

# **Representations of Children, Families and Neo-families in British Theatre 1993-2001**

***“...It’s not an ordinary family”***  
**(*Phaedra’s Love*: Kane 2001)**

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## Declaration of Authorship

I Selina Busby hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Selina Busby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' at the beginning.

Date: 30 September 2013.

## Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that a number of new British plays written in the period between 1993 and 2001 demonstrate that the 'normalised' family unit, which has been taken as "common sense," is a social construct. I will outline how plays written during this period invite audiences to reconsider family structures and provide critical perspectives on the dominant ideology of 'family' life. I suggest that this critical perspective paves the way for the conceiving of alternative structures, and in so doing, argue that these plays offer a utopic vision.

This thesis considers the family as a "mythical entity" that works as a unit of social control, political aspiration and regulation. I argue that British plays written during this time period represent an alternative in the form of what I shall call a neo-family structure. I suggest that the plays discussed in this thesis are inherently political in nature, in that they frame contemporary issues associated with family and neo-family structures and invite a reading of them that displays the social structures of governmentality. I outline the ways in which adherence to this traditional family structure can be seen as dangerous to its individual members, especially the children, who live within these arrangements.

I also propose that these British plays demonstrate that this governmentality, or self-regulation, when taken to an extreme, results in the loss of feelings for both the self and others, ultimately leading to a complete global breakdown involving a personal passive acceptance of violence that will perpetuate both mental and physical abuse. I argue that the form and content of these plays work synergistically to enable the audience to link representation of personal or domestic situations directly to the deployment of ideology and state power. I consider the way in which British playwrights represent the boundaries created by the family home, while simultaneously analysing the utopian endeavours of escape from these spaces. I use Edward Bond's plays for young people as an exemplar for a theatre that poses questions and invites audiences to conceive alternative ways of living.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

***'...It's not an ordinary family'***

**(Phaedra's Love: Kane 2001)**

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1993, two year old James Bulger was led out of a shopping centre in Merseyside by two primary school children. The following day, CCTV footage was released showing that Bulger had been taken by the hand by two older boys to his death. The two boys were arrested for Bulger's murder on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February and, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 1993, after a 17-day trial, the two 11 year olds were convicted and sentenced to the juvenile equivalent of life imprisonment. In June of 2001, both boys were released with new identities. The CCTV images released at the time of Bugler's disappearance became iconic, both of the crime itself and of broader concerns about childhood and the institution of the family in Britain during the Nineties.

The Bulger trial and the subsequent exposure of both the Thompson and Venables families thrust the private family into the public sphere and opened up the institution of the family for public scrutiny at a new heightened level. This thesis will be framed by the period between the year of James Bugler's kidnapping in 1993 and the year 2001, when the two boys who killed him were released.

This time period coincides with a controversial era of British theatre during which many playwrights wrote provocative and confrontational plays. Here, I will argue that a significant number of these plays focused on representations of both childhood and families that invited a reading of them as being social constructs in need of a critical perspective. The concept of the family, which has been featured both as context and subject on the British stage, has long been a topic of debate in the history of British theatre, from the pre-second world war drawing room dramas, to the kitchen sink dramas of the Fifties and Sixties, to the state-of-nation plays of the Seventies and to plays that centred on identity politics in the Eighties. I believe that during the Nineties following the

Bulger murder, the family, with its heightened media visibility, became a focus of more intense scrutiny on the British stage. In this thesis, I will explore the way that family units are represented and interrogated in the plays of the period and consider how they raise questions about the 'normal' family.

Many of the plays of this period demonstrate that the nuclear family remains an ideal; however, one that may bring disastrous consequences for the individuals. These plays question the nuclear family unit, and I suggest that when this family model is accepted as the norm or where it is naturalised, a number of issues regarding the safety of children are raised. I found that each play deconstructs the family unit by providing a critique and inviting a reconsideration of the unit. Here, I demonstrate that the plays of this period emphasise and implicitly critique the construct of the family. The thesis will therefore consider the political nature of theatre and its commentary on the nature of family. I will provide a reading of a number of British plays suggesting that a new form of family, or a neo-family, is conceived as a utopian alternative to the widely adopted nuclear family structure.

### **Family Terms**

In the following chapters, this thesis examines five types of family units: the nuclear family, the single lone parent family, the core family, the blended family and the neo-family. The nuclear family is a household comprised of two parents and their dependent children living together. Shelagh Stephenson's play, *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000), as discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis, is an example of the nuclear family. In this play, Billy and Susan are the parents living with their two daughters. I extend the use of this term to households in which the parents are cohabiting, rather than just using it for situations in which the parents are married.

The single lone parent family is a household comprised of one adult parent and one or more children living together. In scene one of Stephenson's play, *Billy*, the father, is killed, which alters the structure of the family into one in which a mother lives with her dependent daughters, making it a single lone parent family. In the period under discussion, this type of family was often focused upon by politicians and journalists because teenage mothers or unmarried lone mothers were bringing up children. In this thesis, I make no distinction between these categories, making the family in *Five Kinds of Silence* a single lone parent family, just as the Marie and baby Boo characters become members of a single lone parent family at the end of Rebecca Prichard's *Yard Gal* (1997). A core family is a household which includes a nuclear family that is extended to include grandparents. I am borrowing the term 'core family' from sociologists Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris, who describe this family unit as being:

Built around the central balance between two sides of the family, linked through marriage to a common set of grandchildren (Rosser and Harris: 1965, 226).

I also use this term when discussing families, such as the one found in Caryl Churchill's *Heart's Desire* (1997), in which only one or some of the grandparents live within the household.

An extension of the core family constitutes the 'kinship family,' in which a number of related people choose to live together. McGlone et al describe a 'kin universe' that may contain "between 37 and 246 people;" from this larger 'kin universe' people select the "kin with whom people had close personal relationships. The basis of this personal selectivity was emotional attachment rather than formalized ties" (McGlone: 1999, 141). For example, the characters of Esme and Shaz in Sarah Daniels' play, *The Madness of Emse and Shaz* (1994), as discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis, form a 'kinship family'. Although the two characters are aunt and niece, they form a family relationship "based on mutual aid and support" (McGlore et al: 1999, 141).

