that strays upon it. Wind dies. Noises, then moonlight fade. Darkness, silence, emptiness.)

Geographical references abound in Afore Night Come, and reinforce the rural mood of the piece. There are no less than nineteen separate references to places such as Cardiff, Dowlais, Malvern, West

65Ibid., p. 50. 66Ibid., p. 31. 67Ibid., p. 65.
Heath, etc. In another way one is also reminded that clusters of people reside beyond the lonely pear groves and there, out there, is a warmer less alien and primitive world. Rudkin has seen fit to comment on an additional consideration regarding the play's geography in an interview.

At one time I thought, it has to be absolutely exact, whatever I write, the geography has got to be meticulously observed. I don't give a damn for that now. I telescoped the geography in Afore Night Come violently. This has disturbed many people who live locally: they can't understand where the play's meant to happen. And it gave rise to all sorts of extraordinary things—people were being called to write for The Birmingham Mail to discountenance the idea of Black Country people being like this. Black Country experts and experts on pig murder wrote that people must have been leading me up the garden path, telling me all these stories. Well, that's just ridiculous...the play had nothing to do with that at all.68

Although this comment attests to some confusion regarding geographical reference in the play, Rudkin is explicit about where the play takes place and confirms the specific mood value of the geography.

I now live within about two miles of the place where Afore Night Come is set, and it's a very weird place indeed, mainly because it is so near the city, the sort of countryside associated with darkness. Some very dark things do happen. It's not like Wiltshire or Cornwall, where people say, Ah well, that sort of thing does happen there. Worcestershire seems a very boring country on the surface, but it is very, very strange.69

The working-class language used by Rudkin, along with geographical reference, provides the play with a great measure of its primitiveness and mood. Tom Milne writes, that "...the text would

69Ibid., p. 11.
certainly repay close study of its language...."70 The way in which
the language develops, outlines character and defines place is of
primary interest. For instance, the use of the word bloody is
carried almost to monotony in its constant repetition. In fact,
as an adjective, the word is used one hundred and ninety-nine times
in the sixty-five pages of the acting edition. The word itself is not
only persistent, but is used in almost a comic way to interrupt
accepted phrasing. For instance, Spens, the foreman, in one very
typical speech admonishes the workers:

I'm fed up with the bloody lot on you! Asking for trouble,
bloody asking for it! Think I can't see you, do you? I can
see you. Got eyes in my backside, I can see you. (Sees Roche.)
What do you think this am, then? Eh? United bloody Nations?
Get on, the bloody lot on you.71

Elsewhere, Spens will take a word like pandemonium and turn it into
"pande-bloody-monium"72 or disappearance and comically corrupts the
word into "disap-bloody-pearance."73 More humorously, he refers to
the Riviera in this line, "Think this'm the French Rivi-bloody-era
do you?"74 The workers only occasionally depart from bloody and
spice their language more profanely. The playwright has not been
hesitant in employing any profanity which he considered indigenous
to the locale or the characters.

As the use of geographical reference in the dialogue,

70C. Marowitz, O. Hale, and T. Milne, (ed.), The Encore

71Afore Night Come, p. 30.

72Ibid., p. 16.  73Ibid., p. 15.  74Ibid., p. 10.
considered earlier, continually reminds one that there is another life beyond the pear grove, Rudkin in the same way has inserted rather topical and almost literary references into the lines of the pear pickers. These references again recall that there is a world somewhere outside the groves where one would be familiar with Oedipus, Churchill, the United Nations, Russians, Conservatives, Hiroshima, etc. And, Rudkin brings humor into his play by the occasional clever use of literary reference. When Roche appears after having contributed nothing to the group's work efforts, he is derided by Jumbo with, "Well, well, well, if it ain't the playboy of the bleeding Western world."75 One of the workers, Ginger by name, is ribbed about his inability to have children, "Love's Labour's Lost, I call your marriage."76 Spens, of course, adds the most literary comment by dubbing Roche, Shakespeare:

Roche: Humanity. I am a poet. I write, in a way.

Spens: Hear that? Got a poet in the orchard with us, now Bloody Shakespeare.

Jumbo: What you reckon to Shakespeare, then, Pat? Critically speaking.

Roche: I think him good. Very good.

Jeff: I like Macbeth.77

It is worth reiterating that Rudkin has created a viable stage piece which receives fundamental support from the powerful mood which engulfs the action. The various machine sounds, the names of towns and cities

75 Ibid., p. 28. 76 Ibid., p. 8. 77 Ibid., p. 10.
and the current topicalities encircle man with civilizing reminders in a grove of silence; while above is an ever changing nature, at once light and then dark, flashing and roaring thunder down upon us all. What deep, primal, mystical forces are at work afore night come.

With the examination of the mood completed, the symbols are of next concern. Like the mood, they are persistently evident and therefore receive constant reference in criticisms of the play. The symbols may be considered in two ways: (1) those having specific Biblical overtones, and (2) those that most closely identify and surround Roche. However, Rudkin has stated, "there is no symbol whatever in Afore Night Come." Perhaps, his intention was to employ no contrived symbols, but that does not preclude the possibility of the presence of symbols. For whatever reason, symbols are a rewarding part of the artistic design. It is easy to stray in this area beyond the bounds of common sense and force the literal object or action to a figurative mold. Greater temptation exists if dealing with say, Harold Pinter; he has proved himself devious in this regard in both interview and writing. The critical history of Rudkin's work is not as lengthy nor as carefully developed and for that reason the plays may be less subject to critical suspicions.

The Biblical tone which affects the symbols in this play are, according to the playwright, the result of early boyhood influences:

...—it's in my background, my father was a revivalist preacher for several years. My father has always been a very good preacher, very clear and challenging, and of course I knew the Bible

almost backwards and the way it says things.\textsuperscript{79} One example involves Johnny Hobnails, the tractor driver. He is a harmless, doltish homosexual on loan to the orchard from a nearby institution. He questions Larry, a young university student, as to whether he has been baptized in the Blood of the Lamb. Johnny says, "We're all washed whiter than snow in the Blood of the Lamb."\textsuperscript{80} Johnny is obsessed by 'washing in the Blood of the Lamb' but terrified of the ritual which obscenely symbolizes such purification.\textsuperscript{81}

Jeff, a young teddy boy, like Larry has been employed for the day of the play's action. Just after the murder of Roche, one of the workers, very frightened that Jeff may tell about the killing, asks where Jeff lives and Jeff reiterates, "I tell you the truth. I live in Headless Cross. Other side of Redditch. Church with the hollow spire...."\textsuperscript{82} When Roche is killed, his head is cut off and a cross is carved across his chest with a knife. Jeff is the one who marks the cross on Roche. Roche is a headless cross.

One symbol unconnected with either the Bible or Roche is a fountain pen. Johnny develops an affection for Larry, the student, and saves him from the agony of participating in/or witnessing the crime by driving him away prior to its occurrence. At the end of the play, Larry rewards Johnny with a gift, his fountain pen.\textsuperscript{83} The pen

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., p. 14 \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{80}Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{82}Afore Night Come, p. 59. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{83}Ibid., p. 62.
is representative of Larry's educated background and is ironically, almost a useless gift for Johnny. Rudkin was questioned concerning the pen and in an interview he answered:

As for the pen, it seemed to me that he had to give Johnny something and what else was he likely to have? The pen was the only thing. Also it did carry with it connotations which are realistic rather than symbolic--I mean, the fact that Johnny probably can't even write. This is buried a long way down, of course, but I think there is a sort of tragic irony there, and in the fact that it was something he could have broken, almost wanted to break, to show how much he valued it.\(^\text{84}\)

Here Rudkin seems to deny an intention to work on the symbolic level. The fountain pen, Headless Cross and the Blood of the Lamb admittedly work as symbols. However, no symbol is as recurrent nor has a great impact as those that surround and relate to Roche, the victim. The tenuous nature of some of this "symbol sleuthing" is admitted; however, the play itself constantly provokes reflection of this nature.

When Roche first appears he announces the meaning of his name: "It's a fine name. An early Norman name. It means a rock. I'm from Limerick."\(^\text{85}\) On his head is draped a teacloth to protect his head and over his eyes are dark glasses. He wears no socks and is trampishly garbed. Within a very short time it is evident that he is worthless as a worker. He complains of a headache and of ailing sinuses and is looking for a place to get water so that he may take his Alka-seltzer. As Jeff says, "Went after water to stir his healing powders."\(^\text{86}\) Is it improbable to suggest the Biblical and

\(^{84}\)"An Affliction of Images," p. 9.

