

The “Closed” Society in the English Drama of the Seventies and Eighties

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Bachelor's thesis
2020



Tomas Bata University in
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2019/2020

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Renata Sližová**
Osobní číslo: **H170194**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **Prezenční**
Téma práce: **„Uzavřená“ společnost v anglickém dramatu sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let**

Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu
Studium odborné literatury
Formulace cílů práce
Analýza vybraných dramát
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce

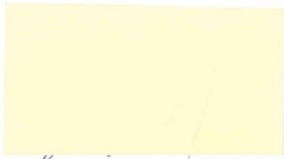
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **Tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

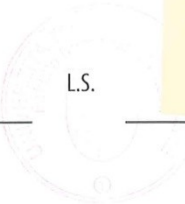

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Jordan, Donnrich. „The Open Society: What Does It Really Mean.“ *De Jure* (Pretoria) 50, no. 2 (2017): 396-404.
Peacock, D. Keith. *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997.
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Turner, Alwyn W. *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s*. London: Aurum, 2013.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ewald Mengel**
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **8. listopadu 2019**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **11. května 2020**


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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se ve své teoretické části zabývá politickou, ekonomickou a sociologickou situací osmdesátých a sedmdesátých let v Británii v kontextu uzavřené společnosti. V druhé části jsou analyzovány dvě hry kontextu dané doby a uzavřené společnosti.

Klíčová slova: Spojené Království, uzavřená a otevřená společnost, Howard Brenton, Harold Pinter

ABSTRACT

In the theoretical part, this thesis provides a reader with an insight into the political, economical and sociological background of the seventies and the eighties in Britain in the context of a closed society. In the second part two plays that are closely analysed in the historical context and in the context of a closed society.

Keywords: The United Kingdom, Closed and Open Society, Howard Brenton, Harold Pinter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to give thanks to Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ewald Mengel for his valuable advice and guidance he provided through the process of writing my Bachelors' Thesis.

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will deal with two plays from the seventies and eighties in their social, political, and cultural context. Many plays written in the two decades are portraying some social issues of the time. For example, *Magnificence* touches upon the housing crisis where there was an abundance of empty buildings and also many homeless people in Britain. And as it is hinted in the play, more are being evicted from their homes because the wealthy investors want to buy the old house, reconstruct it and then, of course, rent the property for much more money so they make a profit.

The unsettling themes of the plays have something in common – the belief that people live in a 'closed' society, a society that is deeply unjust and does not allow any social change moreover, that the situation will get worse. And this feeling arises from the difficulties Britain faced during the decades. When it comes to the endless strikes, three-day working week or power cuts in the seventies that led to the election of Margaret Thatcher, a leader that seemed strong enough to make it all right again - only she did not. The eighties continued with the trend of division between the rich and poor. This division is portrayed in *Party Time* where the rich party while the poor protest and riot in the streets.

Another theme that is present in the plays is violence. Violence was present in society throughout the decades. If it were IRA attacks or just random youth attack on the streets, one thing that they usually had in common was the fact that the lower class attacked the higher class, this type of violence can be observed in the rioting mass in *Party Time*. However, we can speculate if it were not the higher class's fault in the first place that people of a lower position in society had to resort to such crimes.

I. THEORY

1 OPEN AND CLOSED SOCIETY

At first, it is necessary to note that all human societies begin as “closed” societies and unless the society has died out it will eventually evolve into more and more “open” society.¹ This growth, however, occurs in different speeds through different layers of society. It is, therefore, possible for certain classes to enjoy all the economic, political and cultural advantages of an “open” society² and for other classes in the same nation to tackle all the problems of a “closed” society.

The idea of completely “open” and completely “closed” society is unachievable. For research purposes, Platonic ideas of both types of society were constructed.³

The concept of an open society is closely connected with the philosopher Karl Popper and his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. The open society is according to Popper defined by three main ideas which are freedom, humaneness and rational criticism.⁴ Popper’s definition of freedom is based on Mill’s harm principle which states that “people should be free to act however they wish unless their actions cause harm to somebody else.”⁵ This is the general idea of freedom that is still relevant and adopted by most people in our western society.

When discussing humaneness Popper states that in the open society the law must guarantee equal justice to all whereas in the closed society the interest of the state is the only criteria of morality. There is, therefore, a sharp contrast between the individualistic and collectivist reading of justice.⁶

To be a rational person according to Popper one must assess whether his or her reasons are aligned with the values that are considered worthy of being realised.⁷ Popper also argues that norms and facts should be rigorously distinguished in an open society. In closed society norms are seen as facts.

The core of an open society is to recognize that human individuals are ends and avoid using them as mere means to other ends. In this quote, Popper uses Kantian doctrine

¹W. H. Auden. “Criticism in a Mass Society,” In *The Intent of the Critic*, ed. D A Stauffer. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941)

²Auden, “Criticism in a Mass Society,”

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Donnich Jordan, “The Open Society: What Does It Really Mean,” *De Jure (Pretoria)* 50, no. 2 (2017): 399.

⁵ Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971)

⁶ Jordan, “The Open Society: What Does It Really Mean,” 400.

⁷ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 67.

to argue that all human being should be treated with dignity because they are rational beings able to make decisions and guide their lives according to their wishes and needs.⁸ We as a society, therefore, should not manipulate others or use them to achieve our purposes.

Closed society emphasizes the importance of a tribe without which an individual means nothing. Life in a closed society is determined by social and religious taboos. Individuals place in the society is determined by birth and he or she should remain at that position until their death.⁹

1.1 Inequality

Inequality can be seen as “denial on individual opportunity.”¹⁰ Britain was relatively equal in the post-war era.

1.1.1 Social Classes

British society is still divided into classes. Market researches in the 1950s identified six classes in British society:

- Upper middle class (the richest, the elite),
- Middle class,
- Lower middle class (junior managers, clerks and various non-manual workers),
- Skilled working class,
- Semi-skilled or Unskilled working class
- Residual (occasional part-time workers, unemployed, people depended on benefits)¹¹

A social class is usually determined by a combination of wealth and education. The class and therefore the occupation and income of the person is indicated the education, but

⁸ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 98.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ Alvaredo, Facundo, et al. “What Is Inequality? Understanding Inequality Issues and Solutions.” Social Europe. Accessed January 30, 2020. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/focus/what-is-inequality>.

¹¹ David McDowall, *Britain in Close-Up: An In-Depth Study of Contemporary Britain*, (Essex: Longman, 2003,) 93

also the social contacts of the person. Most people are generally in contact with people belonging to the same class as themselves¹² – they meet at work, live in the same area.

Most people in the 1970s and 1980s belonged to the middle class. The middle class also had the highest fluidity and mobility and was constantly expanding – most British citizens who are middle class started their life as working class but the upwards movement between classes is not never-ending. The highest classes and gentry, mainly landowners, protect their position greatly. Children from these high classes go to public schools where they receive better academic education than their peers from lower classes. Most importantly children that go to public school get a sense of social superiority because of the schools' culture that promotes elitism.¹³

These elites have a huge influence and only a few insiders can enter their ranks. Traditionally young men of the elite went to work to the Civil Service, the law or medicine. During the Thatcher years, this tradition was broken. Many members of the elite and upper-middle-class started working in the private sector – in banks, as accountants and in management. That's because before the year 1979 salaries in public and private sector were more or less the same. But after Thatcher started her free-market reform, salaries in the private sector became much higher than those in the public sector.¹⁴

Another reason why the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer is that people usually marry within the same class they belong in. When both man and woman work it is certainly a difference if you live from two upper-middle-class incomes or two working-class incomes.

It is not surprising that Britons themselves consider their society as class-ridden. When asked if they think that the “class struggle” is still present in the UK in 1964 48 per cent thought so and in 1995 this number almost doubled with 81 per cent of people saying that there is indeed some “class struggle”. This indicates that the divide between classes exists and is getting bigger.¹⁵ This huge step towards greater differences between classes will be explored in the chapters about Margaret Thatcher's policies.

¹²McDowall, *Britain in Close-Up*, 93.

