

methuen | drama

Trevor R. Griffiths

A COMPREHENSIVE A-Z OF THE  
WORLD'S BEST PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

**THE**  
**THEATRE**  
**GUIDE**

B L O O M S B U R Y

**The  
Theatre  
Guide**

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# The Theatre Guide



Trevor R. Griffiths

B L O O M S B U R Y  
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# Introduction

The *Theatre Guide* is a theatre reference book with a difference because it concentrates on the writers and the plays you are actually likely to be able to see in the theatre now, rather than the writers who stay in theatre reference books because they have always been there, even though no one has staged their plays for generations. Its other unique feature is a cross-referencing system that allows you to find other plays or authors that have tackled similar topics, share similar interests or offer marked contrasts to the ones you started from; and when you look at those further entries you will find more cross-references that can lead you on a sometimes surprising journey of discovery that could give added enjoyment to your appreciation and understanding of theatre.

Compared to previous editions, the emphasis is now on writers alone, although material from generic or company entries has been subsumed elsewhere. Some ninety new writers have been added, reflecting the very exciting new writing scene in Britain and Ireland in the last decade. In making choices for inclusion in this edition, one of the key criteria was that at least some of the work of the writers should have been published at some point so that you could read their plays if there were no current productions. The only exception to this rule is where there is work published in video form. In a few cases writers who haven't had a recent production are included because, for example, work like theirs or from their period appears to be coming into fashion again and they may be next in line. One of the joys of compiling this book has been the exciting sense of discovery as new writers emerge and revivals of long-lost plays and playwrights suddenly demonstrate their enduring worth and contribute to the vitality of the current theatrical repertory.

# How to use this book

The *Theatre Guide* is divided into an alphabetical list of over 550 main entries covering individual dramatists, and an index of play titles, theatre people and institutions.

If you know an author's name, you can look it up in the main alphabetical list or in the index (where the author's main entry is printed in **bold**). If you know a play's title, you can look it up in the index. The symbol \* in front of a dramatist's name indicates that they have their own main entry.

Each main entry for an individual writer follows a standard format, with a list of plays, discussion of the writers and a list of cross-references. For some writers there is also a key play selected for more detailed treatment. There are sometimes difficulties in ascertaining the dates of writers' births and deaths but where there is known doubt it is indicated by the use of *c.* (for *circa*) by that doubtful date. The dates given for the plays are, wherever possible, those of their first public appearance, whether in production or in print, but in some cases there may be uncertainty about the exact order of composition and/or production of plays. Wherever possible, alternative titles and revised versions of plays going under different titles have been given, but a glance at the entry for John Byrne will show the scope of the problem. It is not possible to include all the plays written by all the writers, and references to their awards and film, television, radio, translation, adaptation and other writing credits are very selective. In the case of foreign-language plays, familiar English titles are given where they exist and literal translations where they don't. The author and publishers would be grateful if any corrections to matters of fact and suggestions for future editions were sent to the publishers.

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**ABBENSETTS, Michael** [1938 – ]  
Guyanan-born British dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Sweet Talk* (1973), *Alterations* (1978), *Samba* (1980), *In the Mood* (1981), *The Dark Horse* (1981), *El Dorado* (1983), *Outlaw* (1983), *Living Together* (1988), *The Lion* (1993)

Abbensetts was the first Caribbean writer to have a television series in Britain, with *Empire Road* (1978). Before that he had already had success with *Sweet Talk*, *Alterations*, a television play *The Museum Attendant* (1973) and radio plays. The secret of Abbensetts' success is his ability to write situation comedies whose characters and human predicaments strike a common chord and appear, therefore, to have a universal appeal. However, although race is not the overt theme, under the comic, often genially satirical veneer, the plays reveal the bitter legacies of colonialism and emigration as seen through the frustrations, aspirations and tragedies of the ordinary British black man-in-the-street. He deals with marital problems (*Sweet Talk*), and the price to be paid for ambition (*Alterations*), with the pathos of individuals who have seen better days (*Samba*), and with those who fought for the 'mother country' (*In the Mood*).

*Sweet Talk*, his most popular play, has been produced in Nigeria (the World Black Arts Festival 1977), New York, Kenya, Canada and throughout the Caribbean.

**TRY THESE:**

★ MATURA, ★ WALCOTT, ★ WHITE for the painful personal legacies of colonialism; ★ KUREISHI and ★ MATURA for 'mother country' disillusionment; ★ RHONE for a similar use of sitcom; ★ CROSS, ★ IKOLI, ★ PHILLIPS have all focused on the British black experience; ★ SAMM-ART WILLIAMS for American equivalents.

**ABBOTT, George** [1887 – 1995]  
American writer and director and producer of musicals

**PLAYS AND MUSICALS INCLUDE:**

*Three Men on a Horse* (1935, with John Cecil Holm), *On Your Toes* (1936, with Rodgers and Hart), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938, based on ★ SHAKESPEARE'S *Comedy of Errors*), *Beat the Band* (1942, with George Marion Jr), *Where's Charley?* (1948), *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1951, with Betsy Smith), *The Pajama Game* (1954, with Richard Bissell), *Damn Yankees* (1955, with Douglas Wallop), *Fiorello* (1959, with Jerome Weidman), *Tropicana* (1985), *Frankie* (1989)

Author or co-author of over fifty plays and musicals, and a legendary director and producer, Abbott was responsible for producing and directing some of Broadway's greatest classics, such as *Pal Joey*, *Call Me Madam* and *On Your Toes*. Abbott spins his plays and musicals on the corniest of plots – in *Damn Yankees* it is a losing baseball team; in *Three Men on a Horse* it is a natural gift for winning. But there is often a twist: *Damn Yankees* also has a touch of *Faust* thrown in (the baseball fan sells his soul to the devil); *Three Men on a Horse* cleverly ridicules the American obsession with winning, turning it equally into a celebration of generous moral decency and the triumph of the little man over the system; and whilst *The Pajama Game* may be about boy meets girl, she's a shop steward and he's the management stooge out to stop her from earning a few cents more an hour. As one might expect, a good moral message gets stirred in along with the comedy. Abbott remained active in the theatre well beyond his hundredth birthday.

**TRY THESE:**

Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls* for its array of gamblers and lowlife characters; ★ BRECHT'S *Schweik in the Second World War* for the triumph

of the 'little man'; ★KAUFMAN AND HART for celebrations of the amiable eccentric; ★WERTENBAKER for Faustian bargains.

**ACKLAND, Rodney** [1908 – 91]

British dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Improper People* (1929), *Strange Orchestra* (1931), *After October* (1936), *The Dark River* (1942), *The Pink Room* (1951, revised as *Absolute Hell*, 1987)

Ackland was a successful screen writer and dramatist whose work had fallen into total neglect before the director Sam Walters successfully revived *The Dark River* at the Orange Tree, Richmond, in 1985. *Absolute Hell*, a revised version of a play that had been condemned by the impresario Binkie Beaumont as 'a libel on the British people', followed at the Orange Tree. It was then staged at the National Theatre with Judi Dench as the hostess of the bohemian drinking club in which a hotch-potch of the disaffected and the distraught while away their lives in a desperate haze of angst and alcohol. The production's success re-established Ackland's reputation as a dramatist. *After October* was staged at Chichester in 1997.

**TRY THESE:**

★O'NEILL'S *The Iceman Cometh* for an American take on the bar room of the damned; Bridget Boland's *Cockpit* for another post-war microcosm.

**ADAMOV, Arthur** [1908 – 70]

French dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*La Parodie* (1950, *The Parody*), *La Grande et la Petite Manoeuvre* (1950, *The Great and the Small Manoeuvre*), *Le Professeur Taranne* (1953, *Professor Taranne*), *Le Ping-Pong* (1955, *Ping-Pong*), *Paolo Paoli* (1957), *Printemps 71* (1962, *Spring of 71*), *Sainte Europe* (1966, *Holy Europe*), *Off Limits* (1968)

Adamov made a precarious literary living in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, when he was a friend of ★ARTAUD and linked with the Surrealists. His plays are sometimes put on by non-professional or university groups, and

they usually try the short and Kafkaesque dream play *Professor Taranne*, but there are more interesting possibilities in his later work. His 1950s plays are dream-like and obsessional, dealing with his urges to suicide, fear of impotence, and general masochism, and his name then tended to be bracketed with those of ★BECKETT and ★IONESCO. However there are signs of his later political interests in *Ping-Pong*, in which two men spend their lives developing a better electric pin-ball machine, a heavy-handed symbol for capitalism.

With the coming of the Algerian War he turned to political plays, notably *Paolo Paoli*, which uses the trade in ostrich feathers and rare butterflies to make anti-capitalist points about the *belle époque*. *Off Limits*, set in the USA at the time of the Vietnam War, is built around a series of parties where the middle-aged drink and the young take dope, each scene interrupted by games or agit-prop sketches.

**TRY THESE:**

★STRINDBERG for the early dream plays; ★BRECHT for the later political plays; ★TREVOR GRIFFITHS' *The Party* for another party at a time of political strife; ★TERRY'S *Viet Rock*, for an anti-Vietnam American satire; ★VAN ITALLIE'S *America Hurrah* for more anti-US satire.

**ADSHEAD, Kay** [1954 – ]

British actor and dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Thatcher's Women* (1987), *The Bogus Woman* (2000)

Adshead has written plays for children and for television. *Thatcher's Women*, presented originally by Paines Plough, tells the story of a northern middle-aged wife pushed reluctantly to the south of England and into prostitution by her husband's unemployment. One of a rash of plays on similar topics inspired (*sic*) by the 'Thatcher decade' and showing the effect of economic policies impinging on private lives, Adshead's is a spirited if uneven play – a kind of 'School in Unsentimental Education or How I Learned to Stop Feeling and Just Play the Game'. *The Bogus Woman*, another fact-based play founded on detailed research, deals movingly with another social issue, the

treatment of refugees and their demonisation as 'bogus' asylum seekers.

**TRY THESE:**

Julia Schofield's *Love on the Plastic* and ★TERSON's *Strippers* make similar links between unemployment and female exploitation; ★MEYER's *Etta Jenks* for an American parallel. For contrast, see *Stars in the Morning Sky* by Alexander Galin, a more melodramatic view of prostitutes; ★HORSFIELD for a contemporary northern ambience.

**AESCHYLUS**

[c. 525 – 456 BC]

Greek dramatist

**SURVIVING PLAYS:**

*The Persians* (472 BC), *The Seven Against Thebes* (469 BC), *The Oresteian Trilogy* (458 BC, *Agammemnon*, *Choephoroi* or *Libation Bearers*, *Eumenides*), *The Suppliant Women*, *Prometheus Bound* (dates unknown)

Aeschylus is credited with two of the major innovations in Greek drama: the introduction of a second actor (which made possible dialogue that did not involve the chorus, thus opening the way for greater dramatic flexibility), and the reduction in size (and therefore importance) of the chorus. *The Persians* is particularly interesting for presenting the recent defeat of the Persians at the Battle of Marathon from a sympathetic viewpoint.

Aeschylus' hold on the current repertory derives almost entirely from *The Oresteia*, the only complete trilogy to survive from the classical Greek theatre. It tells the story of the royal house of Atreus in which crime breeds crime over the generations until the goddess Athene intervenes to substitute reconciliation and justice for the blind process of revenge. Peter Hall directed a memorable all-male version for the National Theatre in 1981, adapted by ★TONY HARRISON, and it was staged again there in 1999 in a version by Ted Hughes directed by Katie Mitchell.

**TRY THESE:**

★ARISTOPHANES, ★EURIPIDES, MENANDER and ★SOPHOCLES wrote the other surviving Greek plays; ★ELIOT's *The Family Reunion* updates the Orestes myth to 1930s England and ★O'NEILL's

*Mourning Becomes Electra* updates it to New England.

**ALBEE, Edward**

[1928 – ]

American dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Zoo Story* (1959), *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1960), *The Sandbox* (1960), *Fam and Yam* (1961), *The American Dream* (1961), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), *Tiny Alice* (1964), *A Delicate Balance* (1966), *Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (1968), *All Over* (1971), *Seascape* (1975), *Counting the Ways* (1976), *Listening* (1976), *The Lady from Dubuque* (1980), *The Man Who Had Three Arms* (1983), *The Marriage Play* (1988), *Three Tall Women* (1991), *Fragments* (1993), *The Play about the Baby* (1997), *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia* (2000), *Occupant* (2001)

The adopted grandson of Edward Franklin Albee, a vaudeville theatre owner and manager, Albee leaped to the forefront of the American theatre scene in the 1960s with his early plays. *Zoo Story*, *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox*, evocative of early ★IONESCO and ★BECKETT both in style and thematic exploration of alienation, provided the United States with a dramatist in the tradition of the European avant-garde. His subsequent plays – *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Tiny Alice* and *A Delicate Balance* – are more Pinteresque in style, raising the question of whether or not Albee found his own voice or has remained derivative in form and content. In recent years, Albee has been less prolific, preferring to spend his time directing his own works and teaching. He is vehement in his protection of the dramatist against directorial excess and has had an active voice in public debate on the subject of stage interpretation.

**Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?**

Albee's commercial success is largely based on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, performed on Broadway by Uta Hagen and Arthur Hill, and later in the film version by Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. The play is set in a small college town and focuses on the relationship between a professor and his wife, the daughter



*The Oresteia* by Aeschylus in a version by Ted Hughes, directed by Katie Mitchell, National Theatre, 1999. Lilo Baur as Cassandra. (Colin Willoughby/ArenaPAL)

of the college president, as they drag a young faculty couple into their elaborate power games. The play explores the force of fantasy, as the amorphous boundaries between appearance and reality are taxed during vicious marital sparring.

**TRY THESE:**

★GUARE's *The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year* for terror in New York's Central Park; ★MILLER's *Death of a Salesman* for another view of the defunct American dream; ★DURANG, ★TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, ★HENLEY for American explorations of dysfunctional families.

**ALRAWI, Karim** [1953 – ]  
Anglo-Egyptian dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Aliens* (1980), *Before Dawn* (1981), *Migrations* (1982), *Divide and Rule* (1983), *In Self-Defence* (1983), *A Colder Climate* (1986), *A Child in the Heart* (1987), *Promised Land* (1988), *Crossing the Water* (1991)

Alrawi was brought up in Egypt and left for Britain at the age of fourteen to live in London's East End. He has never forgotten the sense of dislocation the move produced in him or the racial prejudice he experienced in English schools. *Migrations* (a reworking of *Before Dawn* that won a John Whiting Award) looks at issues of religion and culture, integration and local-authority corruption through the eyes of an old Jewish stall-holder, his young Pakistani assistant, and his dilemma-prone sister. *A Colder Climate* is a bold, not altogether successful, attempt to comment on Thatcher's Britain, showing racism and National Front attitudes filtering through into the behaviour of a group of contemporary East End characters. *A Child in the Heart* pulled no punches in its criticism of the West's cultural exploitation of the Third World and, in its almost Old Testament insistence on sticking to Tribe, it was consistent with Alrawi's ongoing concern with the nature of cultural identity.