\(^{85}\)\textit{Afore Night Come}, p. 9.

\(^{86}\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
religious inferences of Saint Peter, the communion wafer and the
crown of thorns? Saint Peter was the "rock" upon which the new
church was built, and in Christian teaching, great spiritual healing
ensues from the intake of a symbolic wafer. Roche's head bears a
cloth mantle as did Christ's, a crown of thorns. Can the pear groves
that Roche wanders prior to his death be his Gethsemane? It is easier
and more significant to point out the alliances between the play and
Bible than to try and identify the Biblical personages in the play.

In one review, Roche is called a "Wandering Jew," and Johnny Hobnails
a "Christ figure." The symbols, "do not, at first viewing anyway,
seem to make a coherent pattern--perhaps they are not meant to...."

Rudkin employs select theatrical imagery in his work with
the use of the hayfork that decapitates Roche and the insecticide
spread by the helicopter. The hayfork is brought on stage in the
first act by Spens, the foreman, and he later holds it in his hand
making a threatening gesture. This property becomes a device for
foreshadowing what is to come. For this reason, Tiny buries his head
in Johnny's bosom at the first sight of it, his face crumpled.

When Johnny tries to persuade Larry that the coming events will be
frightening, he grabs the hayfork and aims it at Larry's face saying,
"What the hell am a hayfork doing in a orchard?" All the fearful
potential of the hayfork is finally realized when Ginger, the sterile
one, uses it to crush Roche's neck. At the end of the play, the

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88 Ibid., p. 6
89 Afore Night Come, p. 40.
90 Ibid., p. 48.
hayfork receives stage center focus as it stands alone in a soft thin beam of moonlight.\textsuperscript{91} The pitchfork, of course has a legendary place in the hands of the devil in popular religious tradition.

The audience is sufficiently warned that the helicopter will spray the orchard with insecticide to rid it of its pests:

Spens: Didn't ought to spray when the blokes'm a-pickin, Hobnails. Make them go all bald. Make all their hair come out. Make them so's they won't get no babbies.

Mrs. Travis: Dangerous stuff, that spray. Radioactive.

Spens: Ah. Make an Hiroshima on us. Eh, don't you laugh, Hobnails. Proper bloody Hiroshima.\textsuperscript{92}

Roche is like other pests in the orchard who peril the productivity of the workers, thus paralleling the insects which diminish the harvest. So as the plane sprays its sterilizing germicide the workers murder Roche and rid themselves of a human blight. The pears and the workers of the orchard have both been purified and restored to a healthy state. The symbolic nature of Afore Night Come, then, along with its brooding black mood are the dominating hallmarks of its dramatic life. There does not seem to be a cohesive pattern to the symbols. They do not work together in one overall design and point, but rather work to periodically flavor the play.

Tom Milne tells us:

Basically the theme is that of \textit{Lord of the Flies}--the incredible,

\textsuperscript{91}The entire stage direction for this has been quoted on page 63 in this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{92}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.
primitive savagery and blood-lust latent in mankind, so easily brought to the surface by fear or isolation.93

The fear is focused on Roche, the outsider who is strange and different. The situation is "broadened into a poetic synthesis of irrational fear and bigotry, guilt and purgation."94 Roche, who provokes this fear is not the only outsider. Jeff, the teddy boy, and Larry, the student, also join the group as casual laborers on the same day. But Roche underscores his own differentness with threats, pretentiousness and phony verbosity. However, the characteristics that separate him from the group are innumerable and aggravating. Pre-eminently, he is Irish, which earns the occasional derisive "Paddy" reference. Jumbo, in one of many attacks upon Roche's heritage shakes him roughly and says:

Shoved yourselves off, didn't you? Out to bloody sea? Got your new Jerusalem? Crawl bloody home, then, to your own little emerald bog, and work there. Coming over here, with your bloody tuberculosis and venereal disease.95

Roche is also defamed as dirty and lazy because he is Irish, and, in actuality he is dirty and lazy. He simply does not contribute to the group in any way. Ginger describes him:

His hands'm the hands on a dead man. His voice am the voice on a dead man. He'm a dead rotten, filthy, a-dirtying kind of thing. Don't drink nothing; don't eat nothing...what am he, then? What am he?96


95Afore Night Come, p. 53.

96Ibid., p. 38.
Of course, they dub him "Shakespeare," thus to mark his educated difference from themselves. Roche reveals, "I taught in my time." In keeping with his braggart manner, he goes on, "It's writing a book I am. A book will explode in the face of all the earth! I am a Master of Arts." These characteristics, unattractive and threatening, stoke to full fire the emotions of this primitive group.

Once unleashed, there explodes a "demonic celebration," purifying in its ritualism and nightmarish in its execution. The group ritually enacts a murder that rids the orchard of the pest which threatens its sense of dignity, virility, and well being! Roche is either a zombie, a ghost or a visitor from another planet. He brings bad luck, injury, error, disease, and trouble. Only in murdering, marking, decapitating and burying out of sight can a return to normal good providence be assured. That it has all happened before is clear. And that it will all happen again, seems certain. The focusing of superstition, fear and self-doubt upon the outsider and the ascribing of mystical powers to him in order to explain their ills licenses their actions. It is crucial to an understanding of this play to understand that group behavior may take this form and in doing so effects a purgation and expiation.

The mood, the symbols and the themes established encircle Roche, and lead to that gruesome violence which was in the center of a storm of criticism over "dirty plays." This controversy just preceded the collapse of censorship which came about with Bond's Saved.

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97 Ibid., p. 52. 98 Ibid., p. 52.

99 "Marsh Poetry...," p. 6.
Fortunately, neither play must stand on this notoriety to secure its place in the important dramatic literature of the Sixties. However, the violence is memorable.

The workers have ripped off Roche's head cloth and glasses. They break the glasses and scatter his bag of possessions. Roche, on his knees, tries to recover his things. Johnny, the Christ-like homosexual, wants to help him.

Johnny: Oh, Shakespeare... (Torn, helpless, retreats. Johnny to all) But Jesus loves me. He loves us all... (Turns.) (Exit) Tiny puts his tongue out at them, exit quickly. Tractor revs up; goes. Ginger, Jim, Albert, and Jeff turn to Roche, their faces blank, transformed and wild. Roche retreats, but they surround him. Tractor is gone. Helicopter suddenly very near. Roche gropes with his arms outstretched, trying to break through the circle.

Roche: Youse will let me go, you... Youse will let me go, now. (Rises, backs—They converge on him. Thin trails of spray-mist creep on to stage as plane zooms near by.) I'll give you my teapot... Fine auminum... My razor, even... of Sheffield steel... If I had more, I'd... Youse will let me go, now; won't you... Youse will let me go.... (They close in; hold him. More mist. Helicopter screams down overhead.) Don't bend me...! (Terrible cry from Roche. Abnormal light. Roche bent back like a hoop, head front, face slashed. Roche's hands, praying, torn from each other by Albert and Jim, thrust against ground, pinned to ground beneath their feet. Jeff, suddenly paralyzed, hauled forward by Ginger who grabs his wrists, thrusts them together, with flick-knife aimed downward. Spray spills over stage in a filmy mist.

Albert and Jim haul Jeff's arms down. Knife plunges. Jeff groans. Ginger hauls his wrists down twice more, knife with them each time, at breast, and heart. Jeff is moaning... he has slashed on Roche's chest the form of a cross... Roche falls, is still.

Spray ceases, plane recedes.
Ginger thrusts Jeff from them. He lurches away, sobbing; knife falls to ground.

Ginger plunges hayfork into ground about body's neck, hauls on its handle to crush neck. Albert and Jim watch from hayfork to neck. Pause.

Ginger: Quickly--
(They gather round head with their knives. They cut it away. Jeff sees, thrusts hands before his eyes; hands are stained; he is going to cry out.

Something lies, stretched and scarlet, on ground.
Jeff's voice will not come.

Ginger crawls forward, rolling head; then lies still, his head rested by Roche's head. Jim touches head vaguely with two fingers, strokes it. Pause.