A blended family is a household which has a more diverse structure that includes step-parents or step-siblings, as exhibited in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996). The term blended family is used by the sociologists Joanna Bornat, Brian Dimmock, David Jones and Shelia Peace in their 1999 essay entitled 'The impact of family change on older people: the case of stepfamilies.' In this work, they reject the labels of 'stepfamilies,' 'reconstituted or reformed families' and 'divorce extended families' for the term 'blended families.' This term succinctly seems to encompass a range of family structures that involve dependent children and parental figures who may or may not be related by blood, but who are a blend of two or more biological families.

The final family form I discuss in this thesis is the 'neo-family,' which is a broader sense of a family form that McGlore et al might describe as 'fictive kin'. They use this term to describe friendships that have lasted over long periods of time in which care and support is offered by non-related groups of adults (McGlore: 1999, 154). Sociologists Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan describe 'fictive kin' as being where:

the term 'family' is being used...in the broadest sense. It might embrace domestic patterns which include care for children or other dependents, but that is not the exclusive meaning. More generally it is used to include friends and partners as well as blood relatives (Weeks et al: 1999, 304).

They develop their argument by emphasizing that these 'fictive kin' are friendship circles that provide the "life-line that the biological family it, is believed, should provide, but often cannot or will not" (Weeks et al: 1999, 304). While this term might be useful, it "still assumes the blood family as the starting point" (Weeks et al: 1999, 305). In this thesis, I am using the term neo-family to include families that may include blood relatives, but more often than not, do not. The young story tellers in Philip Ridley's *Sparkleshark* (1997) constitute a neo-family which does include a biological brother and a sister, however, the neo-family consisting of Lulu, Mark and Robbie at the end of Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) does not include any blood relatives.

I suggest that the neo-family is presented and offered for consideration in the new theatrical writing of this period as an alternative family structure to the nuclear family. At the centre of these works a series of questions are posed about the meaning of family today. This is a progressive notion of the family, which does not depend on the exclusion of all forms of otherness. There is an inherent danger in the continued use of the word family to denote possible alternative structures encapsulated in the term neo-family, as the term is emotive; however, its ambiguity makes it an accurate designation. Sociologists Malcolm Hill and Kay Tisdall observe that:

In virtually all cultures, family has conventionally referred to a group of people to whom a person is related through birth or marriage. A distinction had commonly been made between the 'nuclear family', consisting of parents and children, and the 'extended family' or wider kin network, which includes grandparents, cousins and so on. However, this is an oversimplified picture, especially in view of recent changes in social mores and household patterns (Hill and Tisdall: 1997, 65).

I believe the term neo-family addresses this 'oversimplification' and continue to use the term family along with sociologists Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan, arguing that it suggests the "sort of values and comforts that the family unit is supposed to embody, even if it regularly fails to do so: continuity over time, emotional and material support, ongoing commitment, and intense engagement" (Weeks et al: 2001, 10).

The concept of family is fluid and ever changing due to the "impact of long-term social, cultural and economic shifts" (Weeks et al: 2001, 4). These shifts and the ambiguous "wider kin network" definition of the word family enables it to be extended to encompass a network of choice, or families of choice, whereby "relationships are more flexible, informal and varied, but are strong and supportive networks of friends and lovers," while providing "a framework for the development of mutual care, responsibility and commitment" (Weeks et al: 2001, 4). Weeks et al identify that "emerging non-heterosexual ways of being can be seen as

indices of something new: positive and creative response to social and cultural change” (Weeks et al: 2004, 5). Sociologist Anthony Giddens uses the term “experiments in living” to describe these relationships (Giddens: 1992,14). I call these “experiments in living” neo-families, and believe they are the creation of alternative and non-oppressive family forms. These are networks of relationships based on friendship and commitments that generate a sense of belonging, support and security. They provide both emotional and economic support. These neo-families are therefore, I suggest, indispensable frameworks for negotiating everyday life and are an emotionally supportive network of adults and sometimes children, living together.

I shall use the term neo-family to describe what might be described as families of choice. The neo-family is a *new* way of conceiving ‘family’ that offers the individuals who are part of it mutual involvement and support with shared responsibilities, while acknowledging and realising individual needs. This thesis, therefore, examines the diverse range of family forms presented to audiences through the period of 1993-2001.

The thesis sets out to explore the ways that family and neo-family units are represented and the ways in which playwrights have engaged audiences with questions surrounding the family. It explores the way in which performance frames ideas of the family and the neo-family by inviting audiences to engage critically with familiar, and not so familiar, conceptions of family life. In this regard I am reading the family in all its forms as being integral to a political reading of the plays. I believe that the concept of the neo-family is one that challenges the naturalisation of the nuclear family and therefore challenges the status-quo, which in turn makes the neo-family a political concept. I suggest that in the plays discussed here audiences are invited to question the nature of family structures and are therefore positioned as meaning makers and agents for social change, which makes these plays inherently political. As a result of this intention, this thesis does not deconstruct issues of class, gender, sexuality or race with regard to the familial. My concern here is

to focus on the constructed and political nature of the nuclear, extended and neo family unit. It is clear that class, gender, sexuality and race are all important areas of consideration with regard to social living arrangements and that there is scope for interpreting the role of each separately within the theatre of this period, or any other period. It is also clear that further research is needed into these categories, both as separate concerns and as interrelated factors. Here, I have taken a more integrated approach that acknowledges the importance of each, but also recognises the interrelated nature of each category whereby characters are representations of more than one status group and which focuses on my reading of the neo-family, and the plays of the period, as being inherently political.

### **‘The State of Play’ or Political Theatre in the Nineties**

‘The State of Play’ was the title of a conference convened in 1991 by the playwright David Edgar to examine, what he described as, the “exponential decline in the amount, quality and performance of new work in British theatre” (Edgar: 1999, ii). Much debate surrounded the demise of British political theatre in the early Nineties. I argue in this thesis that far from being in decline, political theatre flourished in this period, as there were considerable changes to both its structure and focus.

In *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (2003), Michael Patterson asserts that: “all theatre is political:”

it is impossible to parade characters interacting socially in front of a public assembled to witness these relationships without there being some political content. Thus even the silliest farce or most innocuous musical will reflect some ideology, usually that of the Establishment. In this sense, all theatre is indeed political (Patterson: 2003, 3).

