



KATE TEMPEST
WASTED

EDITED BY KATIE BESWICK

Wasted

Kate Tempest was born in London in 1985. Her work includes the plays *Wasted*, *Glasshouse* and *Hopelessly Devoted*; the poetry collections *Everything Speaks in its Own Way* and *Hold Your Own*; the albums *Everybody Down*, *Balance*, *Let Them Eat Chaos* and *The Book of Traps and Lessons*; the long poems *Brand New Ancients* and *Let Them Eat Chaos*; and her debut novel, *The Bricks that Built the Houses*.

Katie Beswick is a lecturer in drama at the University of Exeter, UK. She has published widely on theatre and council estates in journals including *Research in Drama Education*, *Performance Research* and *New Theatre Quarterly*, and her monograph *Social Housing in Performance* was published by Methuen Drama in 2019.

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With commentary and notes by

KATIE BESWICK

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Contents

Chronology and Significant Historical Events vi

Context: History, Society, Politics 1

Form and Genre 7

Hip hop 7

Verse drama 8

Realism/naturalism 10

Themes 13

Loss 13

Neoliberalism 14

Youth culture 15

First Production 16

Further Exploration 19

Works by Kate Tempest 19

On Kate Tempest 19

On hip hop 19

On realism/naturalism 20

On gentrification 20

Notes 22

WASTED 25

Chronology and Significant Historical Events

The timeline below maps an account of national and world events that surround the first performance of *Wasted*. As we will see in the CONTEXT section of this introduction, these seemingly unrelated events converge in the play in a variety of ways.

1973 11 August: Hip hop culture officially begins when teenager Clive Campbell performs as ‘DJ Kool Herc’ at a back-to-school party, thrown by his sister Cindy, in the recreation rooms at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, an apartment complex in the Bronx, New York. Using two turntables to play the same record, he innovates with a technique he has perfected over the preceding months, creating extended instrumental breaks so that partygoers can dance for longer. According to hip hop legend, his friend, Coke La Rock, hypes up the crowd by rhyming over instrumentals. Three of the four ‘pillars’ or ‘elements’ of hip hop culture: DJing, MCing (rhyming over music) and break-dancing (dancing in the instrumental breaks of song) are in action that evening. The fourth pillar of hip hop, graffiti, emerges around the same period. During the 1970s, graffiti, often in the form of ‘tags’ (marks indicating the creator), is seen across public spaces in inner city New York. Often it covers the interior and exterior of subway cars that travel all over the city. In *New York: A Documentary Film*, cultural critic Marshall Berman describes how the subway trains provided a means through which those (black, Hispanic and working-class people) from the impoverished neighbourhood of the Bronx were able to communicate with those in more affluent areas. As he argues, graffiti was ‘the earliest form in which most people who weren’t part of that neighbourhood’ came to understand what was happening there. Scholars who write about hip hop often argue that

there are not four, but five elements; depending on who you consult, ‘knowledge’ is often considered the fifth element.

- 1979 4 May: Margaret Thatcher becomes Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, having served as Leader of the Opposition since 1975. Her leadership is characterized by fiscal conservatism, economic reliance on the free-market, privatization of state-owned industry, hostility towards trade unions and scaling back the welfare state. So-called ‘Thatcherite’ politics, following the model of ‘Reaganomics’ introduced by US President Ronald Reagan, with whom Thatcher was closely allied, marks the UK’s move towards neoliberalism as an economic model (see the THEMES section for a discussion and explanation of the term ‘neoliberalism’).

December: The hip hop record ‘Rapper’s Delight’ by New Jersey’s the Sugarhill Gang reaches number three in the UK singles chart, marking the first mainstream success for hip hop in the United Kingdom.

- 1982 December: The first British hip hop record, ‘Christmas Rapping’ by the artist Dizzy Heights, released by Polydor Records, reaches number forty-nine in the UK singles chart, following a surge of underground and self-released hip hop music. Popular British artists, including Adam and the Ants, The Clash, Malcolm McLaren and Wham! also experiment with adopting hip hop techniques into their music throughout the early 1980s, demonstrating how hip hop is beginning to take root as part of popular culture in the UK.

- 1984 March: The Miners’ Strike, a major industrial action staged by the National Union of Mineworkers in response to the government’s attempts to close British collieries, shuts down the UK’s coal industry. Thatcher attempts to quash the power of trade unions

by opposing the strike. In June 1984, there is a violent clash between striking miners and the police at a coking plant in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. Known as the ‘Battle of Orgreave’, the event sees thousands of police officers deployed, including mounted officers and police dogs, in an attempt to overwhelm the pickets. The strike is ruled illegal in September.

1985 3 March: The Miners’ Strike officially ends. This marks a significant turning point in the culture and trajectory of the British working classes. The power of trade unions is severely weakened, and in the coming decades there is rapid deindustrialization. Opportunities for working-class people to find well-paid, secure jobs with clearly defined benefits and prospects for promotion decrease, and there is an increase in unemployment, drug abuse and social instability in former working-class strongholds. The sense of community and collectivity that characterized the mid-twentieth-century working-class experience begins to fracture, as those able to participate in the neoliberal culture leave behind those who cannot. In a now famous speech delivered in 1987, Thatcher proudly champions the era of the individual, claiming that there is ‘no such thing as society’.

22 December: Kate Esther Calvert is born in London. She adopts the stage and pen name Kate Tempest in the mid-2000s after performing for a number of years under the name Excentral Tempest. She is part of the so-called ‘millennial’ generation, a term used to describe those born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s who became adults in the new millennium. Despite a growth in progressive social movements resulting in increased rights for women, ethnic minorities and LGBT people, this group will face more financial instability than previous generations

and decreased social mobility – meaning that they are less likely than their parents to move into a higher social class or income bracket than the one they were born into.

Tempest is raised in Lewisham, in the south-east of London. The language, culture and geography of south-east London runs through her work across music, plays, novels and poetry.

- 1988 The British hip hop crew London Posse release ‘Money Mad’, a seminal track that is often considered to mark the birth of uniquely British hip hop culture. The artists use their own London accents and do not affect American-style voices as British rappers up to this point have often done. The crew also draw on dub reggae (an electronic development of reggae music), giving their music a distinctive sound that will come to distinguish British hip hop (and later the grime music that emerges from British hip hop, garage and jungle music influences) from US rap music.
- 1990 November: Margaret Thatcher resigns and John Major wins the leadership contest for the Conservative Party, succeeding her as Prime Minister. He goes on to win a general election in 1992.
- 1997 May: Labour, branded as New Labour, wins the general election and Tony Blair becomes Prime Minister. ‘New Labour’ is a rebranding of the Labour Party that signals a move away from its socialist roots. Blair’s leadership is marked by an embrace of the free-market neoliberal ideology that has now characterized British politics since Thatcher, although he makes some concessions to reinvigorating the welfare state, notably with investment in education and Child Benefit. He vows to eliminate class inequality through an expansion of the middle classes, and pursues a social inclusion