Suddenly Jeff's voice begins to return as he whimpers hoarsely. Jim is at him in a flash, hand over mouth. Jeff struggles. Ginger and Albert motionless.)

Jeff: Unwish this...I haven't come here...I haven't come.... It's morning. And I'm going to come here. And I won't....

After Jeff runs off, Albert says:

Let's get him in his grave.
(With great respect, they wrap corpse and head in tarpaulin; slowly trail shrouded figure off towards hole off stage. With method and discreet deference, they clear stage of all Roche's possessions. Jim takes three knives, cleans on a pear; Jeff's knife forgotten; three knives put in Jim's belt. Hayfork left prong-fixed centre stage.)

Life magazine writing about the play adds that "they subsequently use his head in a gory soccer game." Ronald Bryden is another

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100 Afore Night Come, pp. 58-59.  
101 Ibid., p. 60.  
review mentions "the improbable spectacle of a childless rustic raptly
gulping the tramp's blood..." Comment on such additional spectacle
in the production is difficult to interpret. The script does not call
for the actions of which Messrs. Champlin and Bryden are writing, but
if their comments may be taken literally, then the audience had an
additional shock to endure.

As must already be apparent, the violence is brutally physi-
cal. The Times account is representative:

The murder itself, with an aircraft drenching the killers in
pesticide as they tug off the victim's head, remains one of the
most abidingly horrifying images of the modern theatre.

Although the play develops in a naturalistic mode, it is at the
point of violence that there is a departure into a frenzied ritual
crime of a scapegoat.

What I tried to do was to extend a quite common phenomenon in
casual relationships between people—that is, the need for a
scapegoat—to extend it to an excessive dramatic gesture, and
then try (I feel successfully) to re-turn the play to its
documentary course, as it were.

Roche fills the ancient role of a slaughtered scapegoat, who carries
away with him disease, death and sin. After the slaughter, the
orchard calms and mellows into the quiet peaceful glow of a rich
sunset and the play does return to its realistic level.

In the acquiescence to ritual violence there functions in the
play a hierarchy beginning with Spens, the foreman, who gives his

103 Ronald Bryden, "A Bloody Wood," The New Statesman. (July
3, 1964), p. 27.

104 "Harsh Poetry...," p. 6.

sanction to the act by addressing Roche, "To my way of reckoning, you're a dead man"^106 and at his exit leaves Roche in the hands of the workers. There is a enactment of group solidarity through the ritual. From the foreman who condones the action to Johnny who runs from it, this enactment has the social function of maintaining order.

My own view is that the negative and positive rites of savages exist and persist because they are part of the mechanism by which an orderly society maintains itself in existence, serving as they do to establish certain fundamental social values.\^107

Peace and order have been restored with Roche's death.

Jumbo says:

Got things to look forward to, I have. Dark evenings, winter-time. Telly; bit of lead in my pencil; bit of money in my drawer, and a Mackeson's by my side. Bloody sight more than most people have in this horrible world. Isn't it?\^108

The orchard is a place of inky isolation with its inhabitants inbred, and just as socially unattractive as their victim. Rudkin has provided a primitive element that rests just below the civilized surface and it is no wonder that he aroused some of the Black Country citizenry.

Spens and his work force keep their circle closed and unalterable. The members of the circle are iron-clad and unreachable and the answers supplied as to the question, "Who are you?" will not

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\^106\textit{Afore Night Come}, p. 56.


\^108\textit{Afore Night Come}, p. 42.
change them. Ultimately, outsiders are the recipients of violence which expresses the group's inability to accept and care about others. The three plays considered in this section, *Saved*, *Narrow Road to the Deep North* and *Afore Night Come*, present failures in meaningful information exchange which have violent results. The failure in each case is for different reasons, but common to them all is either a blunted, distorted or fixed insensitivity of human beings to one another.
CHAPTER IV

THE DRAMATIC QUESTION, "WHAT ARE WE DOING?"

Joe Orton’s two plays, Entertaining Mr. Sloane and Loot, are the last of the six plays demonstrating the nature of the theatrical violence which matured in the Sixties. Just as violence has been shown to be an inevitable consequence of the quest for identity (Malcolm) and of important communication (Saved, Narrow Road to the Deep North, Afore Night Come) it is also the corrupting residue of the quest for meaning (Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Loot). Orton’s plays invert the world: punishing the good, rewarding evil, elevating youth, debasing the aged and, finally, desecrating a host of sacred images. Critics have suggested that Orton represents a contingent of writers who are thoroughly confounded by what the world calls organization and order. Finding no sense in this supposed order, he reduces it to absurdity through ridicule and raises chaos and anarchic disorder. Violence can be somewhat explained by that disorder. The action of the plays is bizarre enough to force one to ask the question, "What are we doing?" Intentionally, there is reflected in that question a crisis in behavioral meaning, and, as with the other thematic questions, the crises they represent are interlocked with the violence they nurture. Certain motifs and themes are common to both of Orton’s dramas, but that will be revealed as the plays are discussed.
First, let us consider *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*. This play was an early work by Orton, pre-dating *Loot*.

*Entertaining Mr. Sloane* won the London Drama Critic's Award as the best play of the year when produced in 1964. This is surprising in that this "violent little comedy" was greeted initially with a critical chorus of mild, qualified praise. Orton had not fashioned a social tract which approached existing models by Arnold Wesker or Edward Bond. Mr. Orton had not developed an evening's entertainment the fame of which could be claimed by virtue of scathing language in the Osborne mode, symbolic language counterpointed in the Pinter fashion, nor language shrouded with images in the Ruskin or Halliwell manner. *Sloane* was not written as a moral corrective enlightening the audience by unmasking human foibles. A search of the resultant criticism will not turn up claims to the contrary. Curiously, this award-winning drama has been variously labeled as "ugly," "Black Comedy," "odd," "bad farce," "cruel," and "obscure." Significantly, *Sloane* pricked the critics' sense of propriety and brought forth considerable reaction. (It is well to note that this was 1964 and the critics had not yet been assulted with *Saved* which was to stir them even more.) More than one critic, however, admitted there was promise in Orton's work, and *Loot* bore out these accurately predictive notices. However, despite all of the critical hedging as to its particular merit, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* did capture the best play award; it did achieve a rather unanimous appraisal as "Black Comedy"—an appraisal

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which encourages its inclusion in this study; it did prove to be pre-
dictive of an important playwright of the Sixties; and, it achieved
a violent, sensual and absurd quality expressively relevant to the
period. Thus, the play seems worthy of the furore it aroused from
the critics.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane has a rather simple plot with its
action placed in a house on the center of a rubbish dump. There
dwells an old man, Kemp, with his two middle-aged children. Ed, the
son, is a homosexual and Kath, the daughter, is a nymphomaniac. Kath
invites Mr. Sloane, a baby-faced killer, to board with them. Kemp
reveals that Sloane has committed a murder and he had been a witness
to it. Kemp threatens to expose everything; thereupon Sloane stomps
him to death. Ed and Kath agree to conceal Sloane's deed from the
authorities if Sloane will gratify their sexual needs. But, which
one will he live with and satisfy? In one of the unlikliest debates
in modern drama, Ed and Kath compromise their demands, agreeing to
share Sloane in alternating six-month stints. The curtain falls on
this unique denouement.

Throughout this plot structure, five techniques of ridicule
are intertwined in a total pattern. First, traditional family atti-
tudes and relationships are either disregarded or reversed. Secondly,
psychological determinism is mocked as an excuse for poor behavior.
Thirdly, motifs exist which in their design and treatment become ob-
jects of satire and reinforce the total onslaught. Fourthly, language
in its detachment, arch-coolness and juxtaposition with situation
supports the deadly fun which Orton intends. Lastly, the violence and
special denouement are a convincing final blow to conventional con-
cepts.