**TRY THESE:**

★KUREISHI's *Borderline* for images of National Frontism and Asian girls in conflict with their traditional culture; ★BAINS' *The Fighting Kite* and

*Blood* for further British Asians' experience; for images of the East End, ★KEEFFE's *My Girl* and ★MARCHANT's *The Lucky Ones*; ★LEIGH's *Greek Tragedy* shows a Greek immigrant community in Sydney at the end of their tether; ★MILLER for immigrants and the sense of community.

**ANOUILH, Jean** [1910 – 87]  
French dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Le Bal de Voleurs* (1932, *Thieves' Carnival*), *La Sauvage* (1934, *The Restless Heart*), *L'Eocadia* (1940, *Time Remembered*), *Le Rendezvous de Senlis* (1941, *Dinner with the Family*), *Eurydice* (1941, *Point of Departure*), *Antigone* (1942), *Medée* (1946, *Medea*), *Roméo et Jeanette* (1946, *Romeo and Jeanette*), *L'Invitation au Château* (1947, *Ring Round the Moon*), *Ardèle ou La Marguerite* (1948, *Ardèle: The Cry of the Peacock*), *La Répétition ou L'Amour Puni* (1950, *The Rehearsal*), *La Valse des Toréadors* (1952, *Waltz of the Toreadors*), *L'Alouette* (1953, *The Lark*), *Pauvre Bitos ou le Dîner de Têtes* (1956, *Poor Bitos or the Masked Diner*), *L'Honneur de Dieu* (1959, *Becket*)

Anouilh's popularity and influence were at their height in the immediate post-World War II period. Known for his exquisite craftsmanship, in later years his work appeared to take on a whimsical tone. Anouilh himself categorised his plays into *pièces roses* (rosy, such as *Dinner with the Family* or *Time Remembered*), *pièces noires* (dark, which include the three Greek-based tragedies, *Eurydice* (*Point of Departure*), *Antigone* and *Medea*, as well as *Romeo and Jeanette*), *pièces brillantes* (sparkling, such as *Ring Round the Moon*), *pièces grinçantes* (grating, *Ardèle* or *Waltz of the Toreadors*), and *pièces costumées* (costume or historical plays such as *Becket*, or *The Lark*, which is about St Joan). Anouilh's plays seem haunted by certain private and obsessive concerns: the corruption of innocence, the pain of human existence, its ugliness and compromise, the incompatibility of happiness with purity, the clash between the inner and outer worlds, the conflict between past and present, and later in life, loneliness. Above all, as Harold Hobson put it, talking about *Antigone*,



*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, directed by Howard Davies, Almeida Theatre, 1997. Diana Rigg as Martha, David Suchet as George. (Richard Mildenhall/ArenaPAL)

there was bitterness and regret at the contrast between 'what life could be and what life was'.

Anouilh's early plays, however, show the bitterness leavened by laughter and strongly influenced by the form and gloss of ★MARIVAUX (for example, the Pirandellian play-within-a-play *The Rehearsal*, where behind brilliant comic dialogue you can detect a typical confrontation between purity and the artifice of the aristocratic world). In *Ring Round the Moon* the crippled old lady exploiting her power by rearranging the lives of those around her is another veneer for the playing out of a deeper battle between power and money on the one hand, and poverty and purity on the other.

Anouilh's heroines or heroes frequently sacrifice themselves for a nobler cause. Becket and Joan in *The Lark* are both martyrs to their faith and purity, a theme re-enacted in *Antigone* and by Orpheus and Eurydice, Romeo and Jeanette, and even Medea. *Poor Bitos*, about the humiliation of a smug communist deputy at a party where the guests are dressed in Revolutionary costume, is also seen by some as Anouilh's self-portrait etched in self-disgust. Currently Anouilh appears to be making something of a minor come-back in the growing re-evaluation of works of the 1950s, but he has not had a recent major revival with one of the national companies or in the West End.

### Antigone

*Antigone* was written against a background of the German occupation: some saw it as an apologia for the Nazis, others as a statement against them. The play follows ★SOPHOCLES but is typical Anouilh in its heroine's option for the purity of death rather than the muckiness and compromise of life. Sophocles' version dices with the conflict between secular and divine law (another, more modern and interesting reading could see it as a reassertion of the female and instinctual over man-made law), but Anouilh's *Antigone* is not so much the victim of an unjust law as a martyr to purity. Creon argues with her and, unlike Sophocles' Creon who is thoroughly guilt-stricken for the trail of tragedies his decisions have provoked, Anouilh's Creon is a thoroughly modern pragmatist who puts duty – upholding the security of the state – above

personal emotion. To what extent Anouilh sympathises with Creon's response remains a question for conjecture.

### TRY THESE:

★PIRANDELLO; ★SARTRE's *Les Mouches* for another wartime play subversively attacking the Vichy regime; ★SHAW for another treatment of St Joan; ★RATTIGAN for other personal pains treated with similar skill.

## ARBUZOV, Aleksei Nicolaevich

[1908 – 86]

Russian dramatist, actor and director

### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Tanya* (1939), *It Happened in Irkutsk* (1959), *The Promise* (1965, also known as *My Poor Marat*), *Tales of Old Arbat* (1970), *An Old Fashioned Comedy* (1978, also known as *Do You Turn Somersaults?*)

A prolific dramatist who ranges from 'Brechtian' techniques to the sentimental, melodramatic and near vaudeville, Arbuзов's first big success was *Tanya*. His most popular play in the USSR was probably *It Happened in Irkutsk*, a personal drama set against the construction of a power station in Siberia, using a Brechtian chorus, but in the West he is best known for *The Promise*, which was last revived in London in 2002. Like many of his plays it spans a long period, presenting the interaction of a woman and two men – would-be doctor, poet and bridge-builder – in Leningrad in 1942, at the time of post-war reconstruction (1946) and post-Stalin (1959) in the same Leningrad flat. Though the development of their romantic relationships is somewhat predictable, it is the most tightly written of his plays.

### TRY THESE:

★WHITEMORE's *The Best of Friends* for an affectionate look at English friendships over a long time span; ★ROBERT HOLMAN's *Today* for contrasting views of English idealism pre- and post-war; ★COLLINS' *The Strongest Man in the World* for a personal drama set ostensibly in the Soviet community; Peter Arnott's *White Rose*, an elegant, somewhat Brechtian play about a female Russian fighter pilot; ★BRECHT and ★CHEKHOV for contrast.

**ARDEN, John** [1930– ]  
English dramatist and collaborator with  
Margaretta D'Arcy

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*All Fall Down* (1955), *The Waters of Babylon* (1957), *Live Like Pigs* (1958), *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), *The Happy Haven* (1960, with D'Arcy), *The Business of Good Government* (1960), *Ironhand* (1963), *The Workhouse Donkey* (1964), *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* (1964), *Ars Longa, Vita Brevis* (1965, with D'Arcy), *Left Handed Liberty* (1965), *The Royal Pardon or, The Soldier Who Became an Actor* (1966, with D'Arcy), *The True History of Squire Jonathan and His Unfortunate Treasure* (1968), *The Hero Rises Up* (1968, with D'Arcy), *Harold Muggins is a Martyr* (1968, with D'Arcy), *200 Years of Labour History* (1971, with D'Arcy) *The Ballygombeen Bequest* (1972, with D'Arcy), *The Island of the Mighty* (1972, with D'Arcy), *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* (1975, with D'Arcy), *The Little Gray Home in the West* (1978, with D'Arcy), *Vandaleur's Folly* (1978, with D'Arcy)

Barnsley born, a student of architecture and, in his own words, 'a product of English public schools and three years as a conscript in Scotland', Arden began writing plays at university. Considered one of the most influential political dramatists of his generation, Arden's output has been indelibly influenced by his meeting with Margaretta D'Arcy in 1955. D'Arcy started her career in Dublin in small experimental theatres, after which she went to London where she acted in club theatres and at the Hornchurch Rep, one of the first regional companies to be local-authority funded. Her involvement with community theatre stems from these early experiences, and much of her writing has been community-orientated.

Most of Arden's major stage plays appeared in a ten-year period from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, ceasing abruptly after a famous if painful controversy over the RSC's handling of *The Island of the Mighty*. Arden and D'Arcy's work was developing an increasingly anti-English, pro-Irish and community stance: *The Hero Rises Up* is an anti-heroic view of Nelson; *The Ballygombeen Bequest* is an attack on absentee landlordism in Ireland;

*The Non-Stop Connolly Show* is a pro-Irish Republican epic which, according to Arden's biographer, Albert Hunt, should be regarded as a masterpiece. Unsurprisingly this political emphasis led to legal difficulties, accusations of censorship and their effective withdrawal from the British theatre. Instead Arden's and, to some extent, D'Arcy's recent work has been in the novel and radio, culminating in *Whose is the Kingdom?*, a 1988 nine-part BBC radio series on early Christianity, a theme which has run through several of Arden's plays.

Always a moralist, Arden's dissenting voice has increasingly swung away from the earlier anarchic detachment where there are no heroes (even the so-called pacifism of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is hotly disputed by some commentators, who feel it is difficult to decide which side Arden's sympathies are on), through political activism to revolutionary socialism by the late 1970s. Others, however, argue that the seeds of Arden the revolutionary were implicit from the beginning, particularly in the fact that the plays were usually sparked off by historical and contemporary political events. *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, for example, though set in sixteenth-century Scotland, was inspired by the Congo War and intended as an analogous, moral parable on the subject of violence. Written in Lowland verse, it emerged as a rumbustious, sardonic study in realpolitik, opposing the urbane politician (Lindsay) with the highland rebel, Johnny Armstrong.

Arden, from the beginning, rejected naturalism and though his plays were about social, political and economic issues – small-town corruption (*The Workhouse Donkey*), the welfare state (*Live Like Pigs*), violence and militarism (*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*) – his use of bold, imagistic techniques – epics, parables, sometimes grotesque comedy – and the fact that they have an obvious polemical intent, inevitably led to Arden being compared with ★BRECHT, an influence he has always denied. Yet other observers, playing the influence game, detect a kinship with ★BEN JONSON and ★ARISTOPHANES in such plays as *The Workhouse Donkey*.

**Serjeant Musgrave's Dance**

A small group of soldiers invade a bleak mining town in northern England in the

1880s, ostensibly on a recruiting drive. But the men are deserters, and their leader, Serjeant Musgrave, who has become fanatically anti-war, is as terrifying in his religious zeal as the evil against which he inveighs: he demands the death of twenty-five townspeople to match the death of a local boy who died in a colonial war and who was the trigger, in reprisal, for the death of five men. A male-oriented play, where women are seen either as whores (sexual and dangerous) or mothers (asexual and comforting), it seems hard in retrospect to see it as anything other than a passionately pacifist, anti-imperialist play.

**TRY THESE:**

★ BARNES for similar epic treatments of historical subjects; ★ OSBORNE's *A Patriot for Me* for another army play with echoes of male sexual fear of women (also *Look Back in Anger*); for contrasting treatment of Nelson to *The Hero Rises Up*, ★ RATTIGAN's *Bequest to the Nation*; for scrutiny of American national figures, ★ KOPIT's *Indians*; for small-town corruption, ★ AYCKBOURN, ★ BRENTON and ★ HARE's *Brassneck*, ★ FLANNERY's *Our Friends in the North*, ★ GOGOL's *The Government Inspector*; ★ JOHN MCGRATH adapted *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

**ARDREY, Robert** [1908 – 80]  
American scientist and dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Thunder Rock* (1939), *Jeb* (1946), *Shadow of Heroes* (1958)

Probably best known today for his scientific theory of 'the territorial imperative', Ardrey worked for most of his career as a dramatist and screenwriter. *Thunder Rock*, first staged at the beginning of World War II, receives very occasional starry revivals. It is an atmospheric allegorical piece in which a lighthouse keeper's encounters with the spirits of shipwrecked travellers rekindle his fighting spirit. *Jeb*, an investigation of racism in the American South, was uncomfortably enough in advance of its time to be commercially unsuccessful.

**TRY THESE:**

★ PIRANDELLO's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* for its use of 'unfinished' characters; ★ EDGAR's *Maydays* deals with the Hungarian uprising which is the subject of *Shadow of Heroes*; ★ BARRIE's *Mary Rose* for ghosts; ★ BARAKA, ★ BULLINS, ★ HANSBERRY's *A Raisin in the Sun*, ★ AUGUST WILSON for racism.

**ARISTOPHANES** [c. 450 – 385 BC]  
Greek comic dramatist

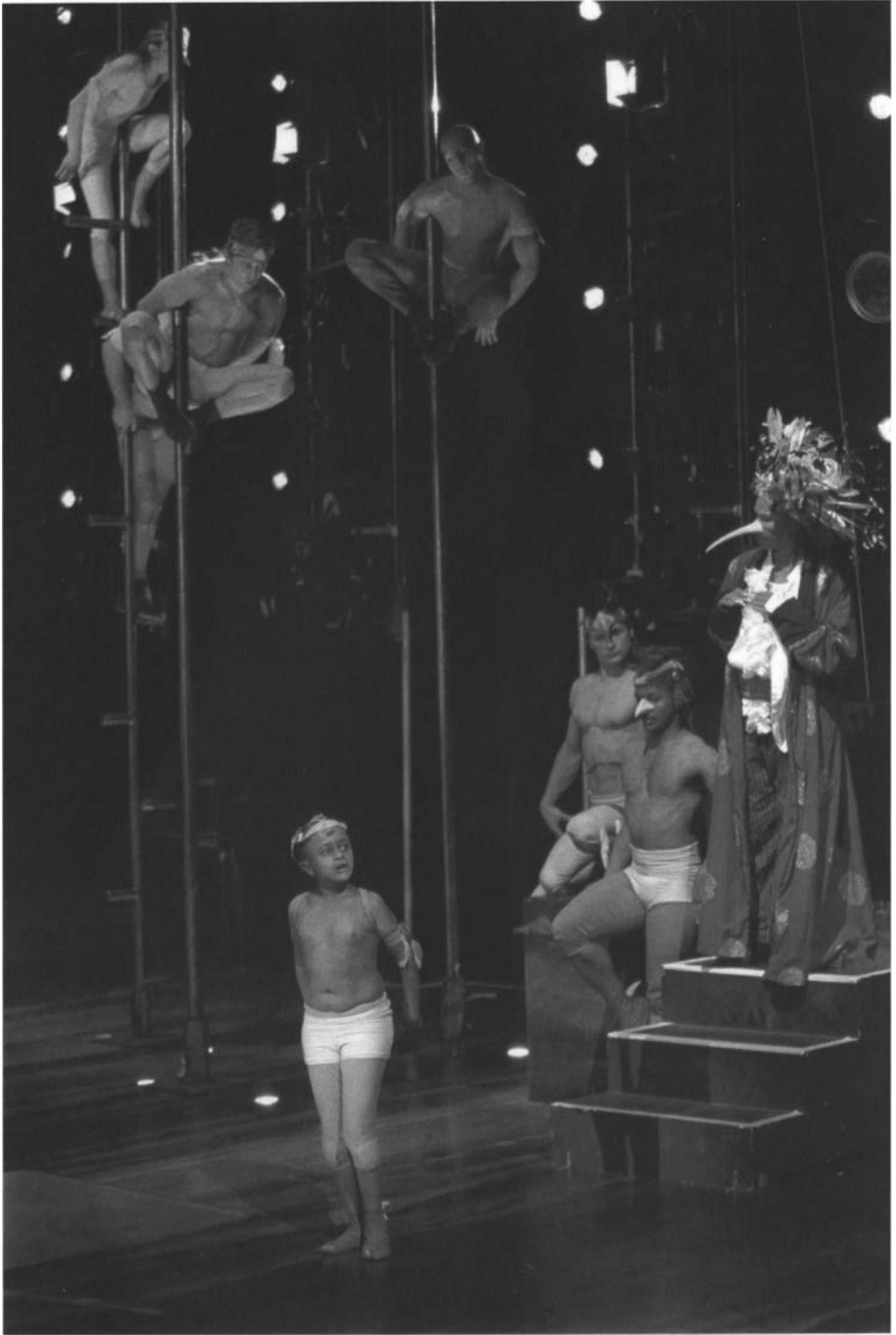
**SURVIVING PLAYS:**

*The Acharnians* (425 BC), *The Knights* (424 BC), *The Clouds* (423 BC), *The Wasps* (422 BC), *Peace* (421 BC), *The Birds* (414 BC), *Lysistrata* (411 BC), *The Thesmophoriazousae* (410 BC, sometimes called *Women at the Festival* or *The Poet and the Women* or *Women at the Thesmophoria*), *The Frogs* (405 BC), *Ecclesiazousae* (392 BC, sometimes called *Women in Parliament*), *Wealth* (388 BC, sometimes called *Plutus*)