He clarifies the term ‘political theatre’ to be a theatre that “not only depicts social interaction and political events, but implies the possibility of radical change on socialist lines” (Patterson: 2003, 4-5). Much of the new writing for theatre produced between the years of 1993 – 2001

depicts “social interaction and political events” and in doing so infers that radical change is possible, and even necessary. This positions the audience as being potential agents for change, as opposed to instigators, because these plays leave the possibilities open to the interpretation and imagination of the audience. This in itself is potentially political because the onus for change resides with the audience. My thinking is in line with Joe Kelleher, who argues in his text *Theatre & Politics* (2009) that “there is no guarantee that ...the carefully constructed political messages will be understood” (2009, 24). If the “political messages” are understood, transformation does not automatically follow, as Amelia Howe Kritzer states in her book *Political Theatre in post-Thatcher Britain*, “theatre cannot compel change” (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 15). Theatre may not be able to compel change, but it may open space for dialogue and therefore, make change a possibility.

In *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, Richard Eyre and Nicolas Wright claim, when discussing David Hare’s trilogy of the early Nineties, that these plays were “a crowning moment in the life of the National Theatre.” They state that the plays *Racing Demon* (1990), *Murmuring Judges* (1991) and *The Absence of War* (1993) all “ask the questions: How does a good person change people’s lives for the better? Can an institution established for common good avoid being devoured by its own internal struggles and contradictions?” (Eyre and Wright: 2000, 292). The plays in Hare’s trilogy are categorised by Eyre and Wright as ‘state-of-the-nation’ plays. These political plays, which became popular during the Seventies, considered the political landscape of Britain and according to Graham Saunders “attempted to make sense of the grand sweep of history” (D’Monte and Saunders: 2008, 3). Largely written with a socialist agenda, these were plays which, according to playwright David Edgar, were the “political plays of the Seventies and which ‘pursued’:

...elements of a single grand narrative which very roughly went like this: Britain had been on the right side in the war against Hitler, but had squandered its moral capital afterwards. There’d been a chance after the war to create a genuine egalitarian,

emancipator socialism, but it was implemented too half-heartedly by the 1945-51 Labour government and the opportunity was lost. The country then held a kind of party in the 1950s and 1960s, squandering its post-imperial riches, and in the 1970s had gone into free-fall political, economic and moral decline, at the end of which, it was assumed, final collapse would occur and 'true socialism' would emerge phoenix-like from the ashes (Edgar: 1999, 7-8).

In *Theatre & Nation* (2010), Nadine Holdsworth argues that critics use the term state-of-the-nation play to describe performances that reveal the nation to be in crisis:

In general terms, the state-of-the-nation play deploys representations of personal events, family structures and social or political organisations as a microcosm of the nation-state to comment directly or indirectly on the ills befalling society, on key narratives of nationhood or on the state-of-the-nation as it wrestles with changing circumstances (Holdsworth: 2010, 39).

Earlier in this book, Holdsworth states that the "raison d'être of most state-of-the-nation-plays is to explicitly critique the nation" (Holdsworth: 2010, 7). Dan Rebellato, writing in 'From the state-of-the-nation to Globalization' (2008), argues that historically state-of-the-nation-plays "often diagnose an imbalance of nation and state as a primary ill." Both Holdsworth and Rebellato are critiquing the place of the state-of-the-nation-play in the Nineties and in a world of globalization, arguing that the place of the 'nation state' is now questionable. Holdsworth argues that the playwrights of the period "ironically, satirically and creatively deploy national iconography to undermine and destabilise the homogenous national image in their work" (Holdsworth: 2010, 7).

During the period discussed, the idea of a homogenous nation was scrutinised. In the 1960s, Althusser described the role of ideological status apparatus and their role in governmental power structures. In the Seventies and Eighties, Foucault's discussions were focused around a decentred power structure. Both theorists were living in an age when the nation state and its authority were unquestionable. In the early Nineties, this was no longer the case. The concepts of state and nation become uncoupled or in Rebellato's words "unbundled" (2008, 251). Rebellato

describes the nation state as a geographical building block, in which the state is a unit of public political organisation bearing responsibility for justice, reason and law, while the nation binds people together through shared temperament, language, history culture and landscape. Jen Harvie, author of *Staging the UK*, argues that:

A state is the political authority that asserts power; but a nation is a sense that people share a culture, a culture that may or may not be coterminous with the state borders (Harvie: 2005, 2).

In the late Nineties, the concept of the nation state changed, being affected by “globalization, devolution, multiculturalism, identity politics, multilingualism, and new technologies,” all having “a profound effect on the meaning of nation” (Holdsworth: 2010, 38). Both nations and states are man-made concepts, like that of the family, which change with time. Borders can arbitrarily be drawn and redrawn. In the year 1997, the United Kingdom withdrew from Hong Kong and New Labour, through regional assemblies and elected mayors, brought about political devolution, which was followed in 1999 by the Devolution Acts. Changes in both the global economy and new technologies made geographical borders more porous and the idea of an ideological state apparatus even more porous with them.

During the Nineties, there was much debate about the decline of British political theatre. Vera Gottlieb claimed that “if the Eighties demonstrated a search for a language of opposition, then the plays of the Nineties seemed to have moved even further away from political opposition and to have given up any attempt to engage with significant public issues” (Gottlieb and Chambers: 1999, 212).

Aleks Sierz, writing in his 2012 book of *Modern British Playwriting*, asserts that:

...despite [David] Hare’s success, the decade was characterised by a decline in political theatre; the most typical examples of new writing by new playwrights all focused on the personal rather than the political (Sierz: 2012: 40).

This focus on the personal as political was particularly poignant in a time of such global and international political change. Rather than offering theatre audiences' plays that neatly outlined the problems and offered solutions, the writers of the Nineties were suggesting problems and allowing audiences to find their own alternatives. Klaus Peter Muller argues that the most striking characteristic of the plays of this period "is their outspoken depiction of a remarkably rude, violent and destructive world and their lack of suggesting alternatives" (2002, 15). These playwrights, with their 'lack of alternatives,' invited the audience to imagine what those alternatives might be. Patrice Pavis argues in his essay on Ravenhill and Durringer that "we have left behind the time of revolutionary utopias and have embarked on a period of reformism, of economic liberalism and of stupefying global consumerism" (Pavis: 2010, 5). The new writing of the Nineties 'left behind' the ideologically based theatre of the previous decades in favour of political plays that invited audiences to define their own utopias, or plays where at least change seemed possible.