First then, a complete scrambling and inversion of traditional
family relationships is representative of Orton's method. The father,
Kemp, becomes a child and is revealed as one by his actions and lan-
guage. The son, Ed, becomes the family head and the authoritarian
figure. The daughter, Kath, assumes the "Mamma" role with continual
reference to herself as such and to Sloane as the "baby." But what
a baby Sloane turns out to be. While but a lodger, he becomes a
murderous son. Kath calls him "baby" and Ed repeatedly refers to him
as "boy." The most irreverent aspect of this scrambled family and
the one that most persistently pinches the nerves of the audience is
the inversion of the father and child roles. Kemp, the father,
monotonously receives the reprimands normally directed to a child:
Kath says, "Can I trust you to behave yourself while I get something
to eat. You want to learn manners."² Kath continues, "You done
enough damage for one day. Make yourself scarce."³ And Kath adds
further condescending advice when sending Kemp out to pick up Sloane's
luggage, "Behave yourself."⁴ More directly, she adds, "Without a word
of a lie you are like a little child."⁵ Kath's conversation with her
father is sprinkled with baby talk, which includes, "drinkie," "tummy
ache," and "Dadda." Kath cautions Kemp on swearing:

²Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Joe Orton, (New York: Grove Press,

³Ibid., p. 12. ⁴Ibid., p. 16. ⁵Ibid., p. 27.
"What language! Don't swear like that in my presence again." Ed, the son admonishes, "Dad, what manners you got. How rude you've become." In this manner, the language successfully encourages and compliments the image of the family turnabout. And, like a churlish child, Kemp is "going to tell" the police that Sloane is a murderer. Kemp does not get spanked like a child, however, to keep him from tattling, he gets kicked to death. It is this inordinately jarring action which justifies the critics' term, "Black Comedy."

Orton has taken a farcical thrust at parenthood and old age by reducing Kemp to the status of a child, and somehow it is not particularly funny in and of itself. More explicit attacks are aimed at Kemp and parental elders in a sequence between Sloane and Ed that succeeds much better:

Sloane: He deserves a good belting.
Ed: You may have something there.
Sloane: I thought you might be against me for that.
Ed: No.
Sloane: I thought you might have an exaggerated respect for the elderly.
Ed: Not me.

Kath also says:

Dadda gets up to some horrible pranks lately. (Shakes vase.) Throwing things in my best vase now. The habits of the elderly are beyond the pale.

At any rate, the norms of family behavior receive no

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6Ibid., p. 35. 7Ibid., p. 49. 8Ibid., p. 55. 9Ibid., p. 66.
reinforcement in Orton's comedy. The guest becomes the best-treated member of this ménage, and to say that he is "entertained" is to indulge in ironic understatement. The head of the house is without rights despite his age and paternal station. The daughter is first a nymphomaniac, the son, a preening homosexual authoritarian whose financial resources give him command of a house which Orton places interestingly in the center of a rubbish dump.

After obliterating normal lines of familial authority, Orton turns his attention to an attack on Freudian determinism. Orton mocks the sympathetic in us: after all, the actions of a Sloane are excusable on grounds that he was reared in an atmosphere of impossibly meager environmental supports for civilized growth and development. Under attack from Ed for getting Kath pregnant, Sloane farcically pleads his innocence:

Sloane: It's my upbringing. Lack of training. No proper parental control.

Ed: I'm sorry for you.

Sloane: I'm glad of that. I wouldn't want to upset you.

Ed: That does you credit.

Sloane: You've no idea what I've been through. (Pause.) I prayed for guidance.

And Sloane continues citing his lack of control:

Sloane: I'm easily led. I been dogged by bad luck.

In the philosophy of determinism, the actions of the characters would be excusable because their choice of action is not free, but, rather, has been determined by a sequence of psychological and environmental causes independent of the character's will.

10 Ibid., p. 53.
Ed: You've got to learn to live a decent life sometime, boy. I blame the way you are on emotional shock. So perhaps (Pause) we ought to give you another chance.

Sloane: That's what I says.

Ed: Are you confused?

Sloane: I shouldn't be surprised.

Ed: Never went to church? Correct me if I'm wrong.

Sloane: You got it, Ed. Know me better than I know myself. Just prior to Kemp's murder, Kemp tells Sloane, "You're bad," and Sloane defends himself with, "I'm an orphan." Sloane's actions are thus absurdly excusable, and Orton presses the mockery:

It's like this see. One day I leave the Home. Stroll along. Sky blue. Fresh air. They'd found me a likeable permanent situation. Canteen facilities. Fortnight's paid holiday. Overtime? Time and a half after midnight. A staff dance each year. What more could one wish to devote one's life to? I certainly loved that place. The air around Twickenham was like wine.

This bi-sexual, seventeen-year old "baby" must be protected from infectious surroundings at all costs; when Ed threatens to have him put away, Sloane responds, "You can't ruin my life. I'm impressionable. Think what the nick would do to me. I'd pick up criminal connections." The playwright is poking fun at the prevalent idea that wayward behavior is excusable because it is determined not by our free will, but by our past experience.

Through his selection and use of irreverent motifs, Orton continues making prey of some of our more revered concepts. In the

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12Ibid., p. 54. 13Ibid., p. 58. 14Ibid., p. 58. 15Ibid., p. 68.
case of motifs, it is tombs, smooth skin, youth, orphans and mamma. Tombs or graveyards are mentioned three times and serve as but one irreverence among many. Sloane's parents are victims of a double suicide (which in Orton's ironically neat world takes care of parents once and for all), and Sloane respects their memory:

Sloane: Every year I pay a visit to their grave. I take sandwiches. Make a day of it. (Pause.) The graveyard is situated in pleasant surroundings so it's no hardship. (Pause.) Tomb an' all.

Kath: Marble? (Pause.) Is there an inscription?

Sloane: Perhaps you'd come with me this trip?

Kath: We'll see.

Sloane: I go in the autumn. I clean the leaves off the monument. As a tribute. 16

This hilarious, quasi-genteel conversation is subsequently exploited further when Ed arrives and demands to meet the new roomer. Kath, Ed's sister, fearfully defends Sloane with:

He's trustworthy. Visits his parents once a month. Asked me to go with him. You couldn't object to a visit to a graveyard? The sight of the tombs would deter any looseness. 17

When Sloane is describing his early life to Kemp, the tomb motif re-appears:

Then one day I take a trip to the old man's grave. Hic Jacets in profusion. Ashes to ashes. Alas the fleeting. A few press-ups on a tomb belonging to a family name of Cavaneough. The sun was declining when I left the graveyard. 18

The graveyard and tombs become a setting not for death or morbidity, but for lunch, press-ups and other life-affirming functions.

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16Sloane, p. 4.  17Ibid., p. 18.  18Ibid., p. 58.
The motif of "smooth skin" serves two purposes. A sensuality is conveyed on the one hand and a condition of infancy on the other. When Kath uses the phrase, it is with undertones that are sexually suggestive, "You've a skin on you like a princess. I like a lad with a smooth body." Kath tells Kemp about Sloane in the same manner, "Do you know, Dadda, he has skin the like of which I never felt before." The play is hardly five minutes old and as Kath is taking Sloane's coat she says, "You've got a delicate skin. She touches his neck. His cheek. He shudders a little. Pause. She kisses his cheek." When Kemp is telling Sloane about witnessing a murder, the "skin" motif is used again:

Sloane: Do they have any clue to the murderer's identity?
Kemp: He was a young man with very smooth skin.

Sloane is a baby-faced killer and the smooth skin reinforces the infantile image that Kath so well establishes with her constant reference to "baby," thus complementing her mother-role.

The youth motif is especially persistent. If you are young like Sloane, then you are innocent and your actions excusable. Youth permeates Sloane not only in the physical presence of Sloane himself, but also as a cloak of innocence which Orton succeeds in satirizing again and again. Ed attempts to excuse Sloane's killing of Kemp with, "This boy was carried away by the exuberance of youth. He's under age." And when Ed realizes Sloane has been carrying on with other

19Ibid., p. 13. 20Ibid., p. 27. 21Ibid., p. 4. 22Ibid., p. 22. 23Ibid., p. 79.
youths, he forgives him with, "Your youth pleads for leniency and, by God, I'm going to give it. You're pure as the Lamb. Purer."24 Kath excuses Sloane with "He's only young," when Ed threatens to fire him from his job.25 And Kath directly confronts Sloane with this same mocking line, "We must make allowances for you. You're young. (Pause.) You're not taking advantage are you?"26 There are three other uses of the word "young" in the play and Orton makes the most telling employment of this motif in a scene of mocking disillusionment:

Ed: You're completely without morals, boy. I hadn't realized how depraved you were. You murder my father. Now you ask me to help you evade justice. Is that where my liberal principles have brought me?

Sloane: You've got no principles.