Aristophanes' plays, the only surviving representatives of Greek Old Comedy, used to be infrequently performed in the contemporary professional theatre. Although it is far from a feminist play, *Lysistrata* has continued to be staged fairly regularly both because of its concentration on sexual politics and because of its anti-war message. However, the growing willingness to stage adaptations and translations and the increasing emphasis on physical theatre in Britain has begun to re-establish Aristophanes' work in the current repertory, with recent productions of *The Frogs* and, less successfully, *The Birds* (National Theatre, 2002). In Stephen Sondheim and Burt Shevelove's 1974 musical version of *The Frogs*, staged originally in a swimming pool at Yale University with a cast including ★ CHRISTOPHER DURANG, Meryl Streep and Sigourney Weaver, ★ SHAW and ★ SHAKESPEARE replace ★ AESCHYLUS and ★ EURIPIDES as the dramatists who might be restored to life.

**TRY THESE:**

★ AESCHYLUS, ★ EURIPIDES, ★ SOPHOCLES for Greek tragic drama; Menander for later Greek comedy; Plautus and Terence for Roman comedy; ★ LITTLEWOOD and THEATRE WORKSHOP's *Oh What a Lovely War* for blending popular forms.



*The Birds* by Aristophanes in a version by Sean O'Brien directed by Kathryn Hunter, National Theatre and Mamaloucos Circus, 2002. Franky Mwangi as Sparrow, Josette Bushell-Mingo as Hoopoe. (Stephen Vaughan/ArenaPAL)

**ARRABAL, Fernando** [1932 – ]  
Spanish dramatist born in Spanish Morocco, who writes in French

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Les Deux Bourreaux* (1958, *The Two Executioners*), *Le Cimetière des Voitures* (1964, *The Vehicle Graveyard*), *Fando et Lis* (1964, *Fando and Lis*), *L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie* (1967, *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria*), *Et ils Passerent des Menottes aux Fleurs* (1969, *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*)

Arrabal's voluminous output of plays reflects his nightmarish childhood, during which his father mysteriously disappeared from prison at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War and his mother tried to behave as though his father had never existed. Unresolved difficulties over this, plus a strict Spanish Catholic upbringing, have led to a number of sado-masochistic plays filled with disturbing images of torture, suffering, blasphemy and eroticism, often involving members of the same family, at which one is horrified to find oneself laughing. In *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria*, two men stranded on a desert island play a series of games, exchanging roles of master and slave, mother and child, victim and executioner, until finally one eats the other. The play owes something to ★ARTAUD and ★BECKETT, but also to Lewis Carroll, whom Arrabal greatly admires. Arrabal has never been particularly popular in the British professional theatre,

**TRY THESE:**

★PIRANDELLO for role-swapping; ★GENET for role-playing; ★WALCOTT's *Pantomime* is a variation on the master-slave theme.

**ARTAUD, Antonin** [1896 – 1948]  
French actor, director, theorist

**WORKS INCLUDE:**

*Jet de Sang* (1925, *Jet of Blood*), *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1927, *The Seashell and Clergyman*, film script), *Les Cenci* (1935, *The Cenci*), *Le Théâtre et son Double* (1938, *The Theatre and its Double*; incorporating his *First and Second Manifestos of the Theatre of Cruelty*, 1931–5)

It is possible, but misleading, to regard Artaud as the archetypal mad genius. Badly affected by meningitis when young, he spent much of his life struggling against an addiction to drugs, and much of the rest in lunatic asylums. He is also one of the most important and seminal theatrical thinkers of the twentieth century, with a considerable (but disputed) influence on a wide variety of authors and especially directors. His principal theoretical work, *Le Théâtre et son Double*, influenced by his partial understanding of performances of Cambodian and Balinese dance, recommended a 'total theatre' that would use sound, light, gesture and visual image rather than relying on the written or even the spoken word, to disturb fundamentally the imagination and subconscious of audience and actors alike; it has in different ways influenced Barrault, Peter Brook, ★MAROWITZ, Grotowski, ★ADAMOV, ★ARRABAL, ★GENET, Pip Simmons, Julian Beck, and the Open Theatre – partly because it is full of memorable but somewhat gnomic pronouncements which one can interpret to suit one's own inclinations (e.g. 'We are not free, and the sky can still fall on our heads; and the theatre exists to remind us of this fact').

Artaud's life is sometimes treated as myth (as with ★DYLAN THOMAS and Marie Lloyd) and used as matter for plays, such as ★MAROWITZ's *Artaud at Rodez*.

*Jet of Blood* is less than four pages long, but manages to touch on many obsessions – Artaud's and our own. It would be very un-Artaudian to describe the plot, but the following stage directions give the flavour: 'The Whore bites God's wrist. An immense jet of blood shoots across the stage, and we can see the Priest making the sign of the cross during a flash of lightning that lasts longer than the others.' 'An army of scorpions comes out from under the Nurse's dress and swarms over her sex, which swells up and bursts, becoming glassy and shining like the sun. The Young Man and the Whore flee.' It was included in the Peter Brook, ★CHARLES MAROWITZ Theatre of Cruelty season at LAMDA in 1964, and student groups attempt it from time to time.

**TRY THESE:**

★WEISS for a dramatist and La Mama for a group influenced by Artaud's ideas; Claudel for impos-

sible stage directions (*The Satin Slipper*, etc.); Expressionism for a non-illusionistic approach to theatre.

**AUDEN, W. H.**  
**(Wystan Hugh)**

[1907 – 72]

British poet, dramatist and critic

**ISHERWOOD, Christopher**  
**(William Bradshaw)**

[1904 – 86]

British novelist, dramatist and screenwriter

**JOINT PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Dog Beneath the Skin*; or, *Where is Francis?* (1936), *The Ascent of F6* (1937), *On the Frontier* (1938)

Although both produced theatre work independently, their best-known plays are the jointly written verse dramas of the 1930s. *I Am a Camera* and the musical *Cabaret* are based on Isherwood's Berlin stories but are not his dramatisations.

Left-wing intellectuals from elitist Oxbridge backgrounds, Auden and Isherwood were politicised by the Depression, by the Spanish Civil War and by living in Germany. All their joint work, and Auden's *Dance of Death* (1934), set out to attack capitalist power and bourgeois values; *Ascent of F6*, with its protagonist clearly modelled on T. E. Lawrence, added elements of mysticism as well. Their style is not naturalistic and suggests strong Brechtian influence. Despite the evident homosexual content in some of both men's other work, these verse dramas do not explore such themes. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* is a morality play in verse which makes use of a chorus, song and dance, masks, cabaret, and a Master of Ceremonies to present the life of a man-sized dog as it passes from owner to owner through a society peopled with caricatures – a general, financier, churchman, etc. Savagely satirical in its time, it may seem naive when set against contemporary polemics.

**TRY THESE:**

★BRECHT, who compared these plays with  
★ARISTOPHANES; for other modern verse drama,  
Ronald Duncan, ★ELIOT, ★FRY; for socialist plays  
in the epic tradition, ★BOND, ★BRENTON,

★CHURCHILL, ★EDGAR, Henry Livings; ★TERRY  
JOHNSON's underrated *Cries from the Mammal  
House* for a disenchanted view of the contempo-  
rary male using an animal metaphor; ★JARRY for a  
similarly eclectic dramaturgy.

**AYCKBOURN, Alan**

[1939 – ]

British dramatist and director

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Mr Whatnot* (1963), *Relatively Speaking*  
(1967), *How the Other Half Loves* (1969),  
*Time and Time Again* (1971), *Ernie's  
Incredible Illucinations* (1971), *Absurd Person  
Singular* (1972), *The Norman Conquests*  
(1973, comprising *Table Manners, Round and  
Round the Garden, Living Together*), *Absent  
Friends* (1974), *Confusions* (1974), *Jeeves*  
(1975, adapted from P. G. Wodehouse, with  
music by Andrew Lloyd Webber; revised as  
*By Jeeves*, 1996), *Bedroom Farce* (1975), *Just  
Between Ourselves* (1976), *Ten Times Table*  
(1977), *Joking Apart* (1978), *Sisterly Feelings*  
(1979), *Taking Steps* (1979), *Suburban Strains*  
(1980, with music by Paul Todd), *Season's  
Greetings* (1980), *Way Upstream* (1981), *It  
Could Be Any of Us* (1983), *A Chorus of  
Disapproval* (1984), *Woman in Mind* (1985),  
*A Small Family Business* (1987),  
*Henceforward . . .* (1987), *Man of the Moment*  
(1988), *The Revengers' Comedies* (1989),  
*Callisto 5* (1990), *Body Language*, (1990),  
*This is Where We Came In* (1990), *Invisible  
Friends* (1991), *Wildest Dreams* (1991), *Time  
of My Life* (1992), *Dreams from a Summer  
House* (1992, with music by John Pattison),  
*Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays* (1993),  
*Communicating Doors* (1994), *Haunting Julia*  
(1994), *The Champion of Paribanou* (1996),  
*Things We Do for Love* (1997), *Comic  
Potential* (1998), *The Boy Who Fell into a  
Book* (1998), *House and Garden* (1999),  
*Damsels in Distress* (2001), *Role Play* (2001),  
*Snake in the Grass* (2002), *The Jollies* (2002)

Ayckbourn is one of Britain's most important and commercially successful dramatists, a staple of the West End and regional repertory, who was critically undervalued for many years because of his predilection for popular forms and theatrical ingenuity. Because his plays have their roots in more traditional

theatrical forms, rather than in a self-consciously avant-garde experimental theatre, they were sometimes dismissed as no more than a 'good night out' by critics unable to see beyond the surface to the murky secrets of domestic life beneath.

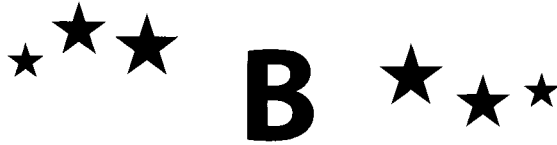
After starting his theatrical career as an actor and stage manager with Donald Wolfit's company, he moved to Stephen Joseph's Studio Theatre Company in the early 1960s, where he began directing and writing with Joseph's encouragement. Most of his plays begin at Scarborough where, as artistic director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre, he usually writes at least one new play annually for their repertory season. Many of these have transferred to London, but he continues to base his work in Scarborough.

A superb theatrical craftsman, his plays are often constructed around a tour de force of staging. For example, *The Norman Conquests* is a trilogy of plays, each of which stands on its own, and presents the same events from the garden, sitting room and dining room; in *House and Garden* Ayckbourn took this further with two plays involving the same cast playing simultaneously in two theatres; more than one household is on stage simultaneously in *How the Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular* and *Bedroom Farce* (where the shifts in occupancy of three onstage bedrooms suggest farce, but the absence of the bedroom of the couple whose relationship is on the verge of collapse manifests concretely the bleak absence at the heart of the relationship); in *A Small Family Business* and *Things We Do for Love* (written, unusually for Ayckbourn, for proscenium-arch theatres) we are presented with cross-sections of houses; the riverboat in *Way Upstream* floated on real water (problematically at the National Theatre, but not elsewhere); *Sisterly Feelings* and *Intimate Exchanges* exist in multiple versions determined by chance. Ayckbourn's assault on the traditional boundaries of theatrical space and time is part of a sustained interrogation of the ways that society constructs its realities, and his deconstruction of traditional genres and theatrical conventions matches his analytical deconstruction of the pieties of social organisation.

Increasingly, the comings and goings of married couples are injected with a note of black comedy, and the social groups are fraught with suggestions of the darker arenas of human interchange. The social niceties of the tea party in *Absent Friends* are disrupted by the inability of the participants to cope with the idea of death, and in *Just Between Ourselves* and *Woman in Mind*, what begins as the familiar comic theme of a sterile marriage transforms into tragedy as the wife descends into catatonia and breakdown. Michael Billington hailed Ayckbourn as the best contemporary feminist dramatist for *Woman in Mind*, but while this is clearly arguable Ayckbourn is one of the theatre's sharpest observers of contemporary suburban values. He has blossomed into a major writer of children's plays, experimented with science-fiction theatre, created music theatre with Paul Todd and John Pattison, encouraged new writers and directed award-winning revivals. True, his playing with the conventions of the thriller has been less successful than his reworking of the structures of comedy (perhaps because the thriller itself has become a less familiar theatrical form), but his work constantly challenges audiences to engage critically with the ways in which we structure our lives (and the ways in which our lives are structured for us), while never forgetting the importance of engaging them in the actual event of theatre.

#### TRY THESE:

★ COONEY is the most celebrated contemporary exponent of traditional farce, the conventions of which Ayckbourn liberally exploits; ★ FRAYN's *Noises Off* is one of the funniest and cleverest examples of theatrical sleight-of-hand; ★ DE FILIPPO, ★ FEYDEAU, ★ LABICHE and ★ SIMON for contrasting approaches to farce and the family; ★ STOPPARD as another juggler of theatrical conventions; Ayckbourn has adapted ★ OSTROVSKY's *The Forest* and ★ SHERIDAN'S *A Trip to Scarborough*, itself based on ★ VANBRUGH'S *The Relapse*; ★ TERRY JOHNSON adapted the television version of *Way Upstream*; Simon Burt's *Got to be Happy* for the nuances of non-communication.