Writing about his plays in 2008, playwright David Greig states that:

truly political theatre was theatre of any type that created a world in which change is possible. I wanted to get away from theatre that proposed dialectical solutions in the old left-wing tradition and offer a theatre that tore at the fabric of reality and opened up the multiple possibilities of the imagination (Greig: 2008, 212).

Many of the new and established playwrights producing work between 1993 and 2001 'tore at the fabric of reality and opened up the possibilities of the imagination' for audiences. The time of the state-of-the-nation play was over, as playwrights took a new direction and a new style in order to draw attention to social issues. In this regard, my thinking draws on the work of Jon Erickson, who states in his essay entitled 'Defining Political Performance with Foucault and Habermas', that:

There are many who would claim that performance is "inherently" political; I disagree with the unequivocal nature of this claim. But I believe that much of theatrical performance engages ethical

judgements that can be appropriated for a political purpose by its audience (Erickson: 2003, 183).

To accomplish this, playwrights emphasise and exhibit social structures and contemporary concerns using techniques that display the structures of government, society and the state. In this thesis, I am interested in how this display leads the audience to question the potential role of the family as a unit of control, and how they are encouraged to see the family as self-policing.

An audience's capacity to critically engage with theatre is a contested area of theatre scholarship. In this thesis, I demonstrate how performance frames ideas of the family and the neo-family which invite a critical engagement with the familiar and the not so familiar. I suggest that the plays discussed here represent the *neo-family*, a structure that challenges conventional expectations of the family, thereby representing a form of utopia. Here I am using Paul Ricoeur's definition of utopia. In *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), Ricoeur does not use the word utopia to mean a dream or the hope of a better place, but rather the desire to change reality. He claims 'the utopia is not only a dream, it is a dream that wants to be realised. And so the intention of the utopia is to change – to shatter – the present order' (Ricoeur: 1986, xxi). He explains that the 'social imagination' sees what is and can critique it and from this point can then configure a utopia or "productive imagining of something else, from this elsewhere it is possible to look back to where we have come from and re-examine the present, which now looks strange and open up the field of the possible" (Ricoeur: 1986, 266). In this thesis, I argue that the role of theatre is to open this field of the possible and that through it audiences might see beyond the real to a field for the creation of "an alternative way of living" (Ricoeur: 1986, 16), or specifically an alternative way of living in social groups (i.e., the neo-family).

I argue that the plays I consider in the following chapters make a political commentary on the decade and look to the future towards finding alternatives. I am interested in exploring these possible alternatives and

in reading the plays as a statement of optimism. I am specifically interested in the way that they deinstitutionalise the family relationship by providing the space from which to critique the ideological circle that makes the family unit a given. Ricoeur states that “fictions are interesting not when they are mere dreams outside of reality, but when they shape a new reality (Ricoeur: 1986, 309). In the chapters that follow, I outline the methods that the playwrights and theatre productions used in order to attempt to “shape a new reality.”

I argue that in the Nineties, the theatre of the period demonstrated that the systems and institutions of family life were failing, and yet the family also appeared to be unescapable. It was a time which called for a “new reality,” or at least alternatives. Drawing on the work of both Michel Foucault and Jacques Donzelot, I suggest that in some circumstances the concept of the family could be seen as “the outcome of the exercise of power” (Knowles: 1996 30-31). In doing so, I suggest that it may influence people by providing an ideal or archetype to which individual members strive towards and to which they also adhere. Writing in Foucauldian terms, Nikolas Rose suggests that this historically gives the family a “vital role in eliminating illegality, curbing inebriety, and restricting promiscuity, imposing restrictions upon the unbridled sensualities of adults and inculcating morality into children” (Rose: 1989, 128). In this thesis, I demonstrate that the British theatre of this period both emphasizes and implicitly critiques the construct of the family, revealing it to be a unit of control and Conservative political aspiration. I argue that the plays considered here suggest that when the family is accepted as a norm or where it is naturalised, a number of issues are raised: firstly, that the family promotes the kind of self-improvement that appears to be focused on the individual, but in fact promotes the ideological position of those in power during the period; secondly, that the privileging of the family unit necessitates an environment whereby those living outside the family structure are marginalised; and thirdly, that official structures of power can be utilised to support the status quo. I also consider the possibilities of alternative family structures, for in my

readings of the plays of this period, it is possible to see a variety of family forms and living arrangements, or neo-families.

Chapter Two discusses the period of the Nineties in order to set the context for the remainder of the thesis, starting with an outline of the political rhetoric of the period (as related to families), then moving on to look at the theatre of the period and lastly the political landscape. In Chapter Three, I consider how theatre audiences are positioned to consider representations of the family and encouraged to contemplate radical alternatives. The plays I discuss in this thesis frame and exhibit contemporary issues and a variety of non-naturalistic techniques that openly display the structures of government, society and the state are used in such a way that the audience is led to question technologies of domination. The audiences' ability to critically engage with theatre is a contested area of theatre scholarship, as debates are framed by a variety of theories and vocabularies. Here, I attempt to demonstrate how performance frames ideas of the family, including the neo-family, by constructing a critical engagement with the familiar and the not so familiar.

Chapter Four focuses on how concepts of the family are deconstructed. I provide a reading of five plays, each which offer a critique on an aspect of the family. Chapter Five includes the sociologist Chris Jenks' analysis of infants, suggesting that they are "regarded as indices of the contemporary state of the social structure" for the late Nineties and early 2000's (Jenks: 1996, 59). This chapter focuses on three plays, each of which contains a depiction of a baby or infant who are shown in a variety of states of suffering and death. In each case, the characters demonstrate a willingness to remain together as a family unit at the expense of the life of an infant. Chapter Five concludes with a consideration of how children are taught to be 'responsible citizens.' I argue that elements of social optimism are also present in the theatre of this period and that there is hope amidst devastation and catastrophe. In doing so, I am traversing a line between the pessimism presented in the

plays discussed and the optimism to be found within them, as epitomized by the use of representations of babies as both commodities and symbols of hope, as I begin to explore how the concept of the 'neo-family' arises from dysfunctional domestic normalcy with an internal optimism and practical utopianism.