Ed: No principles? Oh, you really have upset me now. Why am I interested in your welfare? Why did I give you a job? Why do thinking men everywhere show young boys the straight and narrow? Flash cheque-books when delinquency is mentioned? Support the scout movement? Principles, boy, bleeding principles. And don't you dare say otherwise or you'll land in serious trouble.27

Although Orton is referred to as one of the new young dramatists,28 this play gives us little reason to believe he regards youthfulness

24Ibid., p. 54.  
25Ibid., p. 40.  
26Ibid., p. 31.  
27Ibid., p. 68.  
28In The Guardian, (Manchester, May 7, 1964, p. 9), Orton at the time of the play's production was erroneously noted as being twenty-five years old instead of thirty.
as a redeeming social virtue. If anything, Orton ridicules the idea that the young are innocents and therefore not culpable for their actions. This ridicule of youth also functions as part of the general satire directed at psychological determinism.

The critic writing in The Times termed the play most successful as farce in its "ability to eliminate sympathetic human character." In the traditional technique of farce comedy, the characters are drawn quite lacking in humanizing dimension. There is a certain faceless quality to Sloane in particular, and Orton achieves this through use of an "orphan" motif. In no less than eight instances we are reminded that Sloane has no familial heritage: he is a product of an institution, not of individuals.

Kath: You'll live with us then as one of the family?
Sloane: I never had no family of my own.
Kath: Didn't you?
Sloane: No, I was brought up in an orphanage.

Sloane's behavior is explainable, thus permissible. Kath says, "And he confesses to being an orphan. His story is so sad." Ed expresses the same sympathy, "He's had a hard life, Dad. Struggles. I have his word for it. An orphan deserves our sympathy." But sympathetic response is something which the audience cannot give to Sloane not only because of his murderous actions, but because human dimensions

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30 Sloane, p. 3. 31 Ibid., p. 27. 32 Ibid., p. 50.
are not totally visible in the character.

The most persistent and incessant motif is "mamma," which appears at twenty-five separate moments, particularly as employed by Kath. She uses the word in a maternal sense and as an extension of her sexuality. Kath, who has lost her own baby, aspires to be Sloane's mother and repeatedly prods him as a mother would: "Mamma doesn't like you associating with them," and, "Mamma worries for you," are examples. After sufficiently initiating Sloane into this "relationship," Kath articulates it as fact: "I'm your mamma now." (Interestingly, Orton never capitalizes "mamma" unless it's at the beginning of a sentence but, on the other hand, always capitalizes "Dadda.") The "mamma" usage in a sexual context is introduced at the very beginning of the play when Kath is showing the room to Sloane. She kisses him on the cheek and whispers, "Just a motherly kiss. A real mother's kiss." This is a suggestive teasing, particularly interesting when compared to the way in which the act culminates.

Kath: Mr. Sloane... (She rolls on to him.) You should wear more clothes, Mr. Sloane. I believe you're as naked as me. And there's no excuse for it. (Silence.) I'll be your mamma. I need to be loved. Gently. Oh! I shall be so ashamed in the morning. (She switches off the light.) What a big heavy baby you are. Such a big heavy baby. Curtain.

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33 Ibid., p. 32.
34 Ibid., p. 37.
35 Ibid., p. 4.
36 Ibid., p. 30.
The "mamma" design is finally brought full circle when at the end of the play Sloane, for the only time, calls Kath "mamma." Sloane needs Kath to alibi for him to protect him from the police; he needs his "mamma" and she saves him.

Our analysis of the play thus far reveals parody of rather popularly held conceptions. First, although the motifs are less than controversial, they are sacred and Orton attacks them. Secondly, parents, the elderly and familial relationships receive harsh treatment. Thirdly, our sympathetic understanding of the disadvantaged in light of environmental psychology is a target of Orton's scorn.

This ridicule is accomplished not only through absurd situation and action but also through the language. The success that Orton has with language does not come about through prolific and inventive metaphor. In fact, the metaphor is no more clever than, "Don't saddle me with her for life," or in the same vein, "Support me you mare!" The closest anyone comes to adept metaphor is Kath when she reveals she is pregnant with, "I've a bun in the oven." A close examination of the script shows that Orton makes little use of imaginative simile. Kemp describes Kath's pregnant condition with, "She's like the side of a house lately." In Ed's hand the idea becomes, "She's like a sow." The sharpest level this use of explicit comparison reaches occurs when Ed declares,

37 Ibid., p. 81. 38 Ibid., p. 80. 39 Ibid., p. 73. 40 Ibid., p. 51. 41 Ibid., p. 44.
"Women are like banks, breaking and entering is a serious business."42

Sloane's humor is derived from such an improbable situation that the emphasis remains on plot and not on verbal dexterity. Yet, Orton has found favor with the critics through his utilization of language:

The fact that these incidents are inoffensive and sometimes funny is entirely due to Mr. Orton's use of language—a poised, artificial dialect (like the buttoned-up speech of nervous witnesses in court), which neutralizes the events it refers to.43

And that is what is effective: the artificial seriousness of everything said. The incongruity of such proper, if trite, language in the mouths of these improper and heavy characters is enormous. Orton, moreover, exhibits just how improper this proper speech is through his comedic sense. Mr. Philip Hope-Wallace credits this pretentiousness in his review. "The cross talk is pungent and often quite funny in its condescending scorn of pretentious but illiterate speech and cliche."44

J. C. Trewin is not taken with the play as a whole, as his review indicates, but he testifies to the effectiveness of the over-used phrase as a comic device in the hands of these character types:

But the murky fantastic little narrative matters less, I suppose, than the dramatist's care with the cliche-ridden pedantry of his dialogue: everybody uses such phrases as "area of agreement" and "top decisions." This is amusing at first, then the joke palls...."45

42Ibid., p. 23.


However, the critic of *The New Statesman* found the language to be the center of the humor: "Again, it was the language that made the night: ..." 46

The language may be viewed as working principally in three ways, through cliche, understatement and a detached quality. For instance, in the matter of cliche, Orton derides the staid citizen:

"There can be no agreement. I'm a citizen of this country. My duty is clear. You must accept responsibility for your actions." 47

Exemplifying the use of verbal understatement, Orton provides a notable example. When Ed finds out his father has been murdered by Sloane, he reflects in the best arch-employer tradition:

> I should have asked for references. I can see that now. The usual credentials would have avoided this. An attractive kid, so disarming, too--to tell me lies and-- 48

Much of the talk about death and murder is detached. When Sloane reminisces about his parents, it is unemotional and highly irrelevant information:

> From what I remember they were respected. You know, H.P. debts. Bridge. A little light gardening. The usual activities of a cultured community. (Silence.) I respect their memory. 49

Cliched, detached, understated, cool, inappropriate to the situation, factual and coldly business-like are all ways to describe the language which Orton uses for comic and satiric ends. The language and the situation may be regarded as mutually compatible comic elements.

Finally, the violence in Sloane so shocked its audience that


Orton immediately received membership in the circle of "Black Comedy" playwrights. Before this time, British audiences had already been pounded with various working-class profanities, but Orton clearly escalated the assault. One is not struck so much by the painfulness of the violence as by the surprise of its occurrence and its form. The tone of the language, the nature of character dimension and the farcical situation does not prepare one for the stomping of a senile subject into permanent quiet. Along with this quality of surprise comes a cool, merciless, matter-of-fact acceptance of the violence by the other characters. And the sentence or penalty which Sloane receives for his crime, ironically, is a kind of reward in which he is forced into participation in what he must consider the best of two sexual worlds; that is, heterosexual and homosexual in the persons of Kath and Ed.