¹³*ibid.*, 93

¹⁴*ibid.*, 95

¹⁵*ibid.*, 95

2 GENERAL OVERVIEW OR THE SEVENTIES IN BRITAIN

The seventies are usually viewed as the “dark ages” or “Britain’s gloomiest period since the Second World War.”¹⁶ This period of British history is defined as the most dubious since the Second World War. The 1970s began with trade unions stoppages which were aimed against the Industrial Relations Act which proposed strike ballots, necessary cooling off period before any industrial action was to be taken and tighter controls on union memberships and agreements. Almost 1.5 million workers participated in these protests including postal workers which meant that no national newspaper was printed for six weeks.¹⁷

That was however only one of many strikes that paralysed the country in the 1970s. And strikes are merely one feature of conflict and class war in the industry. This can be recognized as the defining factor of this period.

2.1 Edward Health

At the beginning of the decade in January 1970 Conservative party held a meeting where they formed the core of a new manifesto of the party called *Better Future*. The manifesto included tax reform, focus on law and order, trade union act, reduction in public expenditure and no government subsidiaries for so-called lame ducks (unprofitable industries). The message the party gave to the public was: do not expect our help – you are on your own.¹⁸

In the election that followed in summer of the same year, two candidates faced each other - current Prime Minister Harold Wilson for the Labour party and Edward Heath for Conservative party. Wilson, who was in politics since the Second World War and was charming and a favourite of the public, won the two previous elections and analytics assumed he would win these elections too.¹⁹ Especially when his opponent was seen and “naive and charmless”²⁰ and his programme of technical reforms did not seem to interest the general public. The more surprising was Heath’s victory. On the photographs from his first visit to 10 Downing Street, he seems genuinely excited however his premiership was

¹⁶ Kenneth O Morgan, “Britain in the Seventies – Our Unfinest Hour?” *Revue Française De Civilisation Britannique* 22, no. hors-série (2017). 1

¹⁷ “1971: Workers Down Tools over Union Rights.” BBC On This Day. Accessed November 28, 2019. http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/1/newsid_2514000/2514033.stm.

¹⁸ Alwyn W Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum, 2013), 7

¹⁹ Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), chap. 3

²⁰ Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, chap. 3

nothing but hard – he did not set himself an easy task – Health’s reforms included rearrangement of local governments and reforms of the tax system.²¹ These reforms nevertheless were overshadowed by industrial disputes – the defining factors of the decade.

Just a month after the elections Health was forced to declare first of many states of emergency of the decade. And in autumn the country was brought to the brink of chaos with the so-called “dirty job strike”²² Refuse collectors of London decided to call a strike demanding higher wages. As a result, local parks were closed; rubbish was strewn in the street of London and sewage water spilt into rivers. After six weeks long strike the government accepted all union’s demands just to bring the stoppage to an end.²³

In January 1972 the National Union of Mineworkers or abbreviated NUM started a seven weeks-long strike in protest at working conditions, short annual leave and essentially no overpay. The strike completely paralyzed the country – working days were reduced, heating in public buildings was banned and people were advised to heat only one room in their homes.²⁴ When almost all the coal supplies were gone the government surrendered to the union’s demands once again, leaving the people wondering, who ruled Britain – unions or the government.²⁵

One would think that the situation could not get any worse. But the national spirit suffered once again because of the Yom Kippur War started by Egyptian invasion of Israel, whose last victory was an embarrassment for the Arab world and they fought back using oil – they would cut supplies to the West each month until Israel surrendered and allowed the formation of Palestine.²⁶ Britain was hit particularly hard by this mainly because miners introduced another pay claim and yet another stoppage – this resulted in plans for petrol rationing and “just in case” distribution of coupons – the first ones to arrive into the hands of the public were actually stolen and redistributed from an Eltham sub-post office.²⁷

These desperate times lead to desperate measures – the speed limit was lowered to save fuel, the working week was cut to three days, citizens were urged to share baths and television broadcast ended at 10:30 p.m. every day²⁸. When the government tried to solve

²¹Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 9.

²²*Ibid.*, 10

²³*Ibid.*, 11

²⁴*Ibid.*, 13

²⁵Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, chap 3.

²⁶Andrew Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, (London: BBC Worldwide 2009), chap. 3

²⁷Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 21

²⁸Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, chap. 3

the problem and discuss with the unions upon asking what they actually want the head of Scottish mineworkers' and a Communist Mick McGahey responded: "to bring down the government" and they achieved their goal in February when Health asked the Queen to dissolve the Parliament and another election was called.²⁹ During Health's premiership, people lost their nerve because of the constant state of panic³⁰ and many thought that even bigger crisis was coming. No wonder that they turned to personality that seemed – if not better – at least familiar – Howard Wilson.

2.2 Howard Wilson

In the campaign preceding the 1974 election, Wilson appeared ill and elderly – there were rumours about his health and speculations if he even wanted to win³¹. And it can be speculated if he actually won as the result was hung parliament – the Conservatives had 297 MP's and the Labour Party had 301MP's perhaps the only winner was the Liberal Party that had the biggest support since the Second World War. And that is why Health tried to persuade the Liberals to join him in a coalition government.³²

However the talks between Health and Liberal Party were unsuccessful and at the begging of March Wilson returned to Downing Street. His goals were firmly set: firstly he needed to rescue the economy and secondly he had to secure enough supporters to win a substantial majority in the parliament. To solve the pressing economic situation Wilson appointed the Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey³³ – even though Healey privately admitted that he "knew bugger all about economics"³⁴ He got to work almost immediately.

Public spending was increased, council rents were frozen and unemployment and pensions benefits were increased. To pay for this increase in expenses the top rate of income tax was raised to 83 per cent. Along with these changes went the increase in wages. This approach to battling recession can be seen as a great achievement of a minority government³⁵ or from a different point of view – bribery to secure a clearer mandate.

²⁹Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, chap. 3

³⁰Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 23

³¹Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, Chap. 6

³²Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 93

³³ Ibid, 100

³⁴Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, Chap. 6

³⁵ Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 93

Even though the Labour Party won the October election they did so at a price of wage rises that did temporarily silence the unions but had resulted in a rise of inflation to almost 20 per cent.³⁶ The times were bleak and dour – unemployment rates began to rise again so the public, tired and desperate, turned their last bits of hope to gambling. In 1975 almost half the adult population engaged in some form of betting games and alcohol consumption also went up.³⁷

In 1976 just a few days after his sixtieth birthday³⁸ Wilson decided to resign as prime minister. This shocked many Members of Parliament just as many ordinary citizens. He justified his resignation by arguing that the economic crisis of mid-seventies is over and he can, therefore, leave because his goal is accomplished.³⁹

2.3 James Callaghan

Yet another election was called and the winner in April of 1976 was James Callaghan. He was ambitious, systematic and had a great appreciation of political manoeuvres. He did not lead any campaign instead he continued with fulfilling his duties as foreign secretary. His subordinates led a campaign for him creating a picture of Callaghan as a man who can “unite the party and keep the unions happy.”⁴⁰ The Callaghan government is recalled mainly for the IMF crisis and for the so-called “winter of discontent”⁴¹

Around the time where Callaghan became Prime Minister, investors became sure that the pound was overvalued and the government might depreciate the currency. As the pressure on the national currency continued, the government turned to the International Monetary Fund asking for a 3.9 billion dollar loan.⁴² The IMF representatives demanded large cuts in public expenditure which caused some lengthy and heated debates in the Cabinet but the IMF conditions were eventually accepted which led to reduction of interest rates and a better balance of trade which was also partly caused by the revenues from oil

³⁶Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 102

³⁷*Ibid.*, 103

³⁸*Ibid.*, 110

³⁹Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, Chap. 17

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, Chap. 17

⁴¹Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, Chap. 3

⁴²National Archives. “Sterling Devalued and the IMF Loan.” *The Cabinet Papers*. TheNationalArchives, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU, December 30, 2008.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/sterling-devalued-imf-loan.htm>.

from the North Sea.⁴³ The so-called “IMF crisis” fortified the change towards a policy of inflation control instead of a policy of full employment and social welfare.⁴⁴

The Winter of Discontent how Callaghan himself named the period from November 1978 to March 1979 was largely caused by proposed wage settlement of 5% which was judged as inadequate especially because the inflation rate was just below 10 per cent.⁴⁵ It was the biggest labour stoppage since the General Strike of 1929 and no such wave of strikes has occurred since. The worst day of the strike happened to be 22 January when 1.5 million public-sector workers refused to come to work. Many strikes were unofficial and the stoppages spread randomly and unexpectedly. Examples of striking employees include truck drivers, ambulance drivers, binmen, news reporters, hospital cleaners, pilots, school caretakers, gravediggers and even workers on oil rigs.⁴⁶