# B

**BABE, Thomas**  
American dramatist

[1941 – 2000]

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Kid Champion* (1974), *Mojo Candy* (1975), *Rebel Women* (1976), *Billy Irish* (1977), *Great Solo Town* (1977), *A Prayer for My Daughter* (1977), *Fathers and Sons* (1978), *Taken in Marriage* (1979), *Salt Lake City Skyline* (1980), *Kathleen* (1980), *Buried Inside Extra* (1983), *Planet Fires* (1984), *Demon Wine* (1987), *A Hero of Our Time* (1988), *Great Day in the Morning* (1993)

Buffalo-born and Harvard-educated, and one of America's toughest, most independent dramatists, Babe has yet to achieve the recognition he deserves. Associated with Joe Papp's off-Broadway Public Theatre, where many of his plays began, he is interested both in revisionist treatments of history (*Fathers and Sons* and *Salt Lake City Skyline* are about Wild Bill Hickok and union organiser Joe Hill, respectively) and in closer-to-home, more domestic themes. In *A Prayer for My Daughter*, arguably his best-known work, a Sergeant Kelly ignores the suicidal telephone calls of his own daughter to concentrate on the young murder suspect, Jimmy, whom he starts treating as a kind of aberrant 'daughter'. *Taken in Marriage*, which brings a quintet of women together in a New Hampshire church hall to attend a marriage rehearsal fraught with domestic volatility, and *Buried Inside Extra*, a play about journalists which inaugurated the Royal Court's exchange with the Public, are best seen as vehicles for actors, who tend to rip into Babe's roles with abandon.

**TRY THESE:**

★KOPIT's *Indians* and much of ★LINNEY and ★SHEPARD for iconoclastic views both of history and of the American West; ★BRENTON and ★HARE's *Pravda*, ★HECHT and MACARTHUR's *The Front Page*, Stephen Wakelam's *Deadlines* for alternative dramatic treatments of journalism.

**BAGNOLD, Enid**  
**(Lady Roderick Jones)**  
British novelist and dramatist

[1884 – 1981]

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Chalk Garden* (1955)

Bagnold was the author of *National Velvet* (filmed in 1944 with Elizabeth Taylor) and numerous other successful novels. *The Chalk Garden*, the most successful of her original plays, was described by Kenneth Tynan as probably 'the finest artificial comedy to have flowed from an English (as opposed to an Irish) pen since the death of Congreve'. *The Chalk Garden* is an apparently typical 'Haymarket play' of the 1950s, when the Theatre Royal was the showcase for star-studded (in this case Edith Evans and Peggy Ashcroft) middle-class theatre with its heart in the right place. However, as Lib Taylor has shown, underneath the conventional narrative that reveals Miss Madrigal, the governess who brings life to the household and garden of the eccentric Mrs St Maugham, as a convicted murderer, is a challenge to patriarchal assumptions about the family and the nature of motherhood. It still surfaces from time to time.

**TRY THESE:**

★HUNTER, ★DODIE SMITH, ★HOME for plays of the period; ★HELLMAN's *The Children's Hour* and ★IBSEN for plays of domestic revelation.

**BAINS, Harwant**  
British dramatist

[1963 – ]

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Fighting Kite* (1987), *Blood* (1989)

Bains was hailed as a possible successor to ★HANIF KUREISHI, much to his irritation ('just because I've got a brown face and write plays'). Southall-based, and the son of Indian parents, Bains takes up some of the same issues the

young Kureishi and, to some extent, ★KARIM ALRAWI explored in the early 1980s: racial violence and cultural identity. Bains' first play, *The Fighting Kite*, a sprawling, episodic account of a racial attack in Southall, had its share of stereotyped cut-outs of National Front skin-heads, but handled the emotional response of its young, second-generation British Asians to their sense of alienation (neither 'English' nor accepted back on the Indian subcontinent) with subtlety and sensitivity. His second play, *Blood*, a violent political thriller, received harsh treatment at the hands of some critics who found the language and plot bordering on the crudely sensational. But others applauded the ambitious scope of the play, which tried to chart the legacy of India's bloody Partition of 1947 through the fate of two contrasting young Punjabi Sikh brothers who settle in Britain. His later work for television includes *Two Oranges and a Mango* and the series *Grease Monkeys*, about an Asian family running a garage, based on his radio series of the same name.

#### TRY THESE:

★EDGAR's *Destiny* for a bold attempt to pinpoint the rise of post-World War II British fascism; Farrukh Dhondy's *Vigilantes* explored the problems of cultural identity within the first generation of the British Bangladeshi community; for Afro-Caribbean equivalents, ★PHILLIPS' *Strange Fruit*, ★WHITE'S *The Nine Night*; for a female view of being young, black and British, ★RUDET'S *Money to Live*; for a view of linkage between violence, history and de-humanisation, ★FLANNERY'S Jewish equivalent in *Singer*; ★BEHAN'S *The Hostage* and many plays on prison have made similar observations; for a contrasting view, ★SHERMAN'S *Bent*.

**BALDWIN, James** [1924 – 87]  
American dramatist

#### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Blues for Mr Charlie* (1964), *The Amen Corner* (1965), *A Deed from the King of Spain* (1974)

Baldwin's theatrical reputation rests on his two early plays, both of which struck a lasting chord on their New York debuts, and one of which (*The Amen Corner*) made London

history in 1987 as the first-ever all-black non-musical British production to open in the West End (where, sadly, it lost its £150,000 investment). In *Blues for Mr Charlie*, Baldwin told an unforgettable tale of racial poison based on a true story – a white jury's acquittal, in 1955, of two white men who murdered black Chicagoan Emmett Till in Mississippi. In *The Amen Corner*, which was performed briefly at Howard University in 1955, and opened on Broadway in 1965, Baldwin drew on his own background as the son of a Harlem minister to depict the crumbling domestic life and fading religiosity of Sister Margaret Alexander, the censorious pastor of a 'storefront' Harlem church. An avowed homosexual, perhaps best known for his novels, the expatriate Baldwin, who spent much of his later life in France, was a vociferous champion of civil liberties and of both sexual and racial equality. Interestingly, however, in an interview before his death, he played down the importance of race in his plays, saying with customary wryness: '*The Amen Corner* is not about black people or white people. It's about the people in the play.'

#### TRY THESE:

★BARAKA, ★BULLINS, ★HANSBERRY'S *A Raisin in the Sun*, ★AUGUST WILSON for detonating treatments of racism; ★WOLFE'S *The Colored Museum* takes satiric aim at Baldwin's dramatic style; ★ABBENSETTS, ★BAINS, ★KUREISHI, ★MATURA for British parallels.

**BANCIL, Parv**  
British dramatist

#### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Made in England* (1998), *Crazy Horse* (1998)

Bancil began writing with the Hounslow Arts Co-op in 1986. He has been particularly concerned with the experience of second-generation British Asians and how they negotiate their identities in the country they were born into or brought up in but which still appears to regard them as 'immigrants'. *Made in England* tackles this theme through an examination of Asian underground music and its relationship to the record companies. *Crazy Horse* examines father-son relationships.

## TRY THESE:

★BAINS, ★KUREISHI for earlier takes on British Asian experience; ★EDGAR's *Destiny* for some of the forces that inform that experience historically; ★BUTTERWORTH's *Mojo* for record-company exploitation; ★GUPTA for a contemporary female British Asian voice.

**BANDELE, Biyi**

[1967 – ]

Nigerian-born dramatist

## PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Death Catches the Hunter* (1993), *Marching for Fausa* (1993), *Two Horseman* (1994), *Things Fall Apart* (1997, from Chinua Achebe); *Oroonoko* (1999, from ★APHRA BEHN); *Brixton Stories* (2001)

Bandeled has what has been described as a 'magic realist' approach to theatre that may owe something to the rich variety of traditions both European and African that he draws on in his writing. *Brixton Stories*, which he has described as 'an instinctive celebration of Brixton', uses only two actors to convey something of the teeming multiculturalism of the area. Bandele based the play on his own novel *The Street*, having already successfully adapted both Achebe for LIFT and *Oroonoko*, ★APHRA BEHN's novel of slavery, for the RSC.

## TRY THESE:

★IKOLI for similar portraits of Peckham; ★ABBENSETTS, ★ALRAWI, ★BAINS, ★KUREISHI, ★MATURA for ethnic minority experiences in Britain; ★SOYINKA is the pre-eminent Nigerian dramatist.

**BARAKA, Amiri (Leroi Jones)** [1934 – ]

American dramatist

## PLAYS INCLUDE:

*A Good Girl is Hard to Find* (1958), *Dante* (1961), *Dutchman* (1964), *The Baptism* (1964), *The Slave* (1964), *The Toilet* (1964), *J-E-L-L-O* (1965), *Experimental Death Unit No. 1* (1965), *A Black Mass* (1966), *Slave Ship: A Historical Pageant* (1967), *Madheart* (1967), *Arm Yrself or Harm Yrself!* (1967), *Great Goodness of Life (A Coon Show)* (1967), *Home on the Range* (1968), *Resurrection in Life* (1969), *Junkies Are Full of (SHH . . .)*

(1970), *Bloodrites* (1970), *A Recent Killing* (1973), *The New Ark's a Moverin'* (1974), *Sidnee Poet Heroical or If in Danger of Sun, the Kid Poet Heroical* (1975), *S-I* (1976), *The Motion of History* (1977), *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* (1979), *At the Dim' Cracker Party Convention* (1980), *Boy & Tarzan Meet in a Clearing* (1982), *Money* (1982), *Primitive World* (1984), *The Life and Life of Bumpy Johnson* (book for the musical, 1990), *General Hag's Skeezag* (1991), *The Election Machine Warehouse* (1996), *Skin Trouble* (1999)

Baraka's plays seek to engage the black community by confronting it with an image of its own acquiescence or by elaborating myths of a heroic past or a revolutionary future. In his manifesto, *The Revolutionary Theatre*, Baraka proclaimed that theatre 'should force change; it should be change'. *The Dutchman*, *The Slave* and *The Toilet* (set in a high-school toilet, a tapestry of festering bigotry brought to the boil) mark the beginning of the black revolutionary theatre of the 1960s. *Slave Ship* traces the black experience from Africa to America. Using a series of vignettes, the play shows the murderous conditions of the Middle Passage, the brutalisation of blacks by both blacks and whites, and attempts to organise black revolts. Baraka has since moved away from an exclusively black nationalist position to embrace a form of Marxism and he remains an active campaigner on political, social and cultural issues as well as performing in jazz/poetry events. Appointed as Poet Laureate of New Jersey, his response to the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001 ignited fierce controversy over freedom of expression.

**Dutchman**

*Dutchman* is the best received of Baraka's works. Clay, a well-dressed, black intellectual is accosted on a subway train by Lulu, a white bitch goddess. When her advances are politely rebuffed, she verbally emasculates her victim and ridicules his white middle-class dress and demeanour. Clay articulately counters her racial stereotyping. He describes the music of a Bessie Smith or a Charlie Parker as the expressions of neurotics who suppress their rage 'to keep from being sane'. In a sense Clay

in his three-button suit proclaims his own spiritual death, a fact that does not escape Lulu, who moves rapidly in for the kill with a drawn switchblade. She quickly disposes of Clay's dead body before approaching another young black man boarding the train.

**TRY THESE:**

★LORCA and ★STRINDBERG (especially *Miss Julie*) for often explosive theatrical rituals; ★PINERO'S *Short Eyes* and ★RABE'S *Streamers* as 1970s equivalents to *The Toilet*, in which constricted environments heighten racial tension; for chronicles of racism and the black experience, ★BULLINS, ★KENNEDY, ★SHANGE, ★WESLEY, ★SAMM-ART WILLIAMS, ★AUGUST WILSON; ★WOLFE'S *The Colored Museum* for the myths and stereotypes of the African-American experience; for British parallels and contrasts, ★MATURA, ★PHILLIPS, ★RECKORD; Gabriel Gbadamosi's *No Blacks, No Irish* shows racism and prejudice in 1950s England.

**BARKER, Howard** [1946 – ]  
British dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Cheek* (1970), *No One Was Saved* (1970), *Alpha Alpha* (1972), *Claw* (1975), *Stripwell* (1975), *That Good Between Us* (1977), *Fair Slaughter* (1977), *The Hang of the Gaol* (1978), *The Love of a Good Man* (1979), *The Loud Boy's Life* (1980), *No End of Blame* (1981), *The Poor Man's Friend* (1981), *Victory* (1983), *A Passion in Six Days* (1983), *Crimes in Hot Countries* (1983), *The Power of the Dog* (1984), *Scenes from an Execution* (radio, 1984; staged, 1989), *The Castle* (1985), *Downchild* (1985), *Women Beware Women* (1986, reworking of ★MIDDLETON'S play), *Pity in History* (1986), *The Possibilities* (1988), *The Last Supper* (1988), *The Bite of the Night* (1988), *Seven Lears* (1988), *Golgo* (1989), *A Hard Heart* (1992), *The Europeans* (1993), *Hated Nightfall* (1994), *Judith* (1995), *(Uncle) Vanya* (1996), *The Gaoler's Ache for the Nearly Dead* (1996), *Wounds to the Face* (1997), *Ursula* (1998), *A House Of Correction* (1998), *He Stumbled* (2000)

One of a generation of British dramatists deeply concerned with political and social

issues, Barker has never received the degree of critical acclaim given to some of his contemporaries, probably because his interest in the psychopathology of capitalism and patriarchy leads him to deal in much of his work with the grotesque and the distorted, often in highly scatological language. At his best Barker is a brilliant and provocative writer; at his worst he can be numbingly verbose. Some of his earlier work, such *The Loud Boy's Life*, *Downchild* and *A Passion in Six Days* (a dramatic cantata about a Labour Party conference), was concerned with specifically Labour party themes.

His plays firmly eschew naturalism in favour of an incisive and theatrically inventive cartoon-like style that juxtaposes private desires with public postures and aims for psychological and socio-political truth rather than the texture of everyday life. He shares with ★GAY and ★BRECHT a crucial perception of the apparent identity of interest between criminal and politician and the inherent corruptions of capitalism. The 'criminal' strand in his work is well represented by, for example, *Alpha Alpha* (a study of two brothers patterned on the Kray twins), *Claw* (in which the hero acts as procurer for the Home Secretary) and *Stripwell*, where a judge is faced with both the criminal activities of his son and a man he sentenced returning for revenge.

Barker is a history graduate and many of his plays also pursue an interest in historical moments and their lessons for the present. *Victory*, subtitled punningly 'Choices in Reaction', a fine example of this second strand, deals with the aftermath of the Restoration of Charles II, mixing historical and stereotypical characters in an extraordinary evocation of the collapse of the ideals of the Commonwealth. The play is notable for a brilliant explanation of the nature and contradictions of capitalism involving Charles himself, a banker called Hambro, Nell Gwyn, the skull of the parliamentary Bradshaw, and a large store of gold.

**The Castle**

*The Castle* is an extraordinary meditation on issues of gender, power, rational and emotional knowledge, war and peace, in which a returning Crusader confronts the peaceful female community established by his wife in his absence. The battle lines, both medieval and

contemporary, are drawn between creativity and destruction in confrontations and dialogue that are brilliantly imagined and draw to the full on Barker's ability to write with a poetic density of language, comic as well as tragic, which uses everyday idiom as much as architectural imagery to create an extraordinarily flexible language. In Nick Hamm's original RSC production there were superb performances from Penny Downie as the fecund matriarch, Harriet Walter as her lesbian lover, Ian McDiarmid as the returning Crusader and Paul Freeman as his castle-building architect.