In Chapter Six, I consider images of adolescents and teenagers in families and neo-families. A surprising number of these children are portrayed as wise and knowledgeable in the plays discussed in the chapter and, as such, they are contemporary representations of children described by Rousseau and the Romantic poets as possessing special qualities and an 'original innocence'. Here I discuss the child characters as symbols of goodness, which the family members seek to eradicate as part of the course of their education into the adult world. In this chapter, I ask what happens when this self-regulation is taken to an extreme and consider the wider political significance of doing so. I ask if the plays discussed suggest alternative social structures to the dystopic futures presented in them.

In Chapter Seven, I argue that self-regulation, when taken to an extreme, results in a personal loss of feelings for both oneself and others, which leads directly to violence. In the plays discussed here, this loss of feeling results in a passive acceptance of violence on an individual level that perpetuates mental and physical abuse. The chapter considers the idea that the home environment is not automatically a safe space, and that for some it may become a place of danger. I argue that the 'family home' fails to protect those within its walls from dangers both from inside the home and from outsiders. The chapter ends with a consideration of elements in these plays which suggest that the neo-family structures created by young people may offer a utopian alternative to the dystopic futures presented in the plays discussed in the previous chapter. I argue that the neo-families presented offer a utopian alternative to the family structure that encourages a lack of integrity, compassion and humanness.

In Chapter Eight, I consider the way in which playwrights represented the boundaries created by constructs of the family home and use of space as a socially constructing concept. This section also considers the ideological space the family occupies. This raises questions about the relationship between the idea of the family and 'home'. In discussing this relationship, I draw upon the 1991 work of Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (translated into English), and the way in which spaces are constructed through their social practices. I suggest that the nuclear family home can be described as a conceived space, which is produced in ways that conform to dominant social values, while also appearing to be natural and benign. In this section, I consider representations of family homes, which are far from benign for the individuals who live within them.

In this chapter, I conclude with an analysis of how the characters' attempts to escape from home represent a utopianism by considering representations of characters who choose to remain within the family 'home,' but find the space to evade its disciplinary structures and control; those who wish to flee the constraints of the family home, but remain within its boundaries; those who are forced to move outside the walls of the family home and those who choose to find an alternative social structure that represents their vision of utopia. This section presents characters that reinvent social structures and form collectives. It also considers neo-family relationships as utopias. Here, my discussion, which includes Ricoeur's theories on the social imagination of utopia, is expanded upon, drawing on Ricoeur's notion that a "fundamental structure of the reflexivity we may apply to our own social roles is the ability to conceive of an empty place from which to look at ourselves" (Ricoeur: 1986, 15). This chapter therefore considers the ways in which theatre may contribute to the conception of this 'empty place.'

In Chapter Nine I focus on the plays of Edward Bond, which I use as an example of the concept of a utopian reflexive theatre in which the

audience may become agents for change, and where alternatives to current social structures can be explored. Bond's writing for young people is explicitly intended to be used as an educational tool to encourage and develop a sense of responsibility for both the individual and society. Chapter Nine, therefore, considers the ways in which Bond's theatre for young people is used to examine the concept of humanity and expose the Foucauldian concepts of power over human beings being developed through disciplinary and regulatory techniques, particularly those of the family and education system. It concludes with a discussion centred on his young protagonists, who I believe are primed to restructure their social living arrangements, and the manner in which this may open up the 'field of the possible' for audiences.

## Chapter Two: The Nineties

***'A thousand families...self-contained flats....connecting walkways...public galleries and space...structure...A family in each flat.'***

*(The Architect: Grieg 2002)*

### **Thatcher's Children**

Sociologists and social scientists have established that the family is a social concept rather than a natural development. This means that the definitions of what constitutes a family have been subject to change within different historical contexts (Donzelot 1979, Barrett & McIntosh 1982, Rose 1989, Shapiro 2001). Yet conformity to the “fictitious universality” of the family and the normalisation of this concept persists.

As a result, according to the political scientist Michael Shapiro:

Fictional forms [of family] dominate contemporary understandings of family life. And, more specifically, the conjugal, patriarchal, heteronormal family, which historical evidence shows to be a “regulative fiction than a reality”, is a mythical entity shaping the contemporary conservative, family values movement (Shapiro: 2001, 5).

During the Nineties, the United Kingdom saw a display of concern for the nature of this ‘mythical entity’ or family relationships, which was influenced by the ‘family values movement’ and that was played out in both political rhetoric and the media. This interest in the domestic manifested itself in a number of public debates and political speeches within the period. *The Independent* reported that at the Conservative Party Conference in October 1992, Peter Lilley told fellow party members that “We Conservatives believe in the family. It is the most important institution in society” (MacIntyre: 1992). This comes as no surprise, for the Conservative Party defines itself as the party of ‘the family’. For the New Right, the traditional, self-reliant, patriarchal nuclear family is the central social institution. In her first speech in the 1983 election campaign, Margaret Thatcher proclaimed that the previous Labour government had undermined education, the economy and the family. Throughout the Eighties and early Nineties the family fell under the

spotlight of both the media and party politics, as fears for the dissolution of family life were equated with fears for the dissolution of society. This in turn led to moral panics characterised by the tabloid press as being centred on absentee parents, video and computer game ‘nasties’, ‘dole scroungers’ and a host of other moral mores. Whilst this inclination was not restricted to this era, during this period the debates around social and political affairs were surrounded by the discourses of the New Right, which heightened public discussion around the issues of the family and children. In the face of global recession and technological advances, the family unit became heavily implicated in the New Right’s vision for restructuring the British economy. Rising levels of unemployment throughout the Eighties created a sense of social insecurity, while placing increasing demands on the welfare system; this in turn enabled the Conservative government to articulate a hegemonic project utilizing moral imperatives. The economic decline placed a burden on the welfare system and this came to be seen, according to sociologists Karen Winter and Paul Connolly, as a moral decline “associated in the first instance with ‘our’ over reliance on the state and the loss of those virtues of self-help and thrift” (Winter and Connolly: 1996, 30). It was here that the family took a central role in the agenda of the New Right, as it was seen as the locus for addressing both the “over reliance” on the state and the “loss of virtues.”