The weather did not help to improve the nations’ mood. The winter of 1979 was especially cruel with airports and train tracks blocked and whole towns isolated by snow. Another thing that was not helping the situation were right-wing tabloids with anti-union partiality reporting of sudden school closures, tenants without heating and rats feeding happily on uncollected rubbish – photographed only after two hours of waiting.⁴⁷ However some workers – especially the badly paid public sector ones – happily enjoyed their time off. No matter how apocalyptic the news at the time was the strikes were not an attempt to overthrow the government.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, that is exactly what happened. By March most of the strikes died out and so did the hope of Parliament as it has lost a vote in the House of Commons. And out of five-week election campaign that followed emerged Margaret Thatcher as a new Prime Minister. Mass unemployment would arrive in Britain under her rule – the “economic medicine”⁴⁹ no seventies minister thought to try.⁵⁰

⁴³Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, Chap. 3

⁴⁴National Archives. “Sterling Devalued and the IMF Loan.” The Cabinet Papers. TheNationalArchives, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU, December 30, 2008. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/sterling-devalued-imf-loan.htm>.

⁴⁵Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, Chap. 18

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Chap. 18

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, Chap. 18

⁴⁸Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, Chap. 3

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, Chap. 3

⁵⁰Marr, *History of Modern Britain*, Chap. 3

3 VIOLENCE AND UNIONS

3.1 Violence

The first thing that caused a serious threat to peace was the begging of the skinhead movement. Skinheads were usually young working-class men and teenagers. They had shaved head, ironclad boots and braces and rolled-up jeans. They approached life in a very nihilistic way – when asked “what are they for”, one member replied: “Nothing really. We’re just a group of blokes. We’re not for anything”.⁵¹ The public saw them as a group with inclination to mindless violence which was aimed either on a rival gang, especially members of a different football team and at ethnic minorities. It is therefore not surprising that skinheads appeared at some election rallies of Enoch Powell, who was known for his anti-immigration views.⁵²

In 1970 abuse of British Asians was a pretty common sight and the expression “Paki-bashing” was mentioned often in media. The term “mugging” was brought from New York to denote street robbery. The word had subtle notes of racism as it pointed towards black criminality more than any other previously existing word in English vocabulary.⁵³

Another perhaps even more pressing problem was the oppression of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. The fighting between fractions got so bad that troops had to be rushed to Ulster to assist the police. Perhaps the worst of this conflict between the unionist and the republicans happened on the 30 January 1972 in Londonderry. According to people from the neighbourhood, the army opened fire after some younger demonstrators began to shout “IRA, IRA” at the police and throwing heavy objects on them. The army killed thirteen people injured seventeen and up to sixty people were arrested.⁵⁴ This day is known as “Bloody Sunday”.

The consequences not only of “Bloody Sunday” but of the rise of violence, in general, were daunting. Over the years the UK has experienced a sharp upturn in violence, assassinations, bombings and casual shootings. Relationship between the British army and the Nationalist extended to a state of war. For many people in other parts of the country,

⁵¹Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 63

⁵²*ibid.*, 63

⁵³*ibid.*, 63

⁵⁴ “1972: Army Kills 13 in Civil Rights Protest.” BBC On ThisDay. Accessed November 28, 2019, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/30/newsid_2452000/2452145.stm.

these events were “product of an alien society”⁵⁵ that was just too different and apart from a few inappropriate Irish jokes the mainland culture did not concern itself much with the Irish problem.

3.2 Unions

The political and social power of unions extended far beyond their members. Employees that participated in the strike could be sent to picket (discourage strike-breakers and inform people of the unions' cause)⁵⁶ at relatively small numbers because they would enjoy support from other trade unionists and also from the public. Unions had generally a lot of public support which was given mainly by historical background.⁵⁷

One factor that can be linked together with unions in the seventies is the rise of communism.⁵⁸ Sympathizers of the Communist party were gaining confidence from the apparent decline of the Right wing politics and growth of Left wing politics. Some examples of this presumed progress of the left were the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam or the increase in strength of the Soviet bloc that especially contrasted with the west during the oil crisis and economic downturns.⁵⁹ Many were concerned with the rise of the Communist Party of Great Britain and it was even pointed that the rise of communism was “a serious industrial thread”⁶⁰ especially because the party had been thought to place its men in a high position in the unions. These officials were said to try to destabilize the nation.⁶¹

Communists were indeed present in the ranks of trade unions officials but the majority of workers entered the unions and participated in industrial disputes simply because they wanted to safeguard their job and because they thought they have a decent chance of winning. As things go the unions were not a revolutionary force, as the communists might like to portrait them. The main reason for unions' existence was to find

Morgan, Kenneth O. “Britain in the Seventies – Our Unfinest Hour?” *Revue Française De Civilisation Britannique* 22, no. hors-série (2017).

⁵⁶*Encyklopedia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Picketing,” accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/picketing>.

⁵⁷Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, Chap. 4

⁵⁸Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 78

⁵⁹Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, Chap. 4

⁶⁰Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 85

⁶¹*ibid.*, 87

a compromise between the employer and employee especially in terms of wages and working conditions.⁶²

⁶²Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 87

4 FRINGE AND THE RISE OF THATCHER

4.1 Fringe

Support for the traditional British political parties – the Conservatives and the Labour party was falling steadily during the sixties and seventies. In 1951 the two parties secured a vote of 80 per cent of the entire electorate. In 1974 support for traditional parties had fallen to only 55 per cent of electorate willing to vote for them⁶³ - which were quite a sharp downturn. This of course was noticed by the leading personas of the parties. Harold Wilson warned against the rise of fascism that could arise from the fact that people feel like there is really no choice and can, therefore, be sympathetic to extremist ideas.

One of these extremist ideas was Trotskyism. It was attractive especially to young working-class people, mainly university students. Trotskyites' believed in "international socialism". The doctrine that a country could achieve socialism only if all the working classes could rise united and rid themselves of the ruling class.⁶⁴ They did not manage to overthrow the classes they felt oppressed by, but they did have some influence in the seventies. Various Trotskyist groups had about 15 000 members in total⁶⁵ and that number alone was not enough to attract a sustainable number of voters.

Trotskyists have therefore decided to adopt the tactic of entryism. This tactic meant that members of a Trotskyist group joined the Labour party and then promoted the groups' message to a much broader audience that would not be at their disposal otherwise. This tactic worked a little bit as Trotskyist groups have grown in the second half of the seventies but it was generally unattractive to the general public. They seemed attractive to some students who found the possibility of social revolution exciting but their supposed target group – the working-class was far away from their reach.⁶⁶ The main reason was the lack of cultural connection – Trotskyists just did not like the same things as the majority.

Perhaps the most significant contribution that the fringe parties and groups made was the sharpening of the sense of crisis. This supposed crisis was the fall of capitalism

⁶³Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 226

⁶⁴Esther Wheeler and Brian Webber, "What Is a Trotskyist?" BBC News. BBC, August 10, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-37025649>.

⁶⁵Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 231

⁶⁶*ibid.*, 233

that Marxists had been talking about for more than a century and in the times of high unemployment and high inflation;⁶⁷ it did not seem as completely farfetched.

4.2 The Rise of Thatcher

Even though the seventies were certainly turbulent, for most of the nation the decade was relatively good. Compared to the eighties, the seventies look like a period of calm and stability. For many working-class families, it was possible to live off just one income; most workers did not have to work anti-social hours and were able to afford their own home.

By 1978 it seemed that the political scene of Britain was relatively stable. The inflation rate was going down and so did the occurrence of industrial disputes. There were still some warning signs though. The major cause of discontent was still present – the unions' power did not decrease⁶⁸ – the opposite actually. 82 per cent of people thought that the unions had too much power and most of the members of unions agreed.⁶⁹

Altogether as the decade progressed people seemed to be more and more dissatisfied with the society they were living in especially the lower-middle class. It was mainly the fact that ordinary life just got harder. They felt as if the working class was continuously clutched by big businesses from one side and by the unions from the other side. And people felt like to government did not care about them only about feathering their own nests.⁷⁰

And that was when Margaret Thatcher stepped in and her popularity was growing steadily because she portrayed herself as humble grocer's daughter who could not be corrupted by the post in high politics.⁷¹ As former education secretary Thatcher mainly empathized the lack of opportunity because of the education system that favoured the rich and excluded the poor.

