

*English Drama Since 1940* By David Ian Rabey  
Chapter 12: A Blasted F\*\*\*ing Differences? : The 1990 and  
Beyond the Big Zeroes: An Article Review<sup>1</sup>

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English Drama Since 1940 is a book written by David Ian Rabey in 2003. It is divided into twelve chapters. It mainly tackles the most prominent, dynamic, wide-ranging and ground-breaking era of English drama, since the times of Shakespeare and the Renaissance till the present days. It also sheds light on such foremost playwrights as Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Harold Pinter (1930-2008), John Osborne (1929-1994), Arnold Wesker (1932-2016), Edward Bond (1934), etc.

The writer in chapter 12 spotlights modern and postmodern plays. In 1990 England witnessed many challenging changes on many levels like the economic, political, and social level. The conservative party led by Thatcher and her successor John Major's popularity declined due to many reasons i.e. the Poll Tax, financial, and sexual corruption caused the rejection of the people to their reign. As a result, the labor leader Tony Blair and under the slogan of "A New Britain" could easily win the elections. He promised his citizens a new prosperous life that may secure the life of every individual.

It is worth noting that the mysterious death of Princess Diana also affected the royal system at that time. In 1998 "The Good Friday Agreement" took place between England and Ireland for the sake of unity between the two countries. During the time of the political, economic, and social upheaval, theatre played a pivotal role in arousing the people's awareness towards creating their "National Aesthetic Creation". In 2001, Blair won for the second time the election in England and George Bush became the president of the United States who announced the war against Islamic countries like Afghanistan and Iraq after 11<sup>th</sup> of September as a reaction to fight terrorism. For all American and European people Muslims are to be considered terrorists and should be punished by all means, therefore war was waged against them severely.

- The Terrible Force of Inconsequence:

In 1990, a group of modern British dramatists devoted their works to present literary works that are mainly concerned in the issues of the modern human predicaments like alienation, isolation, pessimism, and sense of meaninglessness namely Martin Crimp's *The Treatment*. The play discusses "spiritual plunder acted by a blinded man committed to taxi with blind driver". Worth mentioning, that Beckett and Pinter influenced the modern dramatists in their "naturalistic or socially realistic situation". The other dramatist is George Motton whose plays are characterized by "Dark Surrealism" like *Ambulance*, and *Downfall*. Like Motton, Penhall tackles the themes of harsh survival in the social obstacles i.e. dramatic situations and disintegration. He asks a main question "what is the rational response to life's chaos". *The Pale Horse* portrays the existence of a man after the death of his wife. Another dramatist whose work shows close affinity to Motton's works is Steven Jeffrey who wrote *The Clink* satirically. Cris Hanna and David Harrows,

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Scottish playwrights, who wrote plays about the self-quest of the characters via “the power of language in undermining and constructing versions of self”.

-Coming Closer:

In 2001 *Yer-Face* theater was initiated based mainly on experiential ideas in the sense that it investigates the binary oppositions of human life like hate/love, poor/rich, revenge/ forgiveness, and much other opposition. This kind of theater traces the existential question in every play. Aleks Sierz drama falls under this division in which he also tries to indulge the spectator in the play and triggers their potentials by discussing many crucial issues and even taboos. Also, Sierz plays are not dogmatized and complex named “Victim Drama” since these plays has ambiguous ideas and cruxes beneath their layers. Philip Ridley attempted to use “the melodrama elements in postmodernist way” the characters of his plays carry powerful names that may suggest their spiritual and psychological power, yet they are devastated and lost due to the Beckttian adaptation of the playwright in his plays. He is also interested in the theater of the children and wrote very brilliant stories.

The Scottish dramatist and director is Anthony Neilson who believed in the passive role of T.V. and Radio and believed in the importance of the stage and how drama may affect deeply the spectators. His literary works were first performed in theater of Edinburgh. One of his literary works is *Normal* 1991 tackled the story of a serial killer and a psychologist who endeavors to figure out the scientific and medical reasons behind these ill-behaviors. Also, he wrote *The censor* 1997 a very well-known play in which he uses new vocabes, structure, and distinguished language. *Mojo Jez* 1995 presented the idea of violence similarly to those of Neilson’s play especially against kids. Additionally the theme of war gangs is also discussed in terms of black comedy i.e. rock & roll the character works in night club who faces problems with his jealous manger as he gains fame and money.

Mark Rivenhall is the prominent dramatist whose works classified under the division of comedy of manners and dark social satire i.e. conspiracies, double meaning, physical relations, mixing the upper and lower classes, forgery, and other themes. *Fucking and Shopping* 1996 is his first and controversial play which was very shocking and astonishing for the first time when it was premiered. Kind of play some accept it whereas others reject it due to the bold way of tackling issues i.e. physical abuse for teens on part of men. The sadistic activities practiced in the performance on the stage that may affect the audience deeply. The play characterized by its Marxist ideas and the playwright presents for the first time gay charcters. *Faust is Dead* mirrors the British society at the time of nineties and time alters and changes. The circumstances of the life at that time were deeply impacted by the technological advancement and its reflection upon individuals. Sierez like Ravenhall states the digital revolution and disconnection of people in life and their connection online led to a sense of inhumanity. People turned simply into machines. The net is something indispensable for them, yet it ruined many beautiful things.

-The Mark of Kane : How Shall We Die

Modern British theater differs from that of the previous generations in its new and controversial strategies in presenting topics that were considered taboos in the British society. In Sarah Kane’s *In-Yer-Face* theater, which is considered “the disgusting feast of filth,” she presents a dark world characterized by horrific crimes are being committed against society while the rest of the world turns its head from these crimes. Thus, Kane’s play, *Blasted* (1995) is experiential drama and address audience to arouse their awareness and expect them to react with the play. It portrays violence in general whether it is physical, psychological, domestic or the violence resulted in and from war, rape, madness or homosexual relations. Aleks Sierz, the most profound in-yer-face scholar, points out that “In-yer-face takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves, provoking alarm and making the audience take notice”. Kane’s *Blasted* is her land mark play that shock and terrify the audience when staged for the first time. Ian and Cate who are physically “consumed by aggregation” on stage. In *Blasted* many obscene things happen on the stage to reflect the ugliness of life i.e. act of war and physical one as well.

Another play entitled *Cleansed* 1998 in which it is set in the university and a group of young people trying to save themselves via love. Tinker is a drug dealer who sells drugs to those students and as a result one of the students takes an overdose which causes his death namely Graham. In the play Kane deals openly with homosexual characters like Rod and Carl. Incestuous relations between brothers and sisters who might be considered as breaking all the taboos in England as a conservative society are presented as well. Kane and Rivenhill dealt with characters defined by their

systematic degradation like that of sexual abuse. Kane's drama shock the audience in the sense that the impact of the play would be carved in their minds and hearts.

Finally, the chapter exerts innumerable British literary works in the nineties that deal with unconventional themes, ideas, symbols, and other aesthetic considerations which stirred the audience feelings and turned all the theatrical norms upside down. The audience is no more being didactically conducted by the performance rather he is part of the work that should take clear cut stand and react intuitively with and against the play.

-Rabey, David. English Drama since 1940. London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003.