Functionally, the violence is perpetrated for a selfish motive: self-preservation. Kemp, a pitiful old man will identify Sloane to the police as a killer. Therefore, Sloane kills Kemp to protect himself. As in Malcolm and Saved, the killing is an integral part of plot development. Unlike the other two plays, the act of violence does not reveal any underlying truth about society or contemporary morality. In particular, the act of violence does not enrich the audience's understanding of character. In the wake of the brutality, one finds himself unaware of a developing portraiture. Whereas the people in Saved may be viewed as culturally deprived and in Malcolm as beings whose autonomy is threatened, there is considerable
critical debate as to whether the people in Sloane can be analyzed as "real" characters. Trewin says:

These characters have neither past nor future: the dramatist Joe Orton, has assembled them merely for the purposes of a sustained joke, an acquired taste that I am unlikely to acquire.\textsuperscript{50}

Richard Gilman, writing in Newsweek, has found fault with Orton for lacking interest in and attitude toward his characters.\textsuperscript{51} Rodney Hall states that Orton's people react "superficially" rather than humanly. So, he wonders, "How does one interpret an ersatz human being?"\textsuperscript{52} But, what is appalling about the murder is that Kemp is not an ersatz human being. He does have dimension and sympathy as an old man, barely able to see, who is maltreated by his children. Sloane intimidates Kemp just before killing him by pushing him down into a chair each time he tries to rise. Sloane straightens Kemp's tie and finally twists his ear. Then, finally:

\textbf{Sloane:} You don't know what's good for you. He knocks Kemp behind the settee. Kicks him. You bring this on yourself. (He kicks him again.) All this could've been avoided.

\textbf{Kemp:} half-rises, croans, collapses on to floor. Pause. \textbf{Sloane} kicks him gently with the toe of his boot.

\textbf{Sloane:} Eh then. Wake up (Pause.) Wakey, wakey.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50}"Passers-By," p. 832.


\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Sloane}, p. 60.
The violence, then, can be said to be shocking because it proceeds suddenly and by surprise against a defenseless old man. The language surrounding it is detached, and the killer is rewarded. It is also important to remind oneself that in a dramatic world in which the normal relationships and experiences of life are turned upside-down in a quest for meaning (i.e., "What are we doing?") violence should come as no surprise.

Joe Orton in his play, *Loot*, completes the desecration of sacred images only mildly begun with *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*. Whereas Orton took scattered shots at a landscape of subjects in *Sloane*, he focused his eye clearly in this later play on the Catholic Church, the police, and the dead. He has instituted a forum for desecration composed of the corpse of a dead mother, a grieving widower, the mother's nurse who is a murderess, and a criminal son who, with his friend, has robbed a bank. This comic coterie is manipulated and moderated by an anarchic police officer who realizes all the criminal potential in his felicitous employment.

The primary plot of *Loot* is focused around the embalmed corpse of Hal's mother laid out in a lower-middle-class funeral parlour. Hal and Dennis, the undertaker's assistant, have robbed a bank and eventually dump mother into a closet and hide the cache in her coffin. Fay, a homicidal nurse, has tended mother at her death and now proposes marriage to the grieving widower McLeavy. Fay and Dennis are also carrying on a romance with one another. Truscott, the police inspector, corrupt and sadistic, arrives to investigate the scene. With an inverted sense of right and wrong, he takes a share
of the loot, locks up the innocent Mcleavy and licenses the guilty to pursue their mad careers.

Loot is included here more because it continues and broadens the attack on the sacred pillars of society than because of any particular psychic or physical violence. The play continues the basic disregard for filial relationships begun in Sloane. Whereas the disregard was summarily carried out in the murder of a father in Sloane, in Loot the disregard for domestic convention is coupled with irreverence for sacred institutions outside of the family. Institutional reverence takes many forms in Loot: reverence for the departed, ritual reverence for the Catholic Church, and ritual reverence for the police authority. The conventional form of behavior in which the common man mawkishly conforms to social tradition by observing these reverential rituals is wickedly satirized.

The "departed," in this case, Hal's mother, is not mourned and venerated but, tossed about as an inanimate object and subjected to every imaginable indignity and neglect. Mrs. McLeavy's corpse is treated to a series of defilements that defy precedent. She is dumped out of her coffin into a wardrobe on her head to make room in the coffin for the stolen money. Later, while Hal and Fay strip the body, the mother's glass eye drops out and rolls across the floor. Hal handles his mother's false teeth like castanets and pockets them when the police inspector arrives. Her vital organs have been removed and put into a separate casket from the body to hide the fact that she had been poisoned by the nurse. Hal, needing a new place to hide the money as the police inspector closes in on him, disposes of his
mother's stomach from the casket, wipes out the casket with a handkerchief so that the bank notes will not get damp, and plans later to go to confession to purge his soul, followed by a visit to a "remarkable brothel." The treatment and disposal of the dead are not sacred in Orton's mind, and he rather wryly comments on the whole funeral process:

Fay: Are you still refusing to attend your mother’s funeral?
Hal: Yes.
Fay: What excuse do you give?
Hal: It would upset me.
Fay: That's exactly what a funeral is meant to do.55

The Catholic Church, its Pope, its rituals, its language, and even its God are not spared the thrust of Orton's satire. From the moment in the Mass when the priest consumes the symbolic body and blood of Christ, Orton borrows the phrase "Consummatum Est" for his play: Hal declares that it is to be the name of a brothel he would like to run. Popular Catholic iconography is ridiculed as Hal chides Fay jointly about her Catholicism and sexual relationship with his undertaker accomplice, Dennis:

You never had the blessing of a rape. I was with him at his only ravishment. A bird called Pauline Ching. Broke a tooth in the struggle, she did. It was legal with you. While Jesus pointed to his Sacred Heart, you pointed to yours.56

It seems that Dennis had Fay beneath a picture of the Sacred Heart but it is forgivable considering that she pointed to her heart as Christ

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did. Orton even informs us about God: "God is a gentleman. He prefers blondes." 

Orton jabs superbly at conventional parish organization by a sporadic insertion of one or another Guild titles into the dialogue:

Mcleavy: The Friends of Bingo have sent a wreath. The blooms are breathtaking.

And later:

Hal: We're ready. The leader of the Mother's Union has given the signal for tears (He picks up his coat.) We must ride the tide of emotion while it lasts.

The popular position of being Catholic is suspect for ridicule in Orton's world and is negated by his satire.

Martin Esslin pinpoints the third recipient of Orton's attack on reverence:

But it was left to Joe Orton to come up with the blasphemy to cap them all—at least for an English audience. Orton knows his English tribal folklore: he knows that there is something more sacred to the English than the name of the Lord even, something far more shocking than homosexuality, incest or the seduction of minors. He knows that this acme of sacredness in the English pantheon is none other than the cult figure of the policeman. In Loot he has dared to desecrate that holy image itself—and you can sense the ripples of incredulous outrage, the waves of moral shock running through the audience: a monstrous, flat-footed detective, stupid, addicted to the most vicious rabbit-punches, determined to get convictions at any cost, and finally sharing the loot with the criminals in the form of a bribe: the very enormity of the outrage contributes to the surprise effects of the play—for who would have believed a policeman capable of all that!

The police, typified by the person of Inspector Truscott, are revealed to be an anarchic force in society, bending every citizen's rights to their own satanic ends. Truscott tries to make the nurse confess her
Truscott: When I make out my report I shall say that you've given me a confession. It could prejudice your case if I have to forge one.

Fay: I shall deny that I've confessed.

Truscott: Perjury is a serious crime.

Fay: Have you no respect for the truth?

Truscott: We have a saying under the blue lamp "Waste time on the truth and you'll be pounding the beat until the day you retire."

Fay: (breaking down). The British police force used to be run by men of integrity.

Truscott: That is a mistake which has been rectified. Come along now. I can't stand here all day. 61

Truscott, at the end of the play, prepares to leave Mcleavy's house and says,

I've fixed everything to my satisfaction. My men will be here shortly. They're perfectly capable of causing damage unsupervised, and so I shall take my leave of you. 62

The police force is not only without integrity, and destructive as well, but uneducated. Truscott says, "Reading isn't an occupation we encourage among police officers." 63 And so it goes.

Orton's satire provides a comic indictment of police methods and values, Catholic bureaucracy and ritual, and the "business" of death. He also takes some side-arm slaps at nursing practice, the medical profession in general, and civil servants. The incessant ridicule acts as a verbal bombardment of institutions responsible for supervising domestic morality. Orton's thrust is oblique in that he

61 Loot, p. 66, 67.  
62 Ibid., p. 80.  
63 Ibid., p. 63.
parodies moral behavior rather than explicitly attacking it in words. However, the incarnate symbols of these institutions—that is, the police officer, Truscott, the Catholic nurse, Fay, and the undertaker-thief, Dennis—are rewarded for their violent crimes.