#### TRY THESE:

★BRENTON shares many of Barker's preoccupations and much of his approach to writing for the theatre; ★EDGAR has also tackled similar issues, particularly in *Destiny* (fascism and Labour reactions to it) and *Maydays* (opposition to totalitarian impulses); ★FLANNERY looked at corruption and the Labour party in *Our Friends in the North*; ★IBSEN's *The Master Builder* also uses architecture metaphorically; ★BARNES uses an inventive rhetorical style reminiscent of Barker, particularly in *Leonardo's Last Supper*; ★WERTENBAKER's *The Grace of Mary Traverse* explores capitalism and the present through the past; ★BEHN, ★CHURCHILL, ★GEMS and ★LEVY have all explored the relationships of gender and power to capitalism; ★DE ANGELIS's *Playhouse Creatures* for Restoration actresses.

**BARNES, Peter** [1931 – ]  
British dramatist

#### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Time of the Barracudas* (1963), *Sclerosis* (1965), *The Ruling Class* (1968), *Leonardo's Last Supper* (1969), *Noonday Demons* (1969), *Lulu* (1970, from ★WEDEKIND), *The Bewitched* (1974), *Frontiers of Farce* (1976, adapted from ★FEYDEAU and ★WEDEKIND), *Laughter* (1978, from ★FEYDEAU), *Red Noses* (1985), *Scenes from a Marriage* (1986, from ★FEYDEAU), *Sunsets and Glories* (1990), *Corpsing* (1996), *Dreaming* (1999)

Much of Barnes' theatre work achieves the aim he stated in a published text of *The Ruling Class*, 'to create by means of soliloquy, rhetoric, formalised ritual, slapstick, song and

dances, a comic theatre of contrasting moods and opposites, where everything is simultaneously tragic and ridiculous'. Barnes generally confronts wider political issues, emulating the broad scale, richness of character and theatricality of ★BEN JONSON, though eschewing his values. He has also 'adapted' a number of Jacobean plays, including Jonson's *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman*, *Bartholomew Fair*, *Eastward Ho* and *The Devil is an Ass* (in which nearly half of the material is new) and ★MARSTON's *Antonio* plays. Other adaptations include ★FEYDEAU farces. *Laughter* opens with a custard pie slammed in the face of an author, and the vitality of music-hall humour jostles, sometimes uncomfortably, with the harsh cruelties which Barnes uses to make emotive attacks on the use of power by the State, the Church and big business. For example, *Leonardo's Last Supper* is an imaginative debate about the value of art, set in a charnel house where da Vinci's corpse revives. A passionate attack on Toryism, class and privilege, *The Ruling Class* presents a rampaging madman who inherits an earldom and believes he is God. It shows his return to 'sanity', confirmed when he makes a pro-hanging and pro-flogging speech to his cobwebbed fellow peers in the House of Lords. On its first production Ronald Bryden hailed *The Ruling Class* as 'a pivotal play', and Harold Hobson placed it on a level with *Waiting for Godot*, *Look Back in Anger* and *The Birthday Party*, but Barnes' later work has been less rapturously received. His characteristic mixture of ironic juxtaposition, metatheatrical comment, popular forms and political themes, death and humour has always required a management prepared to take a risk, and the RSC's seven-year delay in producing *Red Noses* is evidence of how uncomfortable some can feel about his work. *Red Noses* was his first play in London for seventeen years. Set in France at the time of the Black Death, it is populated by roaming bands of guilt-ridden flagellants, red-nosed comics who confront disease with laughter and are tolerated by the Church because they keep the people cheerful. When the plague abates and their performances begin to become subversive they are ruthlessly squashed. Barnes is not a polemicist and, though the bold and epic

scale of the play gives marvellous opportunities to performers, its characters' hope that 'every jest should be a small revolution' is not answered.

Most of Barnes' recent work has been for radio and television and it took a further fourteen years before he had another London production. Critics liked the Manchester production of *Dreaming* (1999), another historical play that demonstrated that Barnes still had the same capacity for effectively ironic juxtaposition that characterised his earlier successes, but it fared less well in London.

**TRY THESE:**

★ BOND (especially *We Come to the River*);  
 ★ BERKOFF for outrage; ★ BENNETT for satire;  
 ★ BRENTON and ★ HARE's *Pravda*, ★ NICHOLS' *The National Health*, and *Privates on Parade* for contemporary satires on an epic scale; ★ DEAR,  
 ★ KOPIT, ★ WOLFE for historical debunking;  
 ★ BOLT's *A Man for All Seasons* and ★ WHITING's *The Devils* for more straightforward treatments of history.

**BARRIE, (Sir) James**

**Matthew**

[1860 – 1937]

British dramatist and novelist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Ibsen's Ghost* (1891), *Walker, London* (1892), *The Professor's Love Story* (1894), *The Little Minister* (1897), *Quality Street* (1902), *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), *The Twelve Pound Look* (1910), *Dear Brutus* (1917), *The Truth About the Russian Dancers* (1920), *Mary Rose* (1920), *Shall We Join the Ladies?* (1922), *The Boy David* (1936)

Barrie, born of a poor Scottish family, went South after leaving Edinburgh University. He started his career as a journalist, then struck gold with the novel of *The Little Minister* in 1891 and wrote prolifically and very successfully through the Edwardian era and beyond. Although *What Every Woman Knows*, *Mary Rose*, with its odd mixture of innocence, fantasy and slightly sinister unquiet spirit, and the equally whimsical toing and froing of the classes in *The Admirable Crichton* surface from time to time, in recent years *Peter Pan*

has been the only one of Barrie's many plays to be revived regularly. His one-act plays, such as *Ibsen's Ghost*, *The Twelve Pound Look*, and the tantalising first act of the thriller *Shall We Join the Ladies?*, are often more effective than the full-length ones and well worth reviving.

**Peter Pan**

The plot centres on Peter Pan (the Boy Who Never Grew Up), who flies off to the Never Never Land with the Darling children (Wendy, John and Michael), leaving their father to take refuge in the dog kennel. After defeating the Pirates, they return to Bloomsbury with the Lost Boys, leaving Peter to forget all that has happened and wait for the next generation of Darlings. Usually revived as a Christmas entertainment, the play is a Freudian's delight and must have bewildered a great many children over the years. Captain Hook, however, remains one of the great bravura parts.

**TRY THESE:**

★ SHAW for class issues in *The Admirable Crichton*;  
 ★ CORRIE offers a rather different Scottish sensibility; the use of a ghostly spirit in *Mary Rose* has parallels, from ★ ELIOT in *The Family Reunion* to ★ PAGE's *Salonika*, though none treat it with the almost touching feyness of Barrie.

**BARRY, Philip**

[1896 – 1949]

American dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*A Punch for Judy* (1921), *You and I* (1923), *The Youngest* (1924), *In a Garden* (1925), *White Wings* (1925), *John* (1927), *Paris Bound* (1927), *Cock Robin* (1928, with ★ ELMER RICE), *Holiday* (1928), *Hotel Universe* (1930), *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1931), *The Animal Kingdom* (1932), *The Joyous Season* (1934), *Bright Star* (1935), *Spring Dance* (1936), *Here Come the Clowns* (1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (1939), *Liberty Jones* (1941), *Without Love* (1942), *Foolish Notion* (1945), *My Name is Aquilon* (1949), *Second Threshold* (completed posthumously by Robert Sherwood, 1951)

Educated at Yale and Harvard, Barry wrote American comedy of manners about the

sophisticated set of which he was a part, but not without healthy criticism of upper-class complacency and snobbery. His two best-known plays make his bemused contempt clear, even as they introduce the so-called 'Barry girl', a clear-headed, no-nonsense rich kid who is more on the ball than her posh surroundings might suggest. In *Holiday*, the self-made Johnny Case becomes engaged to the heiress Julia Seton only to find he has more in common with her younger sister Linda, who shares his desire for a 'holiday' from rampant materialistic pursuits. In *The Philadelphia Story*, later made into the stage and screen musical *High Society*, the moneyed divorcée Tracy Lord forsakes the dour stiff she's supposed to marry for a man defined more by his personality than his social position. Not all Barry's plays treat the mores of the well-heeled: *John* is a Biblical tragedy, *Cock Robin*, written with ★ELMER RICE, a comic mystery; and *Liberty Jones*, an allegory. But he remains best known for his social satire on the swells among whom he moved so easily.

**TRY THESE:**

★AYCKBOURN and ★COWARD for British equivalents to Barry's deceptive dark domestic frivolity, specifically *Private Lives*, a play about divorcés getting back together; ★KAUFMAN for comparable sophistication; ★GURNEY, ★HOWE, ★DENNIS MCINTYRE, ★GREENBERG, ★SIMON for modern chroniclers of American class.

**BARRY, Sebastian** [1955 – ]  
Irish novelist, poet and dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Pentagonal Dreamer* (1986), *Boss Grady's Boys* (1988), *Prayers of Sherkin* (1990), *White Woman Street* (1992), *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* (1995), *The Steward of Christendom* (1995), *Our Lady of Sligo* (1998), *Hinterland* (2002)

The vast majority of Barry's plays draw on aspects of his family history to create compelling narratives of the intersections between the personal and the political. Traditional Irish themes such as emigration fuel *Boss Grady's Boys* and *White Woman Street*; threats to communities, economic troubles and the

failure of aspiration underpin *Prayers of Sherkin* and *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn*, which is based on the life of Barry's grandmother. In *Our Lady of Sligo* a woman in hospital relives her painful family relationships and her dashed hopes. The intersection between family and history emerges most clearly in *The Steward of Christendom*, where Barry explores the ramifications of the career of his great-grandfather, Thomas Dunne, who served in the Dublin police and handed over Dublin Castle to Michael Collins when home rule was achieved. As a catholic policeman he occupied an ambiguous position in the complex interplay of forces in the struggle for independence. Like much of Barry's work the play explores events from the perspective of a more recent time. The play is set in the 1930s when Dunne, who is in his seventies and is mad, looks back both on the struggles of his career and the difficulties of bringing up his daughters alone in Dublin. The contrasts between his private and official selves are reinforced by the sense of the differences between rural and urban Ireland, and another level of complexity is added by the fact that we are looking back on the 1930s while the protagonist looks back to the early 1900s. The cool reception of *Hinterland* in London ended Barry's run of successes, although the resemblances between its protagonist and the former Taoiseach Charles Haughey had guaranteed it more success in Ireland.

**TRY THESE:**

★O'CASEY for the struggle for Irish independence; ★SYNGE for communities under threat and Irish rural life; ★BOLGER, ★FRIEL, ★MURPHY for similar issues; ★HUTCHINSON for contemporary Irish police issues; ★DECLAN HUGHES for contemporary Irish themes; ★GARY MITCHELL for Ulster.

**BARTLETT, Neil** [1959 – ]  
British performer, director and dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Antibody* (1983), *Dressing Up* (1983), *Pornography* (1985), *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1986), *Sarrasine* (1990), *Night After Night* (1994, with Nicholas Bloomfield), *The Seven Sacraments of Nicolas Poussin* (1997)

A determinedly anti-establishment figure, despite his first in English from Magdalen College, Oxford, and a director's traineeship at the Bristol Old Vic, Bartlett set up his own company, Gloria, in 1987. *Antibody* was one of the first plays to deal with AIDS in Britain, but *Dressing Up* began his highly flamboyant explorations into drag, followed, by *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* and *Sarrasine* – two of the most extraordinary theatrical spectacles to have burst on the British public since Lindsay Kemp first came to prominence. As Carl Miller has written: 'Bartlett drags high and low culture into creative collusion', an entirely suitable pun on a process that has relocated drag from the small gay cognoscenti fraternity into a broader dramatic arena. Both spectacles featured performer Bette Bourne in ways which fused high art with low camp, and made points about the importance of the living presence of the performer, the nature of artifice and reality and the politics of gay persecution.

Jim Hiley described Bartlett as 'the most tumultuous, the least categorisable talent to emerge in the 80s'. His multiple careers as director, translator, adapter, dramatist and novelist are ample testimony to the accuracy of that judgement. He became artistic director of the Lyric, Hammersmith, in 1994, where he has pursued an innovative policy with a strong European element. As a director, he was responsible for Complicité's *More Bigger Snacks Now*, and Annie Griffin's equally mould-breaking solo shows *Blackbeard the Pirate* and *Almost Persuaded*, her country-and-western music satire. He adapted ★WILDE's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1994) and has translated ★GENET (*Splendids*), ★KLEIST (*The Prince of Homburg*, 2002) ★LABICHE (*The Threesome*, 2000), ★MARIVAUX (*The Dispute, The Island of Slaves and The Game of Love and Chance*), ★MOLIÈRE (*The Misanthrope and School for Wives*), and ★RACINE (*Bérénice*),

Bartlett's visual theatre uses text, image and music in contrapuntal abundance – satirising itself even at its most outrageous, and delighting in the contradiction. He is, nonetheless, equally at home in the quieter waters (structurally speaking) of the novel; his homage to Oscar Wilde, *Who Was That Man?*, and his contemporary account of gay

life, *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*, have both been warmly received.

### A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep

*Sleep* was originally performed by Bartlett, onstage throughout and naked, as a solo show in a disused warehouse. This studied and luxurious tribute to an all but forgotten Jewish Victorian painter and poet, Simeon Solomon, a friend of Rossetti, Swinburne and Pater, who was disgraced and reduced to poverty after being caught in a public toilet with a labourer, was actually taken from Solomon's own erotic prose poem. Reflecting the imagery of the poem through Bartlett's own nakedness, and merging his own circumstances with those of Solomon, it became a witty and moving 'hymn' to art, homosexual love and defiance. Solomon's own refusal to apologise was apparently one of the reasons Bartlett was attracted to his subject. In later incarnations Bartlett was joined by three drag queens – heightening the production's wonderful mix of 'high art' with 'low culture'. The sight and sound of Bette Bourne singing Cole Porter's 'In the Still of the Night' remains an indelible memory and comment on the emotional repercussions of AIDS.

### TRY THESE:

Lindsay Kemp for theatre of divine outrage; ★GENET, ★TREMBLAY for mixing the sacred and profane; Robert Lepage and Peter Brook for director-auteurs who also favour an ongoing work-in-progress approach; ★NOËL GREIG and ★OSMENT for contrasting gay sensibility.

## BEATON, Alistair

British writer

### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Feelgood* (2001)

Beaton's television credits include contributions to such series as *Spitting Image* and *Not the Nine O'Clock News* so it was no surprise that his play about the trials and tribulations of a prime minister at his party conference was welcomed as the return of theatrical political satire. Updated during its run to maintain its topicality, it seems likely to have been an interesting one-off, and it was note-

worthy that its attacks on Tony Blair, while particularly welcomed by right-wing newspapers, appear to have done nothing to dent his General Election majority.