Thatcher’s controversial statement in a radio interview that “there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families,” firmly asserts the importance of the family unit economically and morally, while placing the concept of family firmly on the New Rights’ political map. Thatcher’s full declaration, originally given as an interview with *Women’s Own* magazine, is worth revisiting here:

I think we’ve been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem it’s the government’s job to cope with it. ‘I have a problem, I’ll get a grant.’ ‘I’m homeless, the government must house me.’ They’re casting their problems on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through

people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour (Thatcher: 1987).

Clearly Thatcher, and thus the Conservative government, is outlining the role of the family as the basic support mechanism for the individual, thereby shedding economic and social responsibility from the State and placing it on the family unit. The importance that was attached to the traditional patriarchal family unit in Conservative discourse and their efforts to 'roll back the State' can be seen in the Children Act of 1989, which while stressing the value of children's rights, placed primary importance on the family unit within which "children's rights amount to little more than their right to remain within the confines of their family, wherever possible, and to express an opinion on their future" (Winter and Connolly: 1996, 40).

The impact of this rhetoric can be seen in a variety of media documents and the political oratory that has followed since Thatcher's resignation in 1990. *The Telegraph* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 1993, published an article entitled 'What's Wrong With Society is Far Too Many Rights', in which Anthony Daniels blames the "sixties permissiveness" for promoting a lifestyle where "one's only duty was to enjoy oneself, and no frustration was to be tolerated" that led to a "state of moral solipsism". Sociologists Bob Franklin and Julian Petley state that "one of the main causalities of 'Sixties values', so it is argued, has been the nuclear family" (Franklin and Petley: 1996, 144). This is a sentiment largely backed up by John Majors' Back to Basics campaign:

It is time to get back to basics: to self-discipline and respect for the law, to consideration for others, to accepting responsibility for yourself and your family, and not shuffling it off on the state (Major: 1993).

The Conservative government's rhetoric on family values and how this has in turn shaped the views of society and created a climate in which the moral panics surrounding single mothers scrounging from the state and their delinquent children were particularly rife. According to

sociologist Caroline Knowles, during this time “an entire spectrum of social failure and pathology (prostitution, crime, drug abuse, teen pregnancies, and so on) is laid at the family’s door, making it one of the most highly socially invested arrangements of our time” (Knowles: 1996, 21). Knowles highlights the fact that “single mothers” became “an icon of social and family failure” (Knowles: 1996, 20). Media stories about single mothers were profuse and occupied many columns in the tabloid newspapers before 1993, but during this year, the fear of children who were not being properly supervised by parents became epidemic after the murder of James Bulger.

The newspaper coverage of the case at the time was extensive. Franklin and Petley give details of the number of stories, columns and inches per paper in their essay ‘Killing the Age of Innocence: Newspaper Reporting of the Death of James Bulger.’ One example of the prolonged coverage can be seen here:

*The Daily Mail* carried twenty-four substantial stories on 25 November 1993, the day after the trial verdict was announced, with a further thirteen stories published during the following two days; a quite staggering total of 3,765 square inches of editorial across the three day period focused on this single news story (Franklin and Petley: 1996, 136).

Much of the coverage vilified and demonised Thompson and Venables. *The Daily Mirror*, for example, described them as “freaks of nature” (*Daily Mirror* 25<sup>th</sup> November 1993). The *Sunday Times* described them both as “evil freaks” and “little devils” (*Sunday Times* 28<sup>th</sup> November 1993). These ‘reports’ cast a suspicious eye on the state of childhood. Marina Warner claimed that the image of the child had become one of menace in her 1994 Reith Lectures, stating that:

The child has never been seen as such a menacing enemy as today. Never before have children been so saturated with all the power of projected monstrousness to excite repulsion – and even terror (Warner: 1994, 33).

This sense of ‘terror’ added to an already heightened sense of the child and the family. Writing about the “young citizen” in 1989, sociologist

Nikolas Rose was extremely critical of this view, observing that “over the present century a new visibility has been accorded to the child in its life within the household and outside it, and the ‘private’ family has been opened up to social powers and allocated social duties” (Rose: 1989, 124). Rose argues that the notion of citizenship has been extended to the child and that this has resulted in childhood becoming “the most intensively governed sector of personal existence” (Rose: 1989, 123). He continues to say that:

The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual, or moral danger, to ensure its ‘normal’ development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability, and emotional stability (Rose: 1989, 123).

In this way, the figure of the child is seen as a subject to be “safeguarded” and “developed;” the potential development or promise of the child must be protected so that it can fulfil its individual potential, which has wider implications, as this individual potential is linked “to the aspirations of authority” (Rose: 1989, 123). Sociologist Christopher Jenks, writing in 1996, summarises that as such:

The child has become a subject in its own right, a source of identity and more than this, a promise of the future good. The child has come to symbolize all that is decent and caring about society, it is the very index of civilisation (Jenks: 1996, 67).

In his study of childhood, Jenks argues that since the Romantic Period of the early- to mid-1800s, children have occupied a privileged and guarded position in Western society. When this theory is applied to the Bulger case, we see that the ten year old Thompson and Venables boys had exploded many of the myths surrounding that status: if society views childhood as “the very index of a civilization”, as Jenks suggests, how did the public balance the court case of Thompson and Venables? What did their actions say about civilization in the Conservative Britain of the early nineties? Jenks continues to say that “our collective images of childhood and our subsequent relations with children could be regarded as indices of the contemporary state of the social structure” (Jenks: 1996, 59). If this is the case, then what did the CCTV footage showing two boys

leading a third smaller child away by the hand say about the state of the British social structure in 1993?