The education system in combination with high taxation and the lack of opportunities in Britain were the main reasons for people leaving their home country altogether. This phenomenon called "the brain drain"⁷² caused almost 270 000 people left

⁶⁷Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 234

⁶⁸*ibid.*, 257

⁶⁹ Beckett, *When the Lights Went out*, Chap. 19

⁷⁰*ibid.*, 260

⁷¹Beckett, *When the Lights Went out*, Chap. 19

⁷²Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 262

the country in 1974 alone.⁷³ They simply felt that to fulfil themselves and live their life as they wish to do they have to leave Britain.

After the Winter of Discontent when Callaghan's government fell the campaign leading up to the new elections was focused mainly on the national mood and of course – the unions. Margaret Thatcher attracted especially those of the electorate who thought that things were going downhill from the 1960s.⁷⁴ And there were a lot of people who were not satisfied with the direction their country was heading because the Conservatives secured a comfortable majority in the Parliament and the country entered a new era of Thatcherism.

During one of the first television interviews as Prime Minister Thatcher shared the vision of society she wished to build – instead of a society of equality focused on socialism she offered natural elitism and therefore the power to govern and lead others should go to those with higher intellect and abilities. She stated: “If opportunity and talent are unequally distributed, then allowing people to exercise that talent and opportunity means more inequality, but it also means you drag up the poor people because there are the recourses to do so”⁷⁵ And it was this style of government that made the split between rich and poor grew even wider than it already was.

⁷³Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 261

⁷⁴ Beckett, *When the Lights Went out*, Chap. 19

⁷⁵Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 273

5 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE EIGHTIES IN BRITAIN

The eighties were a big decade – decade ruled by increased consumerism and bigger differences between the rich and the poor than ever. There was a growth of fashion, hairstyles and also buildings with first skyscrapers being built in London. The number of media, shops and pop stars grew and grew like never before. Another thing that grew bigger was riots and demonstrations some of which became semi-permanent. There was also Falkland War and of course, probably the first name that pops up whenever the words the eighties and Britain are mentioned – Margaret Thatcher.

Thatcher was in power during the “coming of political maturity”⁷⁶ of the most numerous generations in British history, the generation of people born in 1964 when the birth-rate surpassed a million babies and when this generation got the right to vote, they decided she was the one who should lead the country. Thatcher was not concerned only about politics but had an appealing philosophy and morality about the “individual and nation”⁷⁷. During her time in the office, Thatcher transformed the country but it is open to debate whether this transformation ended how she imagined it to end.

Thatcher demanded a return to thrift housekeeping but during her rule, the amount of credit card debts and mortgage indebtedness rose massively. She wanted to encourage people to set up small businesses but instead, the City of London was full of “spivs and speculators”⁷⁸. She wished to end the social liberation started in the 1960s only to find herself in a country where government ministers promoted condoms, drug-taking was taken as a favourite pastime for young people and home video recorders made porn movies more available than ever. Her economic views of free capitalism where market forces determine the prices were supposed to free the country of “industrial strife and underperformance”⁷⁹ but her sometimes too harsh methods were perhaps too much for the general public.

5.1 1979 - 1983

Thatcher was not very popular before she was elected the first woman Prime Minister of Britain⁸⁰ in May of 1979. The thing that made her so interesting to the public

⁷⁶Alwyn W Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980* (London: Aurum, 2013.) x

⁷⁷Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s*, xi

⁷⁸*ibid.*, xi

⁷⁹*ibid.*, xi

⁸⁰ Keith D. Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1999) 1

was the sharp contrast of her “bandbox neat”⁸¹ profile to the chaos in Britain. People maybe was not sure about the solutions she presented but at least she was something different. Thatcher’s strategy to lead the country out of the crisis was mainly based on the assumption that the biggest enemy was the inflation and it had to be reduced at all costs. To achieve this reduction of inflation the government had to control the amount of money in circulation. How this control will be executed was not clear to the public nevertheless the general idea was of lower income tax, free market and cuts in public expenditure.⁸²

The actual completion of the cuts involved a shift to indirect taxation (VAT was unified and raised to 15%) and cutting expenses everywhere it was possible. However, these harsh solutions did not seem to be working as one year after Thatcher’s election the economy was suffering more and more and especially unemployment was the highest since 1930.⁸³ Those who suffered the most were manual workers and even skilled manual workers were jobless. On the other hand, unemployment rates of white-collar workers were relatively low.⁸⁴

High rates of unemployment were felt by pubs because people did not spend money on beer like before and there was a rise in burglaries, interest rates of mortgages were the highest ever and cuts were (literally) felt even in public pools as some cities ordered to lower the temperature of water to save money.⁸⁵

5.2 1983-1987

Margaret Thatcher won her second elections by a landslide and her positions seemed to be undisputed with the success in the Falklands war and the Labour party still deeply divided. The period 1983-1987 was the most economically stable time of Thatcher's government. There were some who worried that the economic growth was enjoyed only by retail, services and financial sector while manufacturing was still struggling. However many especially the middle class and upper sections of the working class were more stable financially but mostly because it became easier to obtain credit cards and mortgages than ever.⁸⁶

⁸¹Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s*, 4

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 11

⁸⁴ Graham Stewart, *Bang!: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013) 98

⁸⁵ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 12

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 132

As the recession ended some jobs were being created and some even in manufacturing where jobs were needed the most now but just not in the same place where they were previously lost. In the North whole cities and regions were forgotten about. For example in Liverpool more businesses were closing than opening and one-fourth of the entire workforce was jobless. Unemployment between young people was reaching 90 per cent in some areas.⁸⁷ Instead of riots that took place in 1981, there was now just resignation. One unemployed 21-year-old woman who previously dreamed of travelling said: “I wouldn’t have minded going to Manchester for a day”. “I’ll probably never go”.⁸⁸ She was living with her three years old child and her husband who was also unemployed. Young families such as this were not a rare sight in Northern cities in the mid-eighties⁸⁹ as having a baby was the only alternative people had to the soul-crushing emptiness of unemployment and job hunting but least had Mrs Thatcher given them an abundance of time for babysitting.

The government felt strong enough in 1983 that their agenda for the next term included the plan to formally end the National Health Service and remove state funding from all but primary education.⁹⁰ These, rather extreme, ideas were not implemented but they show that the cabinet felt confident. In spite of the economic growth that was loudly celebrated the second term of Thatcher government lacked direction. Instead of eagerness to make the most of the end of the recession the government had to settle the conflict with old enemies such as the unions and IRA⁹¹ and calm the masses complaining about cuts in public services. People were experiencing economic highpoint but only as long as these people lived in the south of England or the midlands.

But even in the south and the midlands, there were areas that did not recover that well and the national numbers of unemployment were still above three million and were not decreasing. Unemployment amongst black people was way above the national average and provoked riots in urban centres that were “fewer in numbers but more costly in terms of fatalities and injuries.”⁹² The country prevailed divided and some of the harshest industrial disputes – the miners’ strike and the Wapping dispute happened. None of this implied that a new and stable Britain was in making as promised by Thatcher.

⁸⁷ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 132

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 133

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 148

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 148

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 148

⁹² *ibid.*, 150

According to Tony Benn, “the miners’ strike was the greatest piece of radicalization he has ever seen.”⁹³ Miners’ strike lasted for 51 weeks and was followed by 54 weeks long dispute by print workers. These strikes were similar and also different in many ways. The differences were in the strategy. The striking miners aimed to bring the government to resignation or negotiation by bringing the country to halt through the control of power supply. Whereas the printers wanted to stop publishing of Britain’s most popular newspaper and hurt its owner Rupert Murdoch economically. The miners’ were on strike because their way of life was permanently ending while the printers were trying to protect jobs by ensuring that the industry would continue to use outdated technology. Both of these strikes were significant to British society.⁹⁴ The end of miners’ strike opened the way for privatization of coal and other “old” industries. The Wapping dispute established the role of unions in the “new” technology-driven industries.