**TRY THESE:**

★BRENTON for a long-standing commitment to political satire; ★GAY for eighteenth-century satire; ★BARKER, ★GRANVILLE-BARKER's *Waste* and ★HARE for party politics; ★ELDRIDGE's *A Week with Tony* for contemporary Conservative politics; David Lindsay's late medieval *Satire of the Three Estates* for an early Scottish satire; Justin Butcher's *The Madness of George Dubya* for Gulf War II satire.

**BEAUMARCHAIS, Pierre Augustin Caron de** [1732 – 99]  
French dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Eugénie* (1767), *Les Deux Amis* (1770, *The Two Friends*), *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775, *The Barber of Seville*), *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784, *The Marriage of Figaro*), *Tarare* (1787), *La Mère Coupable* (1792, *The Guilty Mother*)

As well as being a dramatist, Beaumarchais was a watchmaker, musician, financier, courtier, pamphleteer, gunrunner and secret agent, in all of which he achieved some distinction but no lasting success. He wrote two very good plays (*The Barber of Seville* and its sequel *The Marriage of Figaro*) which might be more often performed in English had they not also been the bases of two superlative operas. The first has a plot that can be described in a few lines – old guardian, young ward, young nobleman in disguise, clever servant to help him; the second would need several pages to describe, and combines non-stop comic invention with sharp social satire. *The Marriage of Figaro* is possibly unique in being a successful sequel. There is a third in the series, *The Guilty Mother*, which has a strange combination of elevated moral tone and prurient plot: the Almavivas have come to live in France because of the Revolution, and like to be known as Citoyen and Citoyenne. The hero finds that he is the illegitimate son of the Countess and Chérubin, the latter having been killed in the wars, and so he can marry the Count's illegitimate daughter

by the gardener's daughter. There was going to be a fourth episode of this increasingly depressing story, but Beaumarchais died first. *The Marriage of Figaro* was revived at the Manchester Royal Exchange in 2002.

**TRY THESE:**

★MARIVAUD for eighteenth-century French comedy (though their language and approach are very different, Marivaux being a natural miniaturist and Beaumarchais a poster artist); ★FEYDEAU for plot complications; ★HORVÁTH for updating and development in *Figaro Gets a Divorce*.

**BEAUMONT, Francis** [1584/5 – 1616]  
English Renaissance dramatist, collaborator with  
★JOHN FLETCHER

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), *Philaster* (pre-1610, with ★FLETCHER), *The Maid's Tragedy* (pre-1611, with ★FLETCHER)

Although Beaumont is traditionally associated with Fletcher, his place in the contemporary repertory rests largely on his own *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. A lively blend of satire at the expense of middlebrow taste, this uses plays within plays, popular songs, apparent interruptions from the audience, romance and melodrama in a heady mixture that has maintained its appeal because the tastes and attitudes it confronts are easily recognisable today. Michael Bogdanov staged the last major British revival, for the RSC in 1981. There was something of a Beaumont and ★FLETCHER revival at that time with successful productions of *The Maid's Tragedy*, a love, honour and duty tragedy, by both the Glasgow Citizens' and the RSC, but there has been little recent interest in Beaumont.

**TRY THESE:**

★DEKKER's *Shoemaker's Holiday*, ★HEYWOOD's *Fair Maid of the West* and *Four Prentices of London* (the prime object of Beaumont's parody) are more complimentary to citizen taste than ★MIDDLETON's *A Chaste Maid*, which shares more of Beaumont's standpoint; ★JONSON's *Bartholomew Fair* and ★SHAKESPEARE's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* also offer portraits of the middle

classes from this period; there are many plays about theatre companies and interrupted performances, including ★SHERIDAN's *The Critic*, ★PIRANDELLO's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and ★STOPPARD's *The Real Inspector Hound*.

**BECKETT, Samuel** [1906 – 89]  
Irish/French dramatist and novelist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*En Attendant Godot* (1953, as *Waiting for Godot*, 1955), *Endgame* (1957), *All That Fall* (1957), *Act Without Words I* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Embers* (1959), *Act Without Words II* (1959), *Happy Days* (1961), *Words and Music* (1962), *Cascando* (1963), *Play* (1963), *Eh Joe* (1966), *Come and Go* (1966), *Breath* (1969), *Not I* (1972), *That Time* (1976), *Footfalls* (1976), *Ghost Trio* (1976), . . . *But the Clouds . . .* (1977), *A Piece of Monologue* (1980), *Rockaby* (1980), *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), *Quad* (1982), *Catastrophe* (1982), *Nacht und Träume* (1983), *What Where* (1983)

Born in Ireland of Anglo-Irish parents, Beckett went to Paris in the late 1920s where he worked for a while with James Joyce and later as a lecturer in English. In 1938 he settled in Paris, where he lived until his death, writing in both French and English and translating his own work into English. He was active in the French Resistance during World War II, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

Beckett began writing as a critic; his first published work was a piece on *Finnegan's Wake*, written at Joyce's request. In 1931 he produced a study of Proust; he then wrote verse, short fiction and novels and turned to drama, he said, for 'relaxation'. *Waiting for Godot* arrived in England at a period in which there was a growing interest and awareness of non-realist forms of drama and of the innovations of European theatre. A play in which two tramp-clown figures wait for Godot, who never arrives, it was greeted with both mystification and acclaim. It is, famously, a play in which nothing happens, twice, and its minimalism encouraged both audiences and other writers to reassess what drama actually needed

if it was to entertain and stimulate them.

Martin Esslin claimed Beckett as the figure who brought Absurdism to public attention, but Beckett himself did not accept that characterisation, nor can his considerable output and the range of his experiments in drama be neatly categorised. Beckett himself consistently refused to explain his work, continuing to direct and to produce drama that defies easy definition. Existentialism, Christian allegory and nihilism have all been employed as theoretical accounts of Beckett's work, but he has said only 'I meant what I said'. To reduce the stark and complex imagery and language of Beckett's oeuvre to a single 'meaning' would be to diminish its power.

Beckett's work is full of powerful images which are not referred to or explained, often images of human immobility: in *Play*, the three voices are trapped in jars; Winnie of *Happy Days* is gradually buried up to her neck in sand; in *Endgame*, one of the characters cannot walk, another cannot sit. These images can be seen as metaphors for inescapable traps; in Beckett's plays, as in ★SARTRE's *Huis Clos*, there is literally no way out.

Beckett's plays became increasingly minimalist in their exploration of the limits of the dramatic form. In *Acts Without Words* he produced the works with no verbal language, only sounds, and in a television piece in which actors silently moved around a floor diagram, he raised the question of what a 'play' is; at what point does drama cease to be drama and become dance or mime? He also wrote a number of monologues, most memorably for women: *Not I*, *Rockaby* and *Footfalls*. *Not I* is a stunning visual theatrical effect, performed on a darkened stage on which only a shadowy draped figure and a spotlight mouth are visible. The draped figure moves slightly during the course of the play, while the mouth babbles a fragmented and pain-filled discourse. Billie Whitelaw has described the experience as 'falling backwards into Hell, emitting cries'. When Whitelaw was confronted with the script she told Beckett: 'You've finally done it, you've written the unlearnable and you've written the unplayable'. When she asked Beckett if the character was dead he responded 'Let's just say you're not quite there'.



The setting, timing and direction of a Beckett play are as integral as the text; his stage directions are extremely precise. In *Footfalls* the character is described as ‘compulsively pacing’, but the footfalls are not arbitrary, they are minutely scripted: ‘starting with right foot (r) from right (R) to left (L) . . .’. Beckett places enormous demands upon the performer, but Whitelaw says: ‘I think if that is what he’s written, that is what he wants. And I think it’s up to anyone who’s actually doing his work to follow that as faithfully as they can’.

Despite the difficulty of much of Beckett’s work, he is not as obscure as is often thought; his plays are full of comic invention and punning. He had a fascination with clowning (his one film, *Film*, 1965, was made with Buster Keaton): *Waiting for Godot* employs comic routines that are worthy of Laurel and Hardy.

### Endgame

The four characters of *Endgame* exist in a bare set, with only two small windows. Two of them are locked in a symbiotic relationship: Clov cannot sit, Hamm, blind and impotent, cannot stand. They hate, but need, each other, in a pairing that echoes the master – servant relationship of Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*. The senile Nell and Nagg are encased in dustbins, their concerns only the immediately physical. In a bitter image of a marriage, unable to reach one another except to scratch, Nagg wistfully reminisces about the erotic (a theme also explored in *Krapp’s Last Tape*). The claustrophobic world of the play is never specified, the world outside the room only available through the telescope through which Clov sees a barren landscape. Written in a period when nuclear war seemed a very real threat, one possibility is that this is a post-holocaust world. The only clue Beckett offered is his reply to an actor that ‘the play doesn’t happen only in one person’s mind’. The play is full of theatrical references: Clov and Hamm evoke Caliban and Prospero in ★SHAKESPEARE’S *Tempest*; Hamm (who often sounds Shakespearean) is a reference to ‘ham’ acting (and to Hamlet?); at one point Clov turns his telescope directly onto the audience and reports: ‘I see a multitude in transports of joy.’

### TRY THESE:

★IONESCO and ★GENET were seen with Beckett to represent a European ‘Theatre of the Absurd’; ★STOPPARD’S *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* clearly owes a great deal to *Waiting for Godot*; ★KANE and ★PINTER have obviously been influenced by Beckett; for a contrasting master–servant relationship, see ★WALCOTT’S *Pantomime*.

### BEHAN, Brendan

[1923 – 64]

Irish dramatist, journalist, house painter and alcoholic

### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*The Quare Fellow* (1954), *An Gaill* (1958, reworked as *The Hostage*), *Richard’s Cork Leg* (completed posthumously by Alan Simpson, 1972)

A member of the IRA at fourteen, sent to Borstal for three years, sentenced at nineteen to fourteen years in jail for political offences and attempted murder, Behan drew on his own life for his autobiographical books *Borstal Boy* (1958) and *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (1965) and early radio plays which Alan Simpson adapted for the Pike Theatre Club, Dublin. His first stage play, *The Quare Fellow*, set in a prison on the eve of an execution, was ‘developed’ by ★JOAN LITTLEWOOD for a new version presented by Theatre Workshop (1956) and in the West End, and had an important effect on attitudes to imprisonment and capital punishment. *An Gaill*, commissioned by the Irish language society Gael Linn, and reworked by Theatre Workshop as *The Hostage*, presents a picaresque set of characters in a brothel used as an IRA safe house where a British soldier is held prisoner. Much of its success was due to the Workshop’s style of songs, repartee and audience confrontation. *Richard’s Cork Leg*, a political comedy about fascism, was left unfinished and completed by Alan Simpson in 1972.

Behan’s own curtain speeches, colourful behaviour and alcoholic interviews attracted as much media attention as his plays. Although Behan claimed ‘I’m not a postman . . . I don’t deliver messages’, both plays have a great deal to say to their audiences and the Theatre Workshop productions affected

attitudes both to the topics discussed and to ways of presenting theatre.

**TRY THESE:**

For plays on Irish politics, ★FINNEGAN, ★FRIEL, ★MCGUINNESS, ★O'CASEY; ★GENET's *The Balcony* and ★SHAKESPEARE's *Pericles* for rather different uses of brothel settings; for plays on prison brutality, Jack Henry Abbott's *In the Belly of the Beast*, John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* and ★PINERO's *Short Eyes*.

**BEHN, Aphra**

[1640 – 89]

English dramatist and novelist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Forced Marriage* (1670), *The Rover* (1677), *The Feigned Courtesans; or A Night's Intrigue* (1678), *The Roundheads; or The Good Old Cause* (1681), *The City-Heiress; or Sir Timothy Treat-All* (1682), *The Lucky Chance* (1686), *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687)

The first woman to earn her living by the pen, Behn was renowned both for her wit and for her prolific output. In her lifetime she was one of the most frequently performed dramatists, and actually left behind eighteen plays, as well as novels and poetry. An early champion of a woman's right to free expression – Virginia Woolf suggested that 'all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn . . . for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds' – she was consistently vilified by male critics for daring to write as bawdily as they did. After the opening of *The Lucky Chance* an accusation of indecency brought from her a typically robust plea to be accorded the same freedom to write that men enjoyed. Her plays deal with subjects familiar to Restoration audiences fattened on a diet of elegant debauchery, double standards in high places, sexual intrigue and cuckoldry. She wrote tragicomedies, historical comedies, political lampoons and, with the *commedia dell'arte*-based *The Emperor of the Moon*, is credited with a forerunner to the English pantomime.

After two-and-a-half centuries of neglect, Behn is enjoying a small renaissance: *The Lucky Chance* was revived by the Women's

Playhouse Trust (1981) and *The Rover* by the RSC (1986) and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago (1988–9). Modern audiences enjoy her plays particularly for their good humour and energy, whilst recognising her early feminist claims for equality in relationships between the sexes. A night with Behn is still a good night out and her plays have as much to offer as those of her better-known male contemporaries. Her novel *Oronooko* was adapted for the RSC in 1999 by ★BIYI BANDELE, there was a fringe production of *The Feigned Courtesans* (Old Red Lion) in 2002 and the Wales Actors' Company are staging *The Rover* in 2003.

**TRY THESE:**

Other Restoration dramatists such as ★CONGREVE, ★DRYDEN, ★ETHEREGE, ★FARQUHAR, ★WYCHERLEY, ★VANBURGH; ★BOND's *Restoration* and ★CHURCHILL's *Serious Money* for modern similarities; ★WERTENBAKER's *The Grace of Mary Traverse* for a similar concern for women in their social context, using a historical setting; ★DE ANGELIS for women in Restoration theatre.

**BENNETT, Alan**

[1934 – ]

British dramatist and actor

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Forty Years On* (1968), *Getting On* (1971), *Habeas Corpus* (1973), *The Old Country* (1977), *Enjoy* (1980), *Kafka's Dick* (1986), *Single Spies* (1988, *An Englishman Abroad*, televised 1983, and *A Question of Attribution*), *The Madness of George III* (1991), *Talking Heads* (1992), *The Wind in the Willows* (1996), *The Lady in the Van* (1999)

Bennett first attracted attention as a writer and performer in revue on the Edinburgh Fringe, especially with *Beyond the Fringe* with Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore and Peter Cook, which had long runs in London and New York. Bennett is a very funny writer, adept at using the techniques of farce and music hall, but, while he will find humour in the predicament of cancer patients, geriatrics, Jewish mothers, social workers' cases or homosexual spies, his characters are not butts

for laughter. He has a telling ear for the nuances of everyday speech and an eye for the clinching detail but he explores a wide variety of dramatic forms from monologue to biography to history play so that there is no typical Bennett format.