The press coverage of the Bulger case certainly seems to affirm Jenks' view that children are an "index of civilisation." Much of it made links between the case and the state-of-the-nation, *The Guardian's* headline on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1993 claimed that the murder was "Tragic Proof That *Society* Has Lost Its Soul." As Jenks observes, this headline clearly "underscores the conceptual links and the public conflation, between the idea of the child and the idea of society" (Jenks: 1996, 131). In the following quotation, Jenks summarises what he believes to be the public's view of children:

First, 'the child' is not evil; second, 'the child' is not adult; and third 'the child' is a symbol of optimism, a search for a hopeful future or a recollection of good times past. Because of this children who commit acts of violence were by definition firmly excluded from the conceptual category of 'child'. Through their actions, such children contravene its boundaries and in so doing threaten most fundamentally, each of our sense of attachment to the social bond (Jenks: 1996, 131).

Thompson and Venables were excluded from the category of child in the press coverage, which frequently focused on the non-child-like and inhumane qualities of the boys and called for tougher sentences for juvenile crime, in effect treating them as adults. Franklin and Petley observe that:

The press reporting of the Bulger case was sensational, callous and vindictive in its discussion of Thompson and Venables, pessimistic and conservative in its assessment of the nature of childhood, and punitive in its demands for justice. 'Back to Basics' was the political and ideological reaction to the Bulger case (Franklin and Petley: 1996, 149).

They compared the British reporting of the Bulger murder with the Norwegian reporting of the murder of Silje Raedergard. On October 15<sup>th</sup> 1994, the five year old Raedergard was beaten to death by three six year old boys. In contrast to the British press, Franklin and Petley made the following comment:

[The] Norwegian press reporting...expressed compassion for all the children and families concerned, attempted to understand the causes of the tragedy and tried to explore ways to prevent future incidents...In Norway more sober judgments tried to eschew the need for blame and individual culpability, preferring instead to investigate the broader social roots of the incidents (Franklin and Petley: 1996,149-150).

Franklin and Petley's comparison of press reporting of child murders reveals much about the attitude towards children during the Nineties in New Right Britain. The year 1994, the year after Bulger's murder, was designated 'The Year of the Family' by the United Nations. This international project was, according to sociologist John Rodger, "specifically directed at encouraging both governments and individuals to re-evaluate the place of family relationships and obligations in society in a rapidly changing world" (Rodger: 1996, 2-3). He continues to say that during the Nineties, "divorce, illegitimacy, reordered families and, of course, child abuse and neglect have been particularly prominent themes" (Rodger: 1996, 2-3). These themes were also prominent in the new theatrical writing of the period.

### **British Brutalism**

In a lecture given in May 2004, playwright Mark Ravenhill cited the Bulger murder as the catalyst that provided a focus for his writing and the event which provided his initial writing inspiration.<sup>1</sup> In the years that followed, a variety of playwrights were influenced by the Bulger case and references to it, as well as images from it, have been incorporated into different theatrical presentations since 1993. Two of the more obvious examples of this are *Peripheral Violence* (1994, Cockpit Theatre, London) by Robert Lindsay Wilson and *The Age of Consent* (2001, Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh) by Peter Morris.

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<sup>1</sup> This lecture was entitled 'A tear in the fabric' and was given 5<sup>th</sup> May 2004 at The George Wood Theatre, Goldsmith's College.

*Peripheral Violence* focuses on three children from an estate in Glasgow who murder a fourth child. *The Age of Consent*, first performed just after the release of Thompson and Venables, looks at a child murder from the eyes of a killer on the eve of his release. The eight years between the murder and the release of the boys proved to be significant in theatrical terms, as the dates almost exactly coincide with the rise in popularity of a genre of British theatre that created its own media storm. The theatre critic Aleks Sierz described the period in the following terms:

[n]ever before had so many plays been so blatant, aggressive, or emotionally dark. The decade witnessed more and more new writers (as well as some older hands) being drawn to the extremes of experience. Ideas were kidnapped and taken to the limit (Sierz: 2001, 30).

The plays I have selected for this thesis are connected by these “extremes of experience” and their focus on domestic situations. In my reading of them, I am particularly interested in how each invites a dialogue with the audience on issues surrounding families and society. In doing this they provide a critical perspective on the cry for a return to “family values” as an attempt to reinvest allegiance to the moral and political magnitude of the family. Writing about British theatre the playwright, David Edgar argued that:

[theatre] has faced up to the question of how our various, myriad and contradictory affinities, histories and identities relate to each other. It has provided the most consistently effective platform for a series of challenges to both the patrician and populist conceptions of class and gender roles, sexuality and nationhood. In that sense, if it has fulfilled one task above all others, it has been to provoke (Edgar: 1999, 34).

Here, I consider how the British theatre of this period was provocative by making the concepts of both childhood and the family visible as social constructs, thereby inviting a reconsideration of, or critical perspective on, the family unit.

In 2002, theatre director Dominic Droomgoole asked if the Nineties was a golden age for theatre and answered his own question with “Well, of

course” (2002, ix). According to supporters such as Sierz, it was a period of British theatre when:

A buzz developed, theatre was counted among the glories of British culture in that brief but highly hyped moment of cultural confidence known as Cool Britannia. New writing had rediscovered the angry, oppositional and questioning spirit of 1956, the year of the original Angry Young Men (Sierz: 2001, xii).

Sierz, writing in what he describes as a “personal and polemic history of British theatre in the nineties,” describes the period as “the most exciting decade for new writing since...1965” (2001, xi).

Not all academics accepted that this was a period of “oppositional and questioning spirit.” In 1999, theatre scholars Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers published an edited collection entitled *Theatre in a Cool Climate*. They intended the book to be “a kind of stock taking” of what theatre practitioners thought at the end of the century (Gottlieb and Chambers: 1999, 9). Gottlieb’s own chapter, ‘Lukewarm Britannia,’ is ‘cool’ in its appraisal of the theatre of the Nineties, claiming that it was a period of transition which ‘lacked direction’ (1991, 210). She laments over the lack of political theatre in the period, claiming that the plays of both Sarah Kane and Jez Butterworth were both “lacking in content” and that Ravenhill’s “technical sophistication masks an emptiness of content” (1991, 210). She continues to argue the following:

Some critics view the plays of Kane, Ravenhill and Butterworth as examples of a renaissance in British theatre. I do not see a renaissance...Many of their images resonate from film, and from the plays of Edward Bond, Howard Barker and Howard Brenton – but since these three older dramatists come from within a more overtly social context, their use of violence is seemingly less gratuitous (Gottlieb: 1999, 211).

