

“Light out of De Profundis!
– a play of explosive radical
importance.” **EDWARD BOND**



SIMON STEPHENS

RAGE

Simon Stephens

Rage

methuen | drama

LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

METHUEN DRAMA

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

**BLOOMSBURY, METHUEN DRAMA and the Methuen Drama logo
are trade marks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

First published in Great Britain 2018

Copyright © Simon Stephens, 2018

Simon Stephens has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs
and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as author of this work.

Cover design by Toby Way
Photography by Joel Goodman

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system,
without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for,
any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses
given in this book were correct at the time of going to press.

The author and publisher regret any inconvenience caused if addresses
have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility
or any such changes.

This version of the text went to print before the end of rehearsals
and may differ slightly from the version performed.

No rights in incidental music or songs contained in the work are
hereby granted and performance rights for any performance/presentation
whatsoever must be obtained from the respective copyright owners.

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved and application
for performance etc. should be made before rehearsals by professionals and
by amateurs to Casarotto Ramsay & Associates Ltd, Waverley House,
7–12 Noel Street, London W1F 8GQ (agents@casarotto.co.uk).

No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.

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

ISBN: PB: 978-1-3501-1075-5

ePDF: 978-1-3501-1076-2

ePub: 978-1-3501-1077-9

Series: Modern Plays

Typeset by Country Setting, Kingdown, Kent CT14 8ES

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters.

Introduction

In December of 2015 my friend and long-term collaborator Sebastian Nubling asked me to write a play for him. He wanted me to write a response to the new play by Nobel Laureate Elfriede Jelinek that he would be directing at Hamburg's Thalia Theater. Her play, *Wut* (which loosely translates as 'fury') was a text some hundred and twenty pages in length. It was an imaginative reconstruction of the massacre carried out by Islamist terrorists at the headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris earlier that year.

I love Jelinek's writing. I love her eloquence and formal explosion and linguistic energy and moral honesty. I asked Sebastian if I could read the play in an English translation. He told me I couldn't because there was no English translation of the play. He asked me if could I make a response to it anyway. He asked me if I could write it by April of the following year.

It seemed a difficult task. To write a play in response to another play that I couldn't read. A formally exploratory play defined by an examination of rage.

In three months.

Sebastian suggested I could just think about my own ideas of rage. What does rage mean to me? Where have I encountered it? Where has it moved me? When have I felt it? I liked his questions, and certainly, in the first year of David Cameron's Tory government and the final months before the Brexit referendum that would end his brief, absurd tenure, there was much about Britain that was making me furious and a sense of increasing anger throughout the country. But nevertheless I didn't have an anchor. I needed something to steady my anger if I was going to be able to make something for him.

And then, in the first weeks of 2016 I saw Joel Goodman's photographs of New Year's Eve around Well Street in Manchester. The most celebrated of his photographs became an international sensation. It went viral on the internet. It

depicted several events in one moment. A young man is arrested by four police officers. The arrest or its force causes the horror of a girl who is watching it happen. Others in the area stand to watch. Meanwhile a man in blue, apparently nearly comatose by alcohol, lies in the middle of the road and reaches to a nearby beer bottle on the street.

The photograph had a formal poise to it. Many observed that it accorded to Leonardo da Vinci's model of the golden median. They found in the photograph a classical cogency applied to a scene of alcoholic carnage and horror, violence and anger.

I loved the photograph. I loved it for its elegance and its form. It was beautifully lit. It also seemed to capture something that I recognised in Britain at that time. It seemed to capture the sense of dislocation and disorder of a country that, as it voted to dismantle its own economic security by leaving the EU, seemed to be committing a kind of suicide. It captured completely what I felt when I considered rage or fury in my country at that time.

I found out that the photograph was one of a series. There were thirty-one photos in total. Each slightly different in perspective or tone, but in their entirety they seemed to offer a startling insight into my experience of Britain then. In their capturing of the drunken fury and in the way they seemed charged by sexual desire, by violence, by hatred and love alike, they seemed to crystallise the feelings I was exploring as I reached to respond to the Jelinek play for Sebastian. I rang him to tell him that I had an idea for a play.

My idea was this. Every day in March, a month that I noticed had thirty-one days in it, I would write a response to one of Goodman's photographs. Unusually for me I wouldn't plan the scenes. I would try not to look ahead to the next day's photograph or edit or chart their relationships in any way. I would just write, for an hour or, so my response to what I saw.

And every day I would email Sebastian a new scene. And so throughout March I would build up a collage of scenes and he would have a new play, a play that in the most indirect way possible responded to Jelinek's *Wut*. A chaotic disordered exploration of rage for a culture of chaotic disorder.

He loved the idea. I wrote the scenes. With his dramaturg Julia Lochte, he and I shaped the collage into a kind of order that made dramaturgical sense of its counterpoint to *Wut*. He directed it at the Thalia in Hamburg at the end of 2016. As I write it is still running there.

Over the last year or so I have looked at the play with actors from the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. I wanted to find an order or a shape to my collage of my own. I wanted, effectively, to make my own version of the collage. To find a cogent dramaturgy of my own that meant it can exist independently of the Jelinek.

That version is what is published here.

As I read the scenes, scenes born out of an instinctive exploration of a country in fragmentation, I noticed recurring themes and atomised figures I could blend into characters. It is important to me that few of the figures have names; they are, I think, manifestations of feeling or tone rather than imagined human beings. Nights like the night on which Goodman saw humanity fracture. Through their booze and chaos and pure, distilled anger, they are events of dehumanisation. I wanted to capture that.

The noise of the imminence of the Brexit vote seems to hum under the scenes. I think it is that imminence, born as it was, out of inchoate anger and a need to tear down structures, that is captured in some of the violence of the play. It is certainly captured in the racial fear and hatred some of the figures articulate. I thought at the time of writing, and still feel to a degree, that much of the anger that led to the decision to leave the European Union of trade agreements, was a product of racism. I think Nigel Farage, who led the campaign to leave the

EU, is motivated by racism as much as he is by greed. I think his campaign celebrated his racist sentiments. He kindled irrational patriotism and exaggerated latent fears of movement of people through borders. My sense of that racism is captured in some of the language and images articulated here.

I make no apology for that language or those images. I am aware that it can make for distressing reading or unsettling dramatic speech. I think it is important for art, on occasion, to distress or unsettle. I think the job of dramatists is to create an imaginary psychosis on their stages so that their audiences can experience and explore psychosis in auditoria as a means of having to explore it less in their life.

The psychosis of *Rage* is fractured and sexually needy, incoherent, drunken, sometimes racist and terrified. I think it is so because that state is what Goodman captured in his photographs on that New Year's night, and it is what I recognised as being a defining tone of the country I lived in as it plunged its way towards economic self-destruction at the start of that year.

I would like to think that state of fractured psychosis in Britain has passed or is passing. In that sense *Rage* would become quickly irrelevant. I don't think it is though. I think, if anything, it is getting more overt and will continue to do so as one of the consequences of our almost unavoidable economic catastrophe to come.

Rage