5.3 1987 – 1990

The economic boom did not stop after the election in 1987 and so the basic rate of income tax was reduced from 27 to 25 per cent and the top rate from 60 to 40 per cent. But indirect taxation was still rising and people were expected to pay for eye-tests and dental examinations for the first time. But in general, times were good – interest rates were low, rates of unemployment fell below 10 per cent and house-prices were steadily rising. But the economy cannot grow forever and so the first warning signs started to appear. Economists began to feel suspicious and nervous especially because of the budget deficit to the USA and the huge debts of South America and East Europe. And they were right to be suspicious because on Monday 19 October 1987 shares plunged and the Wall Street crashed.⁹⁵

The government tried to solve the problem by pumping more cash into the economy and it worked until the second half of 1988 when interest rates began to rise and in October of 1989, they reached 15 per cent.⁹⁶ But problems were not present only in economy. There was a “wider sense”⁹⁷ that things were not right in Britain and it was symbolized by a series of disasters. In March 1987, 193 people died when the ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* flipped over on its cross-channel journey. Many passengers were

⁹³ Stewart, *Bang!: a History of Britain in the 1980s*, Chap. 13

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Chap. 13

⁹⁵ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 256

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 266

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 267

readers of the *Sun* who won their tickets in a competition. In August of the same year, Michael Ryan who was unemployed at the time shot sixteen people and then killed himself. In November eleven people were killed after IRA bombing at a Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen.⁹⁸

There was a clear shift in public opinion as the year 1988 was reaching its end. The economic boom has passed and the supposed rebirth of the nation did not happen and with the new recession looming people felt like much that could have been done did not happen. This was visualised for many by the increasing number of homeless people on the streets.⁹⁹ By 1989 75,000 people were homeless just in London mostly sleeping in hostels or in “cardboard cities”¹⁰⁰ - flocks of homeless people sheltering themselves by cardboard boxes. This was, among others, caused by the policy of care in the community, which caused the discharge of thousands of long-stay patients from mental health institutions.

Another shift to for the worst can be seen in the spread of the term “underclass”. Most of this “underclass” came from the middle class that has lost its feeling of community, intelligence and decency.¹⁰¹

Britain had indeed changed and many of the changes were too small to notice at first but when they all amounted together, they created a profound shift in Britain’s society and culture. It was a shift away from the certainties of the post-war era to something comparable to a state of never-ending revolution.

⁹⁸ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 267

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 270

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 270

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 270

6 VIOLENCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The recession was still present in the early 1980s and there were not many things that would improve the mood of the nation. One exception was the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. The wedding came at the same time as major riots in many towns and cities.¹⁰² The disorders of the summer of 1981 lacked the sense of unity that one could observe during the strikes of the 1970s when the whole nation suffered together through the power cuts now the riots only showed a divided nation where the majority was celebrating while the minority suffers in violence.

There was, of course, still the issue of unemployment. According to the official statistics, there were three million people without a job but if those on special government schemes and those who were not “on the dole” were counted the number could reach five million. And one could observe a substantial discrepancy in regards to race and location. It was reported that unemployment rose by 37 per cent but amid the black community, it was reaching 50 per cent.¹⁰³

Young people actually had a better chance of being accepted to university than finding a job in some, especially northern, areas and youth unemployment became “a habitual way of life”¹⁰⁴ There were some training programmes offered to young people but those programmes were mostly a way for companies to obtain cheap labour than anything else.¹⁰⁵ A lack of discipline in schools became more prominent as young people concluded that their future will be the same as their unemployed parents. Worse still drug-taking was on the rise and it was not just “soft” drugs like LSD but especially glue and heroin¹⁰⁶ that dulled senses and took away the hardships of youth unemployment.

It also comes as no surprise that people jaded by empty lives, poverty and lack of opportunity turned to riot especially in decayed urban centres of Liverpool, Manchester or London. The approximated damage of these riots was £6.5 million with several buildings burned down and hundreds of civilians and police officers injured.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Stewart, *Bang!: A History of Britain in the 1980s*, Chap. 14

¹⁰³ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 86

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 86

¹⁰⁵ Stewart, *Bang!: A History of Britain in the 1980s*, Chap. 14

¹⁰⁶ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 88

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 91

7 CONSUMERISM AND THE POLL TAX

7.1 Consumerism

The second term of Thatcher's government the economy recovered enough that people actually started to feel improvements in their lives. Inflation stayed below 5 per cent and wages rose by 14 per cent and the basic rate of tax was lowered by 6 per cents.¹⁰⁸ Another thing that was being lowered as the number of nationalized companies as the privatization continued. And to make the firms attractive investments for the private enterprise the process of rationalization was started. It involved dismissing workers but it also meant that people could now buy shares of companies and at the end of the eighties there were more shareholders than union members in Britain.¹⁰⁹

Another new thing that perhaps went hand in hand with the increase of consumerism was the emergence of new sub-class of yuppies¹¹⁰ (young urban professionals) in Britain; they mostly appeared in the context of the newly-rich brokers in the City of London. Yuppies were able to generate wealth mainly because of the deregulation of the financial markets in October 1986. But they were also present in other flourishing British industries such as advertising or media.¹¹¹

7.2 The Poll Tax

The poll tax was intended as a way of reducing the power of local council because the local election became basically a nationwide referendum on the government and it usually did not end well for the government.¹¹² The introduction of the poll tax, however, did not reduce the power of local council instead it quite dramatically reduced the power of Margaret Thatcher.

The poll tax was so hated because it was a flat-rate charge for everyone. So the poor would pay as much as the rich. There were some exceptions for the unemployed and low-income families but the relatively bright idea to divide the tax into three bands to recognize that not everybody was able to pay that amount was dismissed. The poll tax was introduced in possibly the worst time it could have been because the interest rates along

¹⁰⁸ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 225

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 229

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233

¹¹¹ Marr, *History of Modern Britain*

¹¹² *Ibid.*,

with the cost of mortgages were rising. So people who bought their first home during the rise of the economy were now struggling¹¹³ and on top of that, they were now asked to pay considerably more for their property in the form of a poll tax.

And so on 31 March 1990 a day before the poll tax was to be imposed in England and Wales there was a massive demonstration against it which turned into a riot in Trafalgar Square.¹¹⁴ It can be seen a more than just a public outburst of violence it was the middle-class who normally abided the law voicing their opinion. There was also a huge movement of people who simply refused to pay the poll tax.

It was not just poll tax that ended Thatcher's premiership there was also the issue with her not wanting to join the Exchange rate mechanism and her whole opinion on European Union. Also, it was the fact that she was growing increasingly distant from her average voter and becoming too sure of her premiership. During the election campaign in years 1983 and 1987 she always cleared her office as a reminder to not take anything her post for granted but during her campaign to become Prime Minister for the third time she was speaking of what she would she do when she gets elected for the fourth time.¹¹⁵

As a consequence of all these things Margaret Thatcher announced her resignation on Thursday 22 November 1990¹¹⁶ after eleven years in office

¹¹³ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 354

¹¹⁴ Marr, *History of Modern Britain*

¹¹⁵ Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, 349

¹¹⁶ Stewart, *Bang!: A History of Britain in the 1980s*, Chap. 15

II. ANALYSIS

8 ANALYSIS OF *MAGNIFICENCE* BY HOWARD BRENTON

8.1 Summary of *Magnificence*

The play follows a story of five English squatters and left-wing activists Will, Jed, Mary, Veronica and Cliff who decide to camp in an abandoned flat in London. The group barricades themselves in the flat and the one who is supposed to draw them out is an old bailiff, who ruined his career because he was not able to evict an old woman out of the house she was supposed to leave. He hopes to regain his career on the case of squatters but in all goes awry when he accidentally kicks pregnant Mary into a stomach and she loses the baby.

After this incident, Jed is taken into prison where he starts taking methamphetamine or “speed” and because of this and his anger toward the housing situation he decides to take revenge on Alice the Paymaster General who Jed mistakes for Minister of Environment. He plans to use gelignite but it fails to explode, later he ignites it by throwing it on the ground and killing both.

8.2 Main Themes

The topic of the play is the downfall of the character Jed, who got addicted to methamphetamine in jail in order to escape the cruel reality and then killed himself and the Tory minister, Alice. Who he saw as a representation of the oppressive high class – those who he saw as an enemy.