*Loot* is particularly pertinent for purposes of this study because it does violence to the moral position of institutions held sacred by society. Secondly, the play does violence to traditional audience concepts of behavioral propriety. This violence to concepts is accomplished mainly through an inversion of roles and of status, as well as through characters emotionally detached in the face of calamity. Additionally, when considered with *Sloane*, it offers a broader base to support observations about Orton and his use of violence in the drama. Lastly, the critics are persuasive when they refer to the action of *Loot* as a "comic outrage" and a "calculated atrocity."^64 *The Times* says the action is "violently anarchic."^65 In addition to the violence the playwright directs against the public's cherished institutions, he also presents seemingly conventional characters who are perfectly capable of lethal crimes. The audience only sees or hears the results of their demented aggressions and the particular unique feature of these violent characters is that they receive exorbitant "pay-offs" for their misdeeds. It is a denouement uniquely Orton's. In *Sloane*, the baby-face killer who kicks to death the father of Kath and Ed receives

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^64*The Times*, (London), November 2, 1966, p. 16.
no penalty from society. He is a bi-sexual oaf who is apportioned to spend six months of each year with Kath and six months with Ed. Sloane will serve as sexual partner in both cases, but there is nothing within the play to indicate this will be anything but pleasurable. The innocent are punished and the guilty rewarded. The denouement of *Loot* proceeds to enhance the lives of the guilty even more comprehensively. Fay, the "Angel of Mercy" with a penchant for nursing the sick to death, Hal and Dennis, two thieving criminals, and Truscott, the anarchic police officer, all go free in spite of their errant behavior, sharing one hundred and four thousand pounds in stolen money. The innocent in both plays suffer the fate usually reserved for villains: one is killed, the other hauled off to jail. The resolutions of both plays can be capsulized in the phrase, "a congenial deal," because the guilty do just that. They make a deal.

Orton's comedies, then, are not reformative nor corrective but anarchic. Society does not stand explicitly chastened; it is merely inverted, its conforming members punished and its criminals elevated. In his plays, those characters receiving the severest penalty are not only innocent, they are also the elders, the parents and the family unit. The core of Orton's viewpoint is provided by his preface to *Loot*, which is a quote from George Bernard Shaw's play, *Misalliance*:

Lord Summerhays: Anarchism is a game at which the Police can beat you. What have you to say to that?

Gunner: What have I to say to it! Well I call it scandalous: that's what I have to say to it.
Lord Summerhays: Precisely: that's all anybody has to say to it, except the British Public, which pretends not to believe it.\footnote{Loot, p. 1.}
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Before proceeding to general conclusions, it would be well to review specifically what has been emphasized and revealed in those dramas chosen to reflect the continuing violence in the current era. The plays of Bond, Orton, Halliwell and Rudkin have obviously merited place here in light of both their dramatic worthiness and their explicit violence. Their work mirrors both important general questions and individual specific truths about man. Halliwell's characters groan under the pain of smallness and alienation; and in their anguish, cry out, "Who am I?" Bond's people move about in a world where abandonment, alienation and moral bankruptcy are a way of life. Rudkin's cult characters are prim­itively savage and fearfully watchful of outsiders who will not be assimilated. Ultimately, Bond and Rudkin present a world insensi­tive to an honest response to the question, "Who are you?" Orton, behind his comic mask, sees a normal social order that is oppressive, one in which legal and moral authority hypocritically dominate life. By reversing roles, corrupting morality and inverting justice, he asks quite fairly, "What are we doing?"

The plays considered in this study should be regarded as direct reflections of the culture from which they spring. The dramas face reality and do not avoid it. Although certain sociologists
require more scientifically validated data than literature (e.g., Donald MacRae) as a mirror of reality, Leo Lowenthal and others equally hold a more traditional view. Robert K. Merton summarizes Lowenthal's point:

Lowenthal's main thesis is that creative writers, through their selection—often unconscious—of plots, characterizations, depiction of milieus, and emphasis on values, convincingly portrays man's relation to his society and times. Thus creative literature provides one kind of documentation for the study of social structure and cultural change. However, Lowenthal goes beyond this point to espouse the view that creative writers are highly sensitive to incipient changes in man's relation to his society and often reflect this awareness in their work.

Germane to this study is the contention that the dramatic literature considered reflects a society whose attention has been captured by a developing and cumulating violence. The intention is not to propound a sociological theory, but rather to furnish descriptions of particular dramatic models which mirror the reality of modern life. These descriptions indicate an acute awareness of pain through the presentation of violence. The drama is what its writers are saying about life today. Kenneth Tynan claims that playwrights are once again holding the mirror up to nature.

What then is the special nature of the violence and what does it imply? For one thing, this stage violence has special impact

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because what happens is not simply violent—violence is a part of English stage tradition—but, rather, it does violence to the audience's complacent, traditional conceptions. For example, Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* destroys the traditional family unit and restructures it according to the characters' needs for familial relationships, however aberrant. Likewise, in Joe Orton's *Loot*, death, mother, honesty and normal sex are all treated irreverently. In Edward Bond's *Saved* a defenseless infant is mutilated.

Second, there is added impact because the victims and the killers are not only common people but often central figures. In this today there is a "recognition of kindred" that cannot be felt in a *King Lear* or *Prince Hamlet*. An audience may indeed recognize universal emotions in, for example, the compelling jealousy of an Othello, but that is not the same as recognizing the character as oneself. The modern audience recognizes not only the universal emotions in the play but also the repugnant truth in the characters. The victims, just in the plays considered, are an unnamed baby, an old mother, and old father, a girl, children, nameless peasants, a priest, a dictator and a dirty old tramp. In these plays, audience recognition and identification take place not only in the emotions; the spectator perhaps to his horror, recognizes and empathizes with the aberrant characters.

The nature of the violence is sudden and anarchic. In this stage phenomenon, there is a reflection of the state of the world.
Theodore Solotaroff says "...that a kind of anarchic murder is in the air; that we're all theoretical victims and we're scared." The events on the stage parallel the chaos of a world where anything may happen at any moment; the stage, as a facsimile of the world, is also poised for the next spectacular brutality whether it be infanticide, decapitation or rape. An audience that is attuned to cruelties of mammoth proportions can be said to have a cultivated expectancy and a ready appetite, if a nervous and jaded one. Thus, the violence is quick, limitless and becoming somewhat expected. Robert Coles correlates world violence with the violence the writer creates:

In other words, we have good reason to insist upon proportion, not only from writers, but from one another. I've never thought of myself as a Marxist critic before, but it just occurred to me that the onslaught of "literary" violence may be not only a function of the breakdown in our customs and values, but also a function of the onslaught upon us in the middle class of all kinds of violent things. I suppose the writer responds to the world and starts reflecting that world.

Coles is speaking about an American middle-class, but his point is not without application to the British, and Edward Bond has carefully articulated the belief that the violence on stage (Saved, Entertaining Mr. Sloane) is unreasonable, but not as unreasonable as the violence in the world (Biafra, Viet Nam, etc.).

What, then, is so special about the current violence on the English stage when violence has been a historical stage tradition?

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5Ibid., p. 487.
Shakespeare presented his audience with fifty-two on-stage murders and suicides in thirty-five plays; there were sixty-four more placed off-stage. One will find even more grisly violence in the typical Jacobean revenge-tragedy. In Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* there is one hanging, one shooting, seven stabbings, and the hero biting out his own tongue. Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* has the hero tumble through a trap door into a boiling cauldron.6 Greek tragedies, Roman tragedies, chronicle plays and "games," and medieval secular and liturgical plays indulged excessively in violence. To say that violence is a part of stage tradition, however, is not the same thing as saying violence has been produced continuously throughout stage history. Certain eras produced and created stage violence; certain eras did not. There have been lengthy periods in which the kind of pervasive and accelerating violence which has been demonstrated in this study was not a part of stage life. The point is that the 1956 to 1969 period is unique in that violence has reappeared and the English in this era, at least, share that single distinction with Elizabethans and Greeks, however different the violence may be. The 1956 to 1969 period has given a renaissance to violence and that fact is noteworthy and important as an earmark of the dramatic times and the state of the world.

In review, it can be said that the violent world of the stage is a microcosm of a total world disorder; that the major violence is

done to audience concepts; that the violent stage characters, that both violator and victim, are identifiable as ourselves; that the violence is unreasonable and anarchic; and that the stage epoch will be remembered as one which rediscovered and recreated extensive physical and mental violence.