*Forty Years On* seemed to please everyone, 'a good night out' and a clever satire with songs which analyses Britain in the twentieth century via a revue put on by a boarding school (much of it began life as pastiches of literary and other styles). *The Old Country*, a cerebral discussion of national identity through the image of a British defector living in the USSR, made more demands on audiences. *Enjoy* manages to be illuminating about class values, town planners, the generation gap, sexual politics and fashionable sociology in a play that continually surprises. An ageing working-class couple in the north of England, living in a house due for demolition, and due for removal to a new estate, are visited by an apparently female social worker who, the audience does not realise, is actually their son in drag. Proud of their children, they try to play it his way, and they also boast of their prostitute daughter: 'She's exceptional. You won't find girls like her on every street corner.' *Kafka's Dick*, in which Kafka, his parents and his publisher materialise in the suburban home of a would-be biographer, found appreciative audiences at the Royal Court, but the first production failed to transfer to the West End. It fared better in a 1998 revival at a time when public opinion had become more concerned about the negative aspects of 'celebrity'. Bennett's exploration of the king's madness and its implications in *The Madness of George III* is a typical example of his ability to combine comic and tragic impulses in a single structure.

His television monologue series, *Talking Heads*, and *Single Spies* (a double bill about two English spies, Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt, which includes an appearance by Elizabeth II), both transferred successfully to the stage, and *The Old Crowd* (1979) and *The Insurance Man* (1986) explored techniques outside the apparent naturalism of most of his other television plays. His screenplays include *A Private Function* (1984), the ★ORTON biography *Prick Up Your Ears* (1986), and *The*

*Madness of King George* (1994), retitled so the American audience would not think it was the third film in a series.

#### TRY THESE:

Denise Deegan's *Daisy Pulls It Off* and John Dighton's *The Happiest Days of Our Lives* for satire on the English public school system; ★SIMON GRAY's *Butley*, ★HAMPTON's *The Philanthropist*, ★NICHOLS and ★ORTON for satire of social mores; ★WILCOX's *Lent* for linking the school play with homosexuality; ★JULIAN MITCHELL's *Another Country* for homosexuality and spies; ★STAFFORD for dynastic politics.

### BENT, Simon

British dramatist

#### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Bad Company* (1991), *Wasted* (1993) *Goldhawk Road* (1996), *Shelter* (1997) *Sugar Sugar* (1998), *A Prayer for Owen Meaney* (2002, from John Irving), *The Associate* (2002), *Accomplices* (2002)

Bent has carved himself out a comic niche that marks him as the inheritor of the mantle of ★JOE ORTON and ★HAROLD PINTER. His characteristic approach is to bring together an unlikely group of characters in a microcosmic environment and then explore the ensuing tensions. In *Bad Company* it's the end of the season at a seaside resort and some bored young adults find things to keep themselves occupied including, inevitably, sex and violence. In *Wasted* a similar group try to run a communal house with all the usual difficulties. *Goldhawk Road* owes something to ★JONSON's *Volpone* with its tale of potential beneficiaries jockeying for position at a deathbed. *Sugar Sugar* is set in a seaside guesthouse where the arrival of a new guest awakens dangerous forces. In *The Associate* two workmen about to redecorate a pensioner's council flat share a roast breakfast with him as he regales them with Pinteresque tales of how the world has maltreated him. Although Bent has demonstrated a great talent for creating situations and writing biting comedy, Paul Taylor has suggested he is 'less adept at creating plots with enough narrative dynamism to propel his oddballs through a sustained drama'.

## TRY THESE:

★PINTER's *The Birthday Party* and ★ORTON's *Entertaining Mr Sloane* for comparisons; ★BOND's *Saved*, ★CORTHORN, ★PRICHARD, ★UPTON for rootless young people finding ways to occupy their time.

**BERKOFF, Steven** [1937 – ]  
British actor and dramatist

## PLAYS AND ADAPTATIONS INCLUDE:

*The Penal Colony* (1968), *Metamorphosis* (1969), *The Trial* (1970), *Agamemnon* (1973), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1974), *East* (1975), *Greek* (1979), *The Murder of Jesus Christ* (1980), *Decadence* (1981), *One Man* (1982), *West* (1983), *Harry's Christmas* (1985), *Sink the Belgrano!* (1986), *Kvetch* (1987), *Brighton Beach Scumbags* (1991), *Sturm und Drang* (1994), *Massage* (1997), *Messiah* (2000)

Berkoff is as widely known as a performer as he is a writer. He studied mime in Paris with the École Jacques Le Coq, an emphasis very evident in his performances and plays, which rely as much for their impact on movement as on language. After working in repertory theatre Berkoff went on to found the London Theatre Group, where he began to direct and to develop adaptations from literature into theatre. Kafka and Edgar Allan Poe were favoured authors for this treatment, which often involved expressionistic sets and acting style. The London Theatre Group also developed a version of ★AESCHYLUS' *Agamemnon*, and Greek tragedy became an informing principle of Berkoff's own writing. His first original play was *East*, which used a juxtaposition of street language with high tragedy and blank verse to produce a vitriolic and abrasive account of East End life. *Greek* employed the Oedipus myth to polemicise about mothers, marriage and women. *West* rewrote the Beowulf legend into a scabrous attack on the British upper classes and was (ironically) a great success in the West End, as was his National Theatre revival of his adaptation of *The Trial* in which he starred with Anthony Sher. *Messiah*, his most recent work, treats Christ as a guerrilla waging a campaign against the Romans.

**Metamorphosis**

*Metamorphosis* was the most successful of the London Theatre Group's productions. In Berkoff's hands Kafka's tale of a young man who wakes up to discover he has been transformed into a beetle becomes a sustained scream of rage against the constraints of conventional society. First performed with Berkoff at the Round House in 1969, *Metamorphosis*, which is highly stylised using acrobatics and mime to powerful effect, has toured extensively in Britain and overseas and is now, as a spectacular showcase for an actor, a regular feature of the Edinburgh Festival.

## TRY THESE:

★BENNETT's *Kafka's Dick* is a wildly imaginative but very Bennett-like play on fame and literature, in which Kafka is omnipresent; Lindsay Kemp is as idiosyncratic and unique in his performance style; ★CARTWRIGHT's *Road* uses language explosively; the ★CAPEK brothers' *Insect Play* is another insect-infected metaphor for society.

**BERNARD, Jean-Jacques** [1888 – 1972]  
French dramatist

## PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Martine* (1922), *L'Invitation au Voyage* (1924, *Invitation to the Journey*), *Le Printemps des Autres* (1924, *Other People's Springtime*), *Le Roy de Malousie* (1928, *The King of Malousie*), *La Louise* (1930, *Our Louise*), *A La Recherche des Coeurs* (1931, *Searching for Hearts*), *Les Soeurs Guedonec* (1931, *The Guedonec Sisters*), *Jeanne de Pantin* (1933), *Nationale 6* (1935, *Highway No 6*), *Deux Hommes* (1937, *Two Men*), *Le Jardinier d'Ispahan* (1939, *The Gardener of Ispahan*)

Writing just prior to the generation of ★COCTEAU, ★GENET and ★GIRAUDOUX, Bernard is the best-known exemplar of the 'theatre of the inexpressible', a French school of writers including Denys Amiel and Charles Vildnac in which it's our unspoken dialogue that resonates, not the words themselves ('subtext', as acting teachers might put it). *Martine*, the story of a peasant girl's misplaced attraction for Julien, a callow upper-class journalist, proceeds inevitably to its sad ending, as *Martine's* passivity hardens into a

tacit acknowledgement of perpetual rejection (see Claude Goretta's film *The Lacemaker* for a contemporary update on this theme). *Nationale 6* tells a similar story of an ordinary provincial girl done in by an overactive imagination, and in *Les Soeurs Guedonec* two spinsters pass a miserable holiday in complete silence, accompanied by three loud orphan children. The National Theatre once tried its hand with *Martine* but there has been no significant recent interest.

**TRY THESE:**

★CHEKHOV, ★PINTER, ★BECKETT for transmuting the 'inexpressible' into art rather than just an end in itself; equally, ★ROBERT HOLMAN and ★DURAS for the 'inexpressible' recall of past emotions; for treatments of class clashing, ★CHEKHOV's *Three Sisters*.

**BETTI, Ugo** [1892 – 1953]  
Italian dramatist and judge

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Il Paese delle Vacanze* (1942, *Summertime*), *L'Aurola Bruciata* (1942, *The Burnt Flowerbed*), *Curruzione al Palasso di Giustizia* (1949, *Corruption in the Palace of Justice*, also translated for radio as *The Sacred Seals*), *La Regina e gli Insorti* (1951, *The Queen and the Rebels*)

Some Italian critics considered Betti's later plays even better than those of ★PIRANDELLO, whose influence is evident in his work. Betti's themes are moral and in the wider sense religious: his translator Henry Reed suggested that his major theme was 'man's fatal disregard of God'. Carefully plotted and well constructed in a conventional way, his plays tend to be set in rather unlocalised symbolic settings, though the dialogue is naturalistic. His interest is in the personal and ethical problems of his protagonists rather than any political dialectic: the rebels in *The Queen and the Rebels* or the contending powers in *The Burnt Flowerbed*, for instance, are abstractions without identifiable ideologies. His concerns in these plays are the sacrifice by which a prostitute saves the life of a worthless queen and so herself gains 'queenly' virtues, and a similar self-sacrifice intended to destroy the

cynicism of a former politician. With the general reassessment of mid-twentieth-century drama, a fringe production of *The Queen and the Rebels* in 2002 might presage a Betti revival, though the odds remain against it.

**TRY THESE:**

★GENET's *The Balcony*, ★PIRANDELLO; ★COLLINS' *Judgement* for moral enquiry; ★ANOUILH, ★GIRAUDOUX for ethical discussions.

**BETTS, Torben** [1968 – ]  
British dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Spurning Comfort* (1998), *A Listening Heaven* (1999), *Mummies and Daddies* (1999), *Incarcerator* (1999), *Five Visions of the Faithful* (2000), *Clockwatching* (2001), *The Biggleswades* (2001), *Silence and Violence* (2002)

A Liverpool graduate who subsequently trained as an actor, Betts earned rave reviews for a burst of plays at the turn of the century. He has been hailed as an outstanding new voice without the benefit of a production by one of the national companies or in the West End. His stint as writer in residence at Scarborough inevitably brought comparisons with ★AYCKBOURN. Certainly there are similarities to the master in the excruciating tragic-comic domestic situations captured in acutely observed dialogue in *Clockwatching* or *A Listening Heaven* but *Incinerator* is a verse drama of 'cartoon savagery' (Michael Billington). Connal Orton, the literary manager at Scarborough who opened Betts' unsolicited script for *A Listening Heaven*, has suggested that he has now moved beyond his 'social realist phase' and that 'his more overtly poetic plays' are, in Betts' words, 'about characters who can use language and so create tragedy, rather than characters who cannot (thus creating comedy)'.

**TRY THESE:**

★CHURCHILL's *Serious Money* for modern verse drama; Betts has already been compared by reviewers to ★ALBEE, ★BARKER, ★BERKOFF, ★O'NEILL and ★PINTER.

**BILL, Stephen**

[1948 – ]

British dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Girl Talk* (1977), *The Old Order* (1979), *The Final Wave* (1979), *Piggy Back Riders* (1981), *The Bottom Drawer* (1982), *Naked in the Bull Ring* (1985), *Over the Bar* (1985), *Crossing the Line* (1987), *Curtains* (1987), *Heartlanders* (1989, with ★ANNE DEVLIN and ★DAVID EDGAR), *Over a Barrel* (1990), *Stitched Up* (1990), *The Antigone Project* (1992), *What the Heart Feels* (1996)

Relatively unrecognised nationally until the success of *Curtains*, which won three awards when it was produced at the Hampstead Theatre in 1987, Bill has a solid record of regional successes in the UK, including *The Old Order*, for which he won the 1979 John Whiting Award. Set in Birmingham, *Curtains*, an acutely observed savage comedy about a family birthday celebration which turns into a wake, presents an everyday situation of a family's attitudes to the problems of ageing and to euthanasia in terms which are memorably comic as well as horrific. It is a well-crafted, almost old-fashioned play, which uses the familiar devices of the family gathering and the unexpected return of the prodigal to unlock themes and to analyse the roots of situations. However, as the shortness of its West End run sadly indicates, its sombre material did not make it a popular favourite.

**TRY THESE:**

★BLEASDALE and ★RUSSELL use Liverpudlian settings and ★BYRNE uses Glaswegian settings in similar ways to Bill's use of Birmingham; ★SOPHOCLES' *Oedipus* for family reunions that go wrong; ★SHEPARD's *Buried Child* for calamitous consequences of a prodigal's return; contemporary dramatists who share some of Bill's preoccupations are ★AYCKBOURN, ★ORTON and ★NORMAN (*Night Mother*); contemporary dramatists from Birmingham include Alan Drury, ★ELYOT, ★RUDKIN and ★ZEPHANIAH.

**BLEASDALE, Alan**

[1946 – ]

British dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Party's Over* (1975), *Down the Dock Road* (1976), *It's a Madhouse* (1976), *Should Auld Acquaintance . . .* (1976), *No More Sitting on the Old School Bench* (1977), *Pimples* (1978), *Crackers* (1978), *Love is a Many-Splendoured Thing* (1979), *Having a Ball* (1981), *Are You Lonesome Tonight?* (1985), *On the Ledge* (1993)

A Merseyside writer who until 1985 had developed a strong reputation without ever having been seen in the West End, Bleasdale is a gritty comic satirist who has reached his widest theatre audience with what is, paradoxically, his most earnest work, *Are You Lonesome Tonight?* This overtly hagiographic musical about Elvis Presley aims to set the record straight about a musical legend Bleasdale thinks has been vilified. Set on the last day of the King's life, before drugs and booze killed him at forty-two in 1977, the musical is an unabashedly sentimental picture of a bloated talent looking back sardonically on his younger self, before he allowed himself to be mercilessly corrupted by managers, promoters and the press. Earlier stage plays of note include *It's a Madhouse*, set in a psychiatric hospital in the north-west of England, and *Having a Ball*, about four men awaiting surgery in a vasectomy clinic. *On the Ledge* is a very dark tale of urban blight that shares the social pessimism of Bleasdale's television series *Boys From the Blackstuff*, a 1983 howl of rage against unemployment, set in Liverpool, that tapped the psychic pulse of Britain. Peter Smith's 1985 film *No Surrender* had a strong Bleasdale script about rival factions in a Liverpool nightclub where the tensions mirror those in Northern Ireland. The powerful television series *The Monocled Mutineer*, a 1986 World War I parable of powerlessness in Thatcher's Britain, and *GBH* (1991), which wickedly satirised the battle for ascendancy in Liverpool between the Labour Party and the Trotskyite Militant Tendency, stirred up major controversies. His later television work *Jake's Progress* (1995) is a bleak study of a dysfunctional family but *Melissa* (1997) is based on one of Francis Durbridge's murder mys-

teries from 1962. His television adaptation of *Oliver Twist* was screened in 1999 and his *Henry VIII* is scheduled for 2003.

**TRY THESE:**

★RUSSELL as the other pre-eminent Liverpudlian writer; ★KUREISHI as an urban realist with a comparable sense of humour; ★ORTON for black comedy.