In the first scene, five young squatters are setting up their “home”. General incompetence and lack of certainty with their actions can be observed. The lack of certainty was present through the seventies and it is no surprise that Brenton takes note of this from the beginning of the play.

They hope to raise awareness of the housing crisis and the fact that wealthy investors are speculating on the market with houses which leaves many without shelter. However, from the start, they have to deal with obstructions created by the landlord who got suspicious of their motives and barred the door so they have to get to the room through the window.

JED. Door's stuck

CLIFF. But we looked the place over twenty - four hours ago.

WILL. Don't think the landlord's been round? Barred it up inside?

JED. Why should he?

WILL. Could have got wind. Of us.

...

WILL. Well. That's the revolution. No doorknob to get in and start it.

JED. We'll go through the window¹¹⁷

Another obstacle in their cause to protest is the two ladies, who stare at the group when they are breaking into the flat. Veronica tries to give pamphlets but their effort to attract the attention of the women to their cause ends-up with the ladies tearing the pamphlets and later probably calling the police on them. The old ladies also represent the ignorance of the majority population of the housing crisis and homelessness that the group protests against.

Interestingly, when they are about to be evicted from the property they do not seem to mind and they just continue with their actions as if nothing is happening – the guys continue shaving and Mary continues with her pregnancy exercises. They are only stirred to some action after Veronica's outburst against their ignorance.

VERONICA. Stop it, stop it. Stop, stop, stop.

...

They're getting ready to bust their way in. Bust us. They're going to come through that door... And what are we doing? Nothing. What have done? Nothing. Zero... Sat it out in a grubby room the grubby end of London, for what?...¹¹⁸

The settings of the old dirty flat are later in the play contrasted with the world of high politics by the meeting of former Tory member of the House of Lords, Babs, and the member of the Office of the Paymaster General, Alice.

8.3 Characters and What They Represent

The central character of the play is Jed who is, together with Will, a member of the fringe movement of Trotskyism. Later in the play, after his nine-month stay in a prison, he becomes angry and violent, his violence even results in the murder of the Tory politician whom he sees as a representative of the housing crisis he and his friends are protesting against.

The change of his character to worse is the result of increased frustration with the fact that they did not manage change anything with their actions and his addiction to

¹¹⁷ Howard Brenton, *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1998 36

¹¹⁸ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 65

methamphetamine, that starts in prison, can also be a result of this frustration as drugs were a common escape of especially young people to escape the dullness and harsh reality of life during unemployment and economic crisis.

Will, who is later in the play revealed to be pretty cowardly, is in the Scene One presented as the character who is not afraid of direct conflict with Veronica who works as a documentarist for the BBC. Will's outburst against her job can be seen as an outburst against the long-established media. The author himself might be expressing his frustration with the monopoly of traditional media.

Will is also a member of the Trotskyist movement, however, not as dedicated as Jed. His political views change quickly after he is confronted with the reality of every-day life whereas Jed does not abandon his beliefs until his death. There can be speculations about whether Jed would also not relinquish his political values if he was not taken into prison and was forced to live a normal life just like the rest of the group.

WILL. ... But it's hard for us down in Hounslow ... No, not hard, that's insulting to you. Dreary. Dreary, day in day out. ... Keeping a correct political point of view is something of a chore. I mean ... I know when the milkman calls, you should grab him by the throat, and politicize him on the spot. But it's difficult. Specially if you owe him six weeks. An' you want your cornflakes soggy.¹¹⁹

Veronica is the newest member of the group and also the most pessimistic one, which is especially contrasted with the almost childish character of Mary. For example, when discussing the placement of a banner that Mary sew and wanted to hang out of the window.

VERONICA. How are you going to hang it up?

MARY. Outside. (*She shrugs.*) Out of the window.

...

VERONICA. No one will read it. Just a rag, hanging in the street. It's utterly pathetic.¹²⁰

Veronica's pessimism represents the general mood of the nation that was not very positive during the seventies.

Mary is pregnant during the first three scenes and loses her baby at the end of the third scene because of the brutal attack of an old Bailiff who was hired to evict them. Mary's pregnancy could be a reference to the rise of birth-rate of young peoples especially

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 91

¹²⁰ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 40

those of the lower class. May is also the “mother” character of the group as she is the one who brings “old rags” that could be useful during their isolation, always makes the tea and is the one who is responsible for the supplies.

Another character is Cliff. He stands in the background of the play and his character is not described in detail. He tries to calm the conflict about the BBC between Veronica and Will but he is not responsible for many actions during the play.

The sometimes childish characters of the squatters are contrasted to the violent character of the old bailiff named Slaughter in scene two. What the characters of the bailiff and the squatters share are certain incompetence – in the character of the bailiff the incompetence is symbolized by his failure to evict an old lady from her flat and she even managed to call the TV crew and they then shot a documentary about him which ruined his career.

His character also reveals the problem of rich developers buying old houses, renovating them and then selling them with large profits. It becomes apparent that people who live in such a property are usually “pakis”¹²¹ and other races. This can be linked to the increase of violence in the seventies and also to the increase of violence committed on racial minorities.

The young constable who is supposed to lead the eviction of the squatters shares his somewhat farfetched theories about the origin of humankind and about the reasons for moral decay that was present in the seventies. And Brenton also uses Constables theories as a funny satire on the humankind.

CONSTABLE. ... Yes, we're all Martians

...

CONSTABLE. That's the theory

SLAUGHTER. Ah.

CONSTABLE. A Russian scientist believes in it.

SLAUGHTER. Oh

CONSTABLE. Millions of years ago, Martians landed on earth. And found apes. They doctored the apes and made'em think.¹²²

This world of “average people” represented by the squatters and the bailiff and constable is then contrasted with the world of high politics and the high classes with the

¹²¹ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 46

¹²² *Ibid.*, 50

characters of former politician and now University professor Babs and his former lover Alice who works for the Office of Paymaster General. When the characters meet they speak aside what they think about each other. And it is evident that they both loathe each other. This loathing and insincere behaviour can refer to the pretentious behaviour that is typically associated with high classes.

Babs wants to see Alice tell him that he is dying. It is uncertain what illness is he dying of but is certainly very embarrassing as he states that “in the latter days of his Cabinet career, he farted a great deal”¹²³ This joke can be also seen as a representation of the moral corruption of politicians and higher classes in general.

Babs’s decaying health and his failed career are contrasted with the political success of Alice, however, later in the scene we learn that Alice is a new kind of English politician “... peculiarly modern, peculiarly English kind of fascist”¹²⁴ and the fact that politicians like Alice are starting to get their voice in parliament scares Babs “... I think there’s a danger, a very real and terrible danger, that you may inherit the earth”¹²⁵ which may reflect the public dissatisfaction with the politics but also could represent the general fear of people of fascism, communism and other ideologies that were present in the English culture and were becoming increasingly popular in the seventies.

8.4 Settings

The first three scenes are set either in an old “grubby” flat in London or the street in front of the flat. The fact that Brenton decided to set the squat in London is logical, as in London the prices of real estate were and are extremely high. The group decides to “decorate” their temporary home with graffiti “WE ARE THE WRITING ON YOUR WALL”¹²⁶ Which is a reference to the biblical story of Belshazzar's feast where writing appeared on the wall to tell Belshazzar that because of his sins he will die and his kingdom will be replaced by another kingdom. They also hope to establish a new kingdom of a kind, where there will be no homeless people and no empty houses and flats.

Later however Veronica decides to write the numbers of homeless people in London and writes 1,000,000 on the wall. Even though this is an enormous exaggeration as the official figures estimated that 27,000 single homeless people were sleeping rough in

¹²³ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 78

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40

1971. However, it is the truth that a lot of accommodation for low-income people was being turned into luxury hotels and so the number of reception centres was steadily declining.¹²⁷ And Veronica expressed her concerns about the fact that homelessness is not visible in the city. "... But the people are there somewhere. Like trying to hide litter, ramming it into the cracks in the walls. Ramming people, into cracks in the walls."¹²⁸

And one of these people was rammed into the flat they were occupying. The Old man who emerges from a pile of papers at the end of scene one is the representation of the homelessness that Veronica wants to protest against. However, she does not seem to be concerned about actually helping him, apart from giving him butts from cigarettes. Certain hypocrisy is portrayed here, on the other hand, there was not much Veronica could do.