The second major conclusion to be drawn from this dramatic material is that there has been a collapse of those value systems which limit behavior. These value systems can be taken broadly to mean formal governmental structures, traditional religious institutions, sacred national attitudes toward class and rank, and general, national, secular, inbred, philosophical and psychological deportment. The demise of these systems has been in progress for some time, perhaps beginning as early as the end of World War I, but the 1956 to 1969 period was certainly a time of the most accelerated and visible collapse. For many, it was as if everything fell at once. The trouble, however, had come from deep within and had only surfaced after a long period of latent gestation. In those cases in which institutions restricted individual conscience and heart, the people's sympathy was with the individual. Observe the abdication of Edward VIII for love, in the face of the traditional restrictions placed on the reigning monarch, and the anguish of Princess Margaret when the Bishop of Canterbury would not allow her to marry a divorced man. Reverence for institutions lost further ground when the military was unable to cope with the Suez matter. Governmental oppression was found in the common persecution of homosexuals and the inconsistent,
dictorial censorship rulings that came from the Lord Chamberlain. In this period, homosexual activity between consenting adults became legal and literary works, beginning with *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, and plays, much more "dirty" than *Afore Night Come*, were judged permissible art, subject only to the discrimination of the patron. Marital fidelity and trust in government jointly lost the day when the "Profumo Affair" came into public view. In the economic sphere, the Common Market, led by France, had refused to grant England membership and as a last crushing defeat the pound suffered a devaluation in world monetary competition. Add to these incidents overcrowding and overtaxing, and the level of frustration becomes intolerable. Jonathan Aitken, talking about the youth of Britain, draws a picture of their England:

> They have grown up in an age when Britain's influence both moral, and economic, is plummeting in the world, and when the national confidence in politicians is breaking up completely. Our native talent for indulgence in self-deprecation has, in the last decade, been amplified by the powerful propaganda engines of the mass media into an orgy of national denigration. The old cornerstones of our national greatness, such as military power, imperial might and authoritative foreign policy have crumbled away, as have the domestic foundations of family unity, religion and community life, leaving in their stead a vast anonymous void.7

So, the rules and institutions designed to maintain order were dying. A grim silence and reactionary behavior were the results of a sense of defeat and absurdity. The form of drama, however, was shifting back and forth sensing the vagaries in world order. Chaos,

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war, injustice, gigantic disproportionate violence, all made instan-
taneously graphic by efficient media, and an unpredictable society
which is anxious, bored and frustrated are characteristic of the con-
text of reality in which a dynamic theatre had to find its form and
life. The world, in a state of ethical and behavioral convulsion,
would not settle down, and neither would its slowly scanning mirror,
the theatre.

The turbulent history of the British people, 1956 to 1969, was
the cultural bed from which violence sprang and interestingly, the
violence began with attacks on formal structures (i.e., Look Back in
Anger). The ensuing attack, from Osborne to Orton, has been against
these structures of home, government, and church. Appropriately,
James Feibleman in discussing comedy, generally, points to the most
critical facet of all:

The criticism which comedy makes of all actual things and events
is aimed specifically at their formal structures. Formal struc-
ture is alone responsible for the paucity of actual value; and
it is this lack with which comedy expresses dissatisfaction.8

Feibleman is not criticizing formal structures per se, but rather
acknowledging their limitations. Lowenthal puts forth the primary
question relative to this second conclusion:

The question the artist asks of mankind is whether pain and
anxiety are necessary elements of human destiny, or whether they
are mainly of a consequence of social conditions.9

8James K. Feibleman, Aesthetics, (New York: Duell, Sloan

9Leo Lowenthal, Literature and the Image of Man, (Boston:
The answer from the dramatists seems clearly to indict social institutions and structures. If the anger and violence have a focal point, social organization is that point. And the dissatisfaction with social structures and institutions in England has echoed from its stages a call for freedom that is somewhat terrifying in its potential.

The third conclusion to be drawn from the dramatic material concerns the form of the drama. This study has placed primary emphasis on thematic values as they reflect the British culture from 1956 to 1969. Although it has been stated earlier that the dramatists are again holding the mirror up to nature, it does not necessarily follow that the audience is willing to look. Irving Wardle credits the demise of the naturalistic play to a public unwilling to look courageously in the mirror but rather preferring the "peep show" approach. He writes of The Golden River that:

One of the production's effects was to drive yet another nail into the coffin of the naturalistic problem play. As a society we present a confident external appearance; inside we are in rather a mess. We do not care to have this contradiction cold-bloodedly thrown at us from the stage. When we go to the theatre we are looking either for something that makes us feel secure, or something that provides an outlet for suppressed emotions; not for cool documentaries or plays that put society on trial. It is for this reason, I think, that Brecht and neo-Brechtian writing has yet to gain a foothold in the West End. We accept this kind of performance only when it is directed at someone other than ourselves: ...

Thus, both the naturalistic elements in certain plays (Saved, Afore Night Come) and the direct statement in Brechtian plays (Narrov Road to the Deep North) reflect realities that the "cloistered middle class"

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wishes to avoid, realities they have sought to leave behind in a retreat to housing estates and the security of socialism. Perhaps these three plays are the most shocking of the six examined. This "running away" parallels the isolation affected in America by "holing up" in the suburbs. In its domestic environment, the audience wishes to cut itself off from abnormal behavior, horror, ugliness, etc.

However, with this retreat to housing estates comes frustration and boredom as an inevitable result, and the audience is compelled, perhaps through Wardle's "peep show" approach, to try to crash the indifference threshold which Jimmy Porter first heralded, "Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm. Just another Sunday evening." The audience, perhaps secure in their isolation from causes, has developed appetites for pseudo-events, events safely remote from their lives. The world, in supplying them with daily horrors, is supported by a media onslaught heretofore unknown in history, and the combination has achieved a remarkable corrosion of the sensibilities. The appetite for sensations remains, but the senses dictate the form they must take. The non-naturalistic form (except for the Brechtian direct statement) maintains the distance from reality the audience desires in real life. Through its artistic mercy, they may be confronted with that which they labor to escape, but are spared the pain. Naturalism, then, has suffered from two phenomena: (1) a public rejection of

documentary reality, and (2) audiences seeking extraordinary sensa-
tion as an escape from reality. Perhaps this lends understanding to
the influences of Brecht and Artaud upon the English stage terrain.

The last conclusion ends this study where it began with the-
monic concerns as reflections on the quality of English life as drama-
tized by playwrights who "really do care about it all." The British
theatre since 1956 has put the common man stage center, and in so
doing forged the central question, "Who am I?" Some of the shock of
the subsequent revelation is, of course, recognition of self and of an
aggrieved denial. Moreover, through silences and violent actions, the
stage has mirrored our inability to discover and recognize one another.
The absurdity of what society is doing has been revealed. Thematically,
an inquiry has been made into the meaning of self, which has not re-
vealed anything pleasant or heroic. But the capacity for denigration
has already been established. Secondly, attempts at human empathy
and elementary communication have been strained and abortive. And
finally, an appalling reaction to what is happening to Britain has
been thematically demonstrated, and there is no sign that the drama-
tists are any less aghast now than Osborne was in 1956. This should
insure more dramatic clamor for some time to come.

This writer is not unaware of several critical surveys of the
past decade (Robert Brustein's among them) that disclaim vital life
in the British drama. The contrary view is, of course, implicit in
this dissertation, one of its main theses being that a dynamic move-
ment still exists, a movement that is coming to terms with life in
England. Kenneth Tynan has written:

Whatever the reasons, I became aware that art, ethics, politics, and economics were inseparable from each other; I realized that theatre was a branch of sociology as well as a means of self-expression. From men like Bertolt Brecht and Arthur Miller I learned that all drama was, in the widest sense of a wide word, political; and that no theatre could sanely flourish unless there was an umbilical connection between what was happening on the stage and what was happening in the world.

Most good plays when you boil them down, deal with the problem of coming to terms with life—of adjusting without surrender, to hostile and menacing circumstances. Today the theatre itself is confronted by the same problem that has racked so many of its heroes and heroines. Our business is to urge it to face realities, even though the realities in question are more complex and appalling than the worst nightmares of Hamlet and Oedipus.12

This study has basically been about the umbilical cord between stage life and real life, with violence as one hallmark of their common destiny.

12Tynan, op. cit., pp. viii, ix.
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