**BLESSING, Lee** [1949 – ]  
American dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (1979), *Oldtimers Game* (1982), *Nice People Dancing to Good Country Music* (1982), *Independence* (1983), *Riches* (1984, formerly *War of the Roses*), *Eleemosynary* (1985), *A Walk in the Woods* (1987), *Two Rooms* (1988), *Down the Road* (1989), *Cobb* (1989), *Fortinbras* (1991), *Lake St Extension* (1992), *Patient A* (1993), *Chesapeake* (1999), *Going to St Ives* (2000), *Rewrites* (2001)

Minnesota dramatist Blessing's best-known play, *A Walk in the Woods* (winner of the Best Play award from the American Theatre Critics Association), presents two statesmen negotiating in uncharacteristic poses of casualness and friendliness: we find them human. As potential annihilation hovers over the world, talks of disarmament are set in the context of hope – in the woods. Placed in the harmonious milieu of the natural, we are reminded of the dangers of the artificial. A peculiar tension of pessimism and possibility dissolves into a nihilism that is inherent in survival games. The two rooms of *Two Rooms* are the windowless cubicle where a hostage is held in Beirut and the room, stripped of furniture, where the prisoner's wife hopes to share psychically her husband's ordeal. Some critics pointed to the obvious similarities to ★SARTRE's *No Exit*, but the play's lack of action or point of view distressed others. *Cobb* explores the myth surrounding Ty Cobb, baseball star, portrayed at three stages of his life by three actors. Blessing sees Cobb as a symbol of American greed (the player was an early investor in General Motors and Coca Cola), power (he frequently had violent encounters with strangers), and racism

(the strangers were often black). *Patient A* is based on the true story of Kimberley Bergalis, the first known case of a patient becoming HIV positive as a result of contact with a dentist. It is a three-hander with Blessing himself appearing as a character. His early *Independence* and *Eleemosynary* feature all-female casts and concern relationships between mothers and daughters, strained by the mother's mental breakdown in the former, and a grandmother's stroke in the latter. He brought his interests in politics and the maternal together in *Going to St Ives*.

**TRY THESE:**

★BECKETT's *Endgame* is perhaps the most memorable of all survival games; for diplomacy see ★EDGAR's *The Shape of the Table* and ★LITTLEWOOD's *Oh What a Lovely War*; ★HENLEY's *Crimes of the Heart* features three sisters dealing with the legacy of a mentally ill mother; ★NELSON's *Principia Scriptoriae* and ★HAVIS's *Morocco* for Americans held prisoner in foreign lands; ★STOPPARD's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* for new takes on Hamlet; ★FIERSTEIN and ★KRAMER for HIV/AIDS.

**BLOCK, Simon**

British dramatist Plays include:

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*Not a Game for Boys* (1995), *Chimps* (1997), *A Place at the Table* (2000), *Hand in Hand* (2002)

Block is a witty writer whose plays cover a wide range of topics with astringently accurate character observation. In *Not a Game for Boys* he takes three cab drivers playing a crucial table tennis match as the starting point for an exploration of issues in friendship and masculinity. *Chimps* takes the comic situation of the door-to-door salesman from hell and extends it into a ★PINTERESQUE nightmare. In his recent plays Block has demonstrated a willingness to tackle subjects that others might find too taxing: *A Place at the Table* has a television company commissioning a wheelchair-using writer to create a disability sitcom; in *Hand in Hand* he deals with some of the ways in which British Jews react to the Palestinian situation.

## TRY THESE:

Block has been compared to ★SIMON GRAY and ★MAMET; ★GODBER, ★IKOLI's *Pot the Black*, ★PAGE's *Golden Girls*, ★STOREY for sports and games; ★AYCKBOURN's *Man of the Moment* for bad television; Graeae and ★KEMPINSKI for disability; the male protagonist in *Hand in Hand* is called Ronnie, a name redolent of ★WESKER's trilogy; for other responses to Palestine, ★HARE's *Via Dolorosa* and ★PASCAL's *Crossing Jerusalem*.

**BOGART, Anne** [1951 – ]  
American writer and director

## PRODUCTIONS INCLUDE:

*Hauptstadt* (1979), *Inhabitat* (1979), *Out of Sync* (1980), *Women and Men: A Big Dance* (1982), *History, An American Dream* (1983); *The Making of Americans* (1985, adapted from Gertrude Stein), '1951' (1986, with ★MAC WELLMAN), *No Plays No Poetry But Philosophical Reflections Practical Instructions Provocative Prescriptions Opinions and Pointers from a Noted Critic and Dramatist* (1988), *The Medium* (1993), *Culture of Desire* (1998), *Bob* (1998), *Room* (2000)

Bogart is one of the USA's most innovative and creative directors/writers. Although she creates theatre pieces that most would term 'experimental', she told Catherine Sheehy in a *Theatre* interview that 'I usually personally resent being called avant-garde because I spend most of my time thinking about history, tradition and culture'. Her most widely acclaimed piece may be *No Plays No Poetry*, described by a *New York Times* critic as 'an avant-garde carnival that carries the audience from scene to scene in a choreographed comic pageant that sends up the theoretical writings of Bertolt Brecht'. According to Bogart, 97 per cent of the text came directly from ★BRECHT's critical writing. As a sideshow Barker spouted the history of the theatre according to Brecht, a tent opened and the audience could wander to any of nine scenes, including one where nine actors playing Brecht argued about acting or another where Tina Shepard played Brecht playing Charlie Chaplin playing Hitler. Much of her work depends on 'sampling' other writers and cultural figures. For example, *The Medium* drew on Marshall McLuhan

and *Culture of Desire* uses Dante's journey and Warhol's career as a framework, *Bob* (seen in London in 2001) is created from the words of Robert Wilson and scripted by Jocelyn Clarke who did the same for Virginia Woolf in *Room*.

## TRY THESE:

★MUSSMANN's *Civil War Chronicles* for questions as to how history is often perceived and conceived; ★FOREMAN, Nancy Reilly, Richard Schechner, Peter Sellars, the Wooster Group for other Americans engaged in the rearrangement of theatrical forms; ★BARTLETT and Ariane Mnouchkine for European parallels.

**BOGOSIAN, Eric** [1953 – ]  
American actor, dramatist and screenwriter

## PLAYS/MONOLOGUES INCLUDE:

*Men Inside* (1981), *Voices of America* (1982), *FunHouse* (1983), *Talk Radio* (1984), *Drinking in America* (1986), *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll* (1990), *SubUrbia* (1994), *Pounding Nails in the Floor with my Forehead* (1994), *31 Ejaculations* (1996), *Griller* (1998), *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* (2000), *Humpty Dumpty* (2002)

In *Talk Radio*, the late-night talk jockey Barry Champlain (Bogosian) asserts, 'This decadent country needs a loud voice – and that's me'. This voice, one that characterises much of Bogosian's work, offers various versions of the macho male in a political comedy context that exploits their stereotypical fictions and makes them real. The characters embrace attributes of greed and fear that encumber America's ego – the boastful, the phoney, the hypocritical. As philistines of a decaying culture, Bogosian's characters are caught in addiction and victimisation. At the same time as monologist Bogosian enacts the compulsive behaviour of the white American male, he strips bare his psyche. Bogosian has appeared in many films including Oliver Stone's version of *Talk Radio*.

## TRY THESE:

★SPALDING GRAY, and ★HOLLY HUGHES for trenchant use of the monologue; see also ★GODBER for the British macho male and ★POLIAKOFF's *City Sugar* for a decadent DJ.

**BOLGER, Dermot** [1959 – ]

Irish poet, novelist and dramatist

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Lament for Arthur Cleary* (1989), *Blinded by the Light* (1990), *In High Germany* (1990), *The Holy Ground* (1990), *One Last White Horse* (1991), *A Dublin Bloom* (1994, from James Joyce's *Ulysses*), *April Bright* (1996), *The Passion of Jerome* (1999), *Consenting Adults* (2000)

Bolger's initial success came as a novelist, his second book, *The Woman's Daughter* (1987) bringing him the AE Memorial Award, the Macaulay Fellowship and the Sunday Tribune Arts Award. His first stage play, *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* – based on his poem of the same name – was premiered to widespread critical acclaim at the Dublin Theatre Festival of 1989, picked up a Fringe First the following summer in Edinburgh and subsequently won the Samuel Beckett Award for Best First Play of that year.

After fifteen years away – bumming round Europe, putting down no roots – Arthur Cleary comes home. He feels the need to belong again, but the Dublin he has carried in his head and his heart is long gone. Not just the streets of his boyhood, but the neighbourhood ways and hierarchies have been swept aside by a new set of circumstances: drug trafficking on the pavements where Cleary was once cock o' the walk. Nowhere in his inner being, not even in the soft corners of his heart where he holds the love of a young girl he's just met, can Cleary accommodate that change. He meets his death – Celtic inevitability. Was that not, after all, the reason for his homecoming?

Bolger pinpoints the eternal baggage of the migrant and the exile – a fixed vision of a time and place when they themselves had rooted identity. It's common to all races, but with the Celts it's a particular shackle. At home or abroad they cannot let go of the past, centuries of it, albatross-like around their psyche. Hence *The Lament* – wild with heady, poetic imagery and yet tough with its spare, rapidly shifting scenario, fond with its regard for Arthur and sorrowing at the needless waste of a bright spirit.

Bolger's subsequent theatre work has continued to tackle many of the themes he raises

elsewhere in his writing. *April Bright* explores family life through juxtaposing the experiences of two families living in the same house half a century apart, and the ghostly theme is carried through in *The Passion of Jerome* where sexual shenanigans are interrupted by a poltergeist. *Consenting Adults* is a two-hander with a man and a woman role-playing in a hotel room, touching on themes of desire and identity.

**TRY THESE:**

★O'CASEY, ★SYNGE, for earlier issues within tightly knit communities; ★FRIEL, ★MURPHY, Graham Reid (with his Billy plays, set in modern Belfast) for modern parallels; ★O'NEILL'S *Anna Christie* has a nostalgia for the exiled Irishman; ★BRYDEN for Scottish parallels and contrasts; ★DYER, ★HORSFIELD for contrast to the football fans of In High Germany; ★COWARD'S *Blithe Spirit* for another unfortunate ghostly manifestation; ★KANE, ★PINTER, ★SHEPARD, ★SIMON for hotel encounters; ★MARIE JONES' *Stones in His Pockets* and ★MCCAFFERTY'S *Mojo Mickybo* for recent Irish two-handers.

**BOLT, Robert** [1924 – 95]

British dramatist and screenwriter

**PLAYS INCLUDE:**

*The Critic and the Heart* (1957), *Flowering Cherry* (1957), *A Man for All Seasons* (radio version 1954; staged 1960), *The Tiger and the Horse* (1960), *Gentle Jack* (1963), *The Thwarting of Baron Bolligrew* (1965, for children), *Vivat! Vivat Regina!* (1970), *State of Revolution* (1977)

A schoolteacher who began writing plays for children and then for radio, Bolt modelled *The Critic and the Heart* on ★MAUGHAM'S *The Circle*, while contemporary critics greeted *Flowering Cherry*, his first popular success, as Chekhovian. Its picture of an insurance salesman living among his own illusions has an edge of non-naturalism that contrasts with its largely conventional structure. Bolt continued to try out different theatrical forms, describing *A Man for All Seasons* as 'bastardised' ★BRECHT. *A Man for All Seasons* presents the conflict between Sir Thomas More and Henry VIII, and the title role gave Paul Scofield a triumph in both play and film. Here most

clearly is the thread that runs right through Bolt's work, of personal integrity, responsibility and the use of power. Actors and director are offered chances to create striking theatre and the play has proved a durable favourite

Bolt's involvement in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is reflected in *The Tiger and the Horse*, in which an academic wife has to decide whether to sign an anti-bomb petition although doing so will jeopardise her husband's elevation to Vice Chancellor of his university.

Bolt originally proposed that *Vivat! Vivat Regina!* should be given an *Oh What a Lovely War* pier-end-style presentation. It was intended to provide a meaty role for his wife, Sarah Miles, as Mary Queen of Scots, but he overwrote the part and the more sparsely written Elizabeth I is dominant in performance. *State of Revolution* attempts to present a political dialectic rather than a personal story but its hagiographic portrayal of Lenin against a complex revolutionary background does not come off as well as his Tudor portraits. His films have been more successful in handling epic themes. It would be good to see if *Gentle Jack*, drawing parallels between pagan folklore and capitalist mores with its onstage presentation of the god Pan and mixture of folk elements, theatrical effects and direct address to the audience could be made to work today.

#### TRY THESE:

★BRECHT, ★BRENTON, ★EDGAR, ★HARE, ★LITTLEWOOD, ★PETER SHAFFER for historical epics; ★BARNES for debunking history; for plays on anti-nuclear issues, ★BLESSING'S *A Walk in the Woods*, ★BRENTON'S *The Genius*, ★CLARK'S *The Petition*, ★DARKE'S *The Body*, Steven Dietz's *Fooling Around with Infinity*, ★FORNES' *The Danube*, ★FRAYN'S *Copenhagen* and ★LANFORD WILSON'S *Angels Fall*; ★LOWE for plays with an anti-war theme; ★EURIPIDES' *The Bacchae* for Dionysiac experiences and ★RUDKIN'S *Afore Night Come* for countryside rituals to parallel *Gentle Jack*.

## BOND, Edward

[1934 – ]

British dramatist

#### PLAYS INCLUDE:

*The Pope's Wedding* (1962), *Saved* (1965), *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1968), *Early Morning* (1968), *Black Mass* (1970), *Passion* (1971), *Lear* (1972), *The Sea* (1973), *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death* (1973), *The Fool: Scenes of Bread and Love* (1975), *Stone* (1976), *A-A-America* (1976), *Grandma Faust and The Swing*, *The Bundle* (1978), *The Woman* (1978), *The Worlds* (1979), *Restoration* (1981), *Summer* (1982), *Derek* (1983), *Choruses from after the Assassination* (1983), *Human Cannon* (1985), *The War Plays: A Trilogy* (1985, *Red, Black and Ignorant, Tin Can People, Great Peace*), *Burns* (1986), *September* (1989), *In the Company of Men* (1989), *Jackets* (1989), *Olly's Prison* (1993), *Tuesday* (1993), *Coffee: A Tragedy* (1995), *At the Inland Sea: A Play for Young People* (1997), *Eleven Vests* (1997), *Crime in the Twenty-First Century* (1999)

Bond, one of the most radical of dramatists, was once called 'the most important and controversial dramatist writing in Britain today'. Notorious for a scene in *Saved* in which a baby is stoned to death, he has consistently written from a Marxist perspective, and argues that the shock of such violent images is necessary to represent the violence that is done to people by capitalism.

Born in London, Bond left school at fourteen, worked in factories and offices, writing plays in his spare time, and sending them to the Royal Court. *Saved*, developed with the Writers' Group at the Court, was instrumental in ridding British theatre of the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. The theatre's attempt to stage the play under club conditions led to a prosecution, which showed that such conditions did not offer any protection from censorship. In 1968, The Theatres Act abolished the powers of the Lord Chamberlain, and *Saved* and *Narrow Road to the Deep North* were toured throughout Europe under the auspices of the British Council. *Black Mass* was written for the anti-apartheid movement; *Stone* for Gay Sweatshop; *Passion* was commissioned by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Many of Bond's plays offer



*Saved* by Edward Bond, directed by Bill Gaskill, Royal Court Theatre, 1968. (Morris Newcombe/ArenaPAL)