The conditions in which the group lives there may also be a reference to the so-called "dirty job" strike where the rubbish was not collected and quite literally flooded London just like the lavatory did in the flat.

The dirty and foul settings of the squat are rapidly exchanged for a bright and sunny Cambridge College setting where Babs and Alice meet. This, of course, provides a sharp contrast between the world of homelessness, dirt and mindless violence that is even more exaggerated at the end of scene three where Mary loses her baby.

8.5 End of the Play

Jed is very much the driver of the action in the last scenes of the play. From the scene five where he returns from prison and Lenin talks to him in red light and with heroic gestures about how Jed has to take action.

LENIN. A noble, proletarian hatred for the bourgeois 'class politician' is the beginning of all wisdom.

JED. Right Vlad!

LENIN. Only a violent collision, which indeed may be forced upon the people, will wipe out the servility which has permeated the national consciousness.¹²⁹

It is clear that Jed is enraged and plans something violent. After his failed attempt to change things in the group he decides to take individual action. He explains his intentions

¹²⁷ "HOMELESS SINGLE PERSONS." HOMELESS SINGLE PERSONS (Hansard, 2 March 1973). Accessed March 22, 2020. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1973/mar/02/homeless-single-persons>.

¹²⁸ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 42

¹²⁹ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 86

to Will using a metaphor of a movie he saw in the cinema where some drunken man threw a wine bottle through the screen.

JED. For the rest of the film, there was that bottle-shaped hole. (*With a jab of his finger.*) Clung. One blemish on the screen. But somehow you couldn't watch the film from then.

...

And so thinks... (*With a bow.*) The poor bomber. Bomb 'em. Again and again. Right through their silver screen. Disrupt the spectacle. The obscene parade, bring it to a halt! Scatter the dolly girls, let advertisement bleed ... Bomb 'em, again and again! Murderous display. An entertainment for the oppressed, so they may dance a little, take a little warmth from the sight, eh?¹³⁰

It is evident that Jed's frustration is great and the fact that he decides to take such a rapid and serious action as bombing is a portrayal of the violence that become so common during the 1970s. Also, the fact that he decides to use Gelignite, the explosive used by IRA, can be understood as a hint towards this organization that is responsible for much more violent attacks than Jed's.

As the target of his attack, he chooses Alice. Jed assumes that Alice works for the Ministry of the Environment but only during the actual attack learns that Alice "was moved downstairs"¹³¹ and works for the Paymaster General. His attack as a whole seems to be unprepared. The fuse that was supposed to ignite the Gelignite fails. Jed is then bewildered by Alice's articulate speech and his ability to remain relatively calm during the attack: it seems that the tables have turned and it is Jed who is panicking now.

Jed also sees that Alice is not just an evil politician but also a person with hobbies and also problems such as his chronic pain under the right shoulder or his demotion. What also angers Jed are the rhododendrons force-fed to bloom during the Indian summer in Alice's garden. Alice's garden represents the "Englishness" of the ruling class for Jed. That kind of idyllic vision of England that is so distant from Jed's experience. And when Alice offers him a glass of whiskey in hopes of some "humane resolution"¹³² Jed snaps and throws the Gelatine on the ground, killing both.

8.6 Conclusion

The play contains many examples of a closed society and also of structural violence. For instance, the character of bailiff Slaughter is a nice representation of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 95-96

¹³¹ Brenton, Plays: 1, 103

¹³² Ibid., 105

structural violence. He is the violent force send by the government to evict the squatters from the flat they are occupying. He also mentions other instances where he was hired by wealthy developers in order to dispose of people living in old apartments. The same apartments those developers want to rebuilt and then make a profit on renting them out. If they want to make a profit they, of course, will not sublet the flats to the same, usually poor or middle-class people that lived there before.

The closed society is also shown in the fact that characters are not able to change their situation. Not much is known about Jed's life apart from the fact that he is the son of a gardener. It can, therefore, be assumed that he grew up in a working-class family. However, the fact that he is taken into prison for not so serious an offence – in fact, it is not so obvious why he is taken to prison it the first place – and then he becomes a member of the lowest class. He then – out of desperation – commits the murder of Alice. It can also be seen in the story of Will. Even though in the play there is very little information about Will's background it can be assumed that he has the same background as Jed. Will also does not manage to change his situation. If anything his situation became worst. He moved in with “a little chick”¹³³ who has “taken to injecting acid in the eggs for breakfast now.”¹³⁴ It is therefore evident that he is addicted to some kind of hallucinogenic drug.

There is, of course, the sharp contrast between the world of the squatters and Slaughter and the world of Alice and Babs. In the world of the squatters, there is violence and social injustice whereas is the world of the politicians there is punting on the river. But the two worlds have also something in common, for example, the presence of death – first Mary's baby dies and then a few scenes later Babs dies.

¹³³ Brenton, *Plays: 1*, 87

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 87

9 ANALYSIS OF *PARTY TIME* BY HAROLD PINTER

9.1 Summary of *Party Time*

In *Party Time* Harold Pinter portrays the differences between upper and lower classes. The play is about a group of upper-class people who get together at a party that was thrown by Gavin who wishes to be accepted into their “club”. While the club members enjoy their party, there are slight hints of the unrest happening on the streets. There are barricades on the street and helicopters flying as well as soldiers patrolling on the streets. All these are only briefly mentioned in play or are immediately muzzled by the characters. The reader gets a brief insight into the lives of lower classes – those protesting on the streets by the character of Jimmy who is in prison and being tortured.

9.2 Historical Context of *Party Time*

Party time by Harold Pinter was first performed in the Almeida Theatre in London.¹³⁵ In the year 1991 – just a year after Margaret Thatcher resigned her post of Prime Minister and the critique of her politics can be observed in the play.

People voted for Thatcher because they wanted change and the need for something to change was prevailing through the decade. Just like the protesters in the streets of this unnamed city in the play, British lower class and left-wing voters in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and London were protesting because they were dissatisfied with the state of their country and the social injustice that they were experiencing. In the 1980’s many people became richer but many people, especially in the rural and industrial areas, became poor. This can be linked to Thatcher’s politics of the free market and her belief that those who have natural abilities would lead and those who do not will still profit from the strong leadership.

9.3 Characters

Terry is something of a central character of the play; he is a clear example of a yuppie (young urban professionals). That means that he profited from the deregulation of the stock market in the eighties. It is evident from the start of the play that he was not born into the upper-middle class like most of the people present at the party.

¹³⁵ Keith D Peacock. *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*. Westport, (Conn: Greenwood, 1997), 214

The fact that Terry is not a member of upper-middle-class from birth is shown in his first conversation with Gavin, who is the host, about the usage of hot towels in barbershops. Terry is not aware of such practice whereas Gavin who was “born in the West Country”¹³⁶ believes that “it was common practice in those days”¹³⁷ which just show that he grew up upper class and is out of reality in the sense that he does not know what is a common practice for people of the lower classes.

In the first chapter of this thesis, it is mentioned that it is extremely hard to become a member of the upper class. One can become upper class by being born into it or by marrying into an upper-class family. Just how hard it is to become a member of the elite is illustrated in Terry’s monologue about how difficult is it to join their tennis club which is a symbol of the upper-class.

TERRY

...Mind you, there’s a waiting list as long as – I mean you’ve got to be proposed and seconded, and then they’ve got to check you out, they don’t let any old spare bugger in there, why should they?¹³⁸

This clearly shows the unwillingness of the elite to share power with anybody or let somebody from lower-class join them in their club – in their way of life and they definitely do not want to share the power that comes with being a member of such club. Another character that is not originally upper class is Dusty – Terry’s wife. She is a kind of a disturbing element in the play as her constant questions about what happened to her brother Jimmy are an indication that something serious and violent is happening outside the party.

The character that is originally from the elite and is of the highest social status from all the club members is Dame Melissa. Firstly just the fact that she is Dame shows that is a member of the nobility and secondly it is revealed that she could own a valley as she tells Gavin in their conversation about birds of prey. However, it may not be a direct hint to make the reader realize just how wealthy Melissa may be. She might be just talking about the place of her birth or her favourite place to visit.

MELISSA

Oh, I loved the hawks too. And the eagles. But certainly hawks. The kestrel. The way it flew and hovered, over my valley. It made me cry. I still cry.

¹³⁶ Harold Pinter, *Party Time: A Screenplay* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 3

¹³⁷ Pinter, *Party Time*, 3

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4

The two characters who represent the oppression of lower classes and the abuse of power by high classes are Fred and Douglas. From the first dialogue between them, it is obvious that they are plotting something.

FRED
We've got to make it work.
DOUGLAS
What?
FRED
The country
...
FRED *clenches his fist.*
FRED
A bit of that.
DOUGLAS clenches his fist.
DOUGLAS
A bit of that.¹³⁹

By the phrase "to make it work" they mean their wishes to use some violent force.

What is meant by this violent force is shown in the next dialogue between Suky and Emily. It is mentioned that he was competing in horse jumping "somewhere up north"¹⁴⁰ But on the day of the party, Emily's husband is unable to attend the party because "He's busy. Down there"¹⁴¹ which is one of many hints that appear through the play that something is not quite right with the world outside the party.

9.4 Inequality of Sexes

Sexism is present throughout the play but it is frequently observed in Terry's and Dusty's relationship. For example, when Dusty asks about her brother Jimmy in front of Gavin and Melissa Terry starts to insult Dusty in front of the others and later Gavin's remark clearly shows his attitude towards women.

GAVIN (TO MELISSA)

It's the root of many ills, you know. Uncontrollable wives.¹⁴²

This implies that he thinks that women are supposed to be controlled and that their opinion does not really matter. It is also Terry who does not respect his wife's opinion and is not willing to discuss the topic which is obviously very important to her.

¹³⁹ Pinter, *Party Time*, 13-14

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16

¹⁴² Pinter, *Party Time*, 23

DUSTY

Does anyone know what's happened to my brother Jimmy?

TERRY

.... I thought I had said that we don't discuss this question of what has happened to Jimmy, that it's not up for discussion, that it's not on anyone's agenda. ...

DUSTY

It's on my agenda.

TERRY

What did you say?

DUSTY

I said it's on my agenda.

TERRY

No, no, you've got it wrong there, old darling. ... you don't have any agenda. Got it? You have no agenda. Absolutely the opposite of the case. (To the others) I'm going to have to give her a real talking to when I get home, I can see that.¹⁴³

9.5 Closed Society in *Party Time*

The closed society is portrayed in hints, remarks and the stage directions rather than shown directly, during the play the front door opens more and more and reveals the unrest on the streets. Only at the end of the play in Jimmy's monologue, the audience comes in direct contact with the violence committed on the lower classes. The first indication of the social unrest can be spotted when Dame Melissa enters the party.

MELISSA

What on earth's going on out there? It's like the Black Death.

TERRY

What is?

MELISSA

The town's dead. There's nobody on the streets, there's not a soul in sight, apart from some ... soldiers. My driver had to stop at a ... you know... what do you call it? ...a roadblock. We had to say who we were ... it really was a trifle...

GAVIN

Oh, there's been a little ... you know...

TERRY

Nothing in it. Can I introduce you? ...¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Pinter, *Party Time*, 22-23

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7

From what Melissa says it is clear that something violent is about to happen outside. It is also evident that she is not used to coming in contact with this kind of violence and is not concerned with why this is happening and only cares about how inconvenient it was for her to stop and identify herself. Moreover, the others do not want to discuss it and Terry tries to switch to another topic as soon as possible.

DUSTY

I keep hearing all these things. I don't know what do believe

...

TERRY

You don't have to believe anything. You just have to shut up and mind your own business, how many times do I have to tell you? ... You keep hearing all these things spread by pricks about pricks. What's it got to do with you?¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, when Dusty mentions that she is not sure what to believe she is silenced by Terry. His response is not just sexist but also shows that the elite did not want to bother themselves with lower-class problems. Dusty is concerned about the wellbeing of her brother so when Terry asks he "what's it got to do with you?" he dismisses her family and her background – she was born working class – and implies that she is now only to be concerned with her own problems.

It is clearly visible that most of the partygoers do not want to concern themselves with what is happening outside. So what do they care about? The play shows us just how shallow the lives of these people are. When Gavin is asked by Melissa "What else do you do?"¹⁴⁶ He is bewildered by her question because "He doesn't do anything else, He plays golf."¹⁴⁷

The play continues to show more of the lives of upper-class people such as when Douglas invites Fred and Charlotte to come to their island in the summer.

DOUGLAS

If you're free this summer do come to our island. We take an island for the summer. Do come. There's more or less nobody there. Just a few local people who do us proud. ... You know what God intended for the human race, you know what paradise is.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Pinter, *Party Time* 7-8

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27

This is one of the moments in the play where Douglas is boasting just how rich he is. He also feels as if the locals who live on his island are his property. He likewise believes that he is worthy of the life that “God intended for the human race”¹⁴⁹ completely ignoring that almost nobody has this “God intended lifestyle” which he leads.

So what do people like Douglas think about the people outside? It can be spotted in the next conversation of Sam with Smith and Harlow about a person called Stoddart.

SAM

... I met a man at a party the other day – I couldn’t believe it – He was talking the most absolute bloody crap – his ideas about the world, that kind of thing – he was a complete and utter total arsehole – a musician or something.

SMITH

Stoddart?

SAM

That’s it. Now, you see, these kind of people, they’re an infection.

SMITH

Don’t worry about Stoddart. We’ve seen him off.

HARLOW

We’ve had him for breakfast.

This dialogue shows the violence committed by the elite on others. Stoddart as a musician represents the opposition of Thatcher. Sam, Smith and Harlow are obviously aware of their power and are not afraid to abuse it to silence everybody who may not agree with them. The power that the upper class has over the lower class is then intensified by Terry who in his sudden outburst against his wife Dusty verbally attacks her.

TERRY

Yes, you’re all going to die together, you and your lot.

DUSTY

How are you going to do it? Tell me.

TERRY

Easy. We’ve got dozens of options. We could suffocate every single one of you at any given signal or we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse ... or we could poison all the mother’s milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before it opened its perverted bloody mouth.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Pinter, Party Time 25

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 30

The biggest example of the abuse of power committed by authorities is presented at the very end of the play when the front door that was opening during the play finally bursts open and the riot happening outside can be seen. And the character of Jimmy – brother of Dusty is presented in a different space altogether. He is dressed in thin clothes and is in an isolation cell. He is being tortured in prison and describes how he cannot hear anything else than his heartbeat and see anything else than darkness. Jimmy is the representation of the lower classes that are being oppressed and tortured by the elite. Many people probably felt the same as Jimmy in the eighties. Even though they were not in prison they were in a hypothetical cell constructed by the closed society they could not escape from.

CONCLUSION

The seventies and Eighties were extremely turbulent times in the history of Britain. The seventies were a time of industrial conflict – the endless strikes completely paralyzed the country. The political consensus of the fifties and sixties was suddenly over and the political scene was becoming increasingly polarized. Political and racial violence also erupted in the country. People felt as if they were not governed by their MPs but ruled by the Union Leaders who were announcing one strike after another.

This disappointment in policy-makers was one of the reasons for Thatcher's success in the 1979 election. People tired of weak leaders were excited by the promise of a strong prime minister who could manage the rising demands of unions. Thatcher promised something new – the end of the British welfare state. She promised to tackle the economic recession by controlling inflation, not unemployment like her precedents. However, she did not manage to fulfil her pledges to the people of Britain as the divide between classes grew even more in the eighties than in the seventies.

Playwrights of the seventies and eighties, of course, noticed the growing gap between the wealthy and poor, south of the UK and north of the UK. Between ones who were building beautiful houses in the country and ones who had nowhere to sleep. Authors such as Howard Brenton and Harold Pinter were not afraid to draw attention to the problems of their time in their plays. Both *The Magnificent* and *Party Time* deal closely with the theme of a closed society and structural violence. The focus of the plays is on the contrast of closed and open societies. They show the world of the poor – squatters or prisoners and then contradict it with the world of the rich.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NUM First abbreviation – National Union of Miners

MP Second abbreviation – Member of Parliament

IMF Third abbreviation – International Monetary Fund

IRA Fourth abbreviation – Irish Republican Army

VAT Fifth abbreviation – Value Added Tax

YUPEE Sixth abbreviation – Young Upwardly Professional