While the plays of these writers, and many others of the period, undoubtedly use violent images, I am interested in interrogating the political in these plays. In his writings in 2002, German scholar Klaus Peter Muller argued that it was difficult to define a political play due to the “strong effects of both post-modernism and political reality” (Muller: 2002, 15). He continues to say that “political plays present negative situations

in order to elicit social and political changes. Where change is not desired, there is no space for political theatre” (Muller: 2002, 18). I question if, in the violent images of the plays of this period, just as in those of Bond, Barker and Brenton, change is depicted as desirable and even necessary, which therefore makes these plays political in nature.

What perhaps marks the period and these writers as different from their forerunners is the profusion of provocative work that was generated by a variety of young and new theatre writers. Due to the violent nature of many of these plays, critics of this work, the so called “Neo-Jacobean,” “In-yer-face,” “urban ennui” or “new brutalism” (Sierz: 2002, 17), “New Realism” (Gottlieb: 2003, 5), “British Brutalism, [and/or] New European Drama (Nikcevic: 2005, 255), have often commented on its presentation of a fractured, violent, dysfunctional society<sup>2</sup>. During the period covered by this study, I participated as an audience member for the first run of many of the plays discussed here. At the time, I was profoundly struck by the images of children and the provocative portrayals of British society that these plays offered. In this thesis, I draw upon my own initial reactions to these plays, as well as to the reviews of the plays offered by newspaper theatre critics. The primary reason why the responses of the critics are important is because they help to constitute the climate of opinion prevalent in the public at the time. The view of the critics can be seen as modelling the responses to the social issues represented in the plays, which may have also been found in the audiences, and their opinions provide the framework against which the contents of the plays were judged. This thesis also draws on close readings of the plays. I offer a reading of the plays to consider how they elucidated certain social structures by challenging audiences with difficult content. This difficult content was manifested as aggressive language, brutal violence, abusive behaviour and sexual content. Challenges were also present in difficult form, in the shape of elliptical dialogue, unfinished characters, nonlinear

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<sup>2</sup> Many theatre critics were originally hostile to the new generation of writers in the mid to late nineties. Examples include Michael Billington in *The Guardian*, Jack Tinker in *The Sun*, Irving Wadle in *The Independent on Sunday* and Charles Spencer in *The Telegraph*.

structures and open ended conclusions. I argue that these plays are lacking neither the “political focus” nor the “context” that Gottlieb mourns in her articles of 2003, and that they do far more than simply offer the “bleak canvas” she speaks about. I demonstrate that rather than do nothing more than revealing a depressing picture of Nineties Conservative and New Labour British Monetarism and Individualism, they in fact offer a political commentary. My suggestion is that they offer elements of hope and new found support networks and communities.

These plays caused heated debates about the nature and form of theatre, as well as its purpose. The debates happened publicly in the media and brought the general public’s attention to the theatre in a way rarely seen in the twentieth century. Many theatre critics claimed that these works were ugly, brutal, and childish, and some were even simply dismissed as rubbish. Established playwrights Edward Bond (1995), Caryl Churchill (1995), and Harold Pinter (1995) defended these works at the time, which are now largely considered to be engaging and challenging pieces of work that provide a social commentary of their time. More recently, the new plays written between 1990 and 2003 have come under more intense academic scrutiny. Rebecca D’Monte’s and Graham Saunders’ edited 2008 collection of *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the Nineties*, called for a reappraisal of the period. Saunders argues in his introduction that during the Nineties, in terms of “theatre history, any assessment of British Drama...has been dominated by the term ‘In-Yer-Face Theatre. Based on Aleks Sierz influential book” (2008, 1). Sierz himself concurs with the need for a “rethink” in his opening chapter in his book, claiming that “A good starting point would be to begin seeing in-yer-face theatre less as a literal representation of reality and more as a metaphor” (Sierz: 2008, 35). In his contribution to the book and as part of this reappraisal, Ken Urban argues that the generation of new playwrights in the Nineties “rather than turning its back on British Theatre’s political tradition...use cruelty as a means of both reflecting and challenging the despair of contemporary urban life shaped by global capitalism and cultural uniformity” (Urban: 2008, 39). This is

certainly an aspect of the works that I intend to explore here. While Urban continues to present an argument for the representation of the “ethical possibilities of an active nihilism,” in this thesis, I consider how, what Urban describes as Kane’s generation of playwrights, both reflected and challenged social and family structures.

The year 2008 also saw the publication of *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, edited by Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst. This book spans British drama from 1979 to 2005 and offers a valuable collection of essays that moves consideration of the period beyond the in-her-face debates to the issues of shock and violence. The editors state in their introduction that they hope “this volume gives a snapshot of political engagement, thematic complexity, theatrical energy and formal experimentation of the period” (2008, 3). These intentions chime with my own in this thesis in which I specifically consider the political engagement of British theatre in a more narrowly defined time period. I examine the plays through a lens of domestic politics in order to consider the social commentary provided in the plays of this period. In doing so, I hope to take a wider view than that offered by Elaine Aston, who covers almost the same time frame in her *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights 1990-2000* (2010). Here, Aston balances a feminist argument with a detailed play analysis by arguing for plays to be considered on:

a continuum: an understanding of feminism as a political field that responds intrinsically and extrinsically to social and cultural change, but always with a view to understanding and, if not racially transforming, then at the very least ameliorating the social and cultural conditions under which a majority, and not a privileged minority, of women, variously and heterogeneously, live their lives (Aston: 2010, 9).

While not denying the importance of this thinking, I wish to adopt an approach that considers the wider social commentary offered by the theatre of this period. Whilst agreeing with Aston that there is still a need for women’s stories to be told, here I also wish to consider the stories told by male writers on domestic issues. My thinking is more in line with

that of Clare Wallace in *Suspect Cultures: Narrative, Identity and Citation in Nineties New Drama* (2006). In this book, Wallace explores the ways in which “new playwrights have engaged with questions of identity, agency and representation (political, aesthetic) vis-a-vis contemporary cultural conditions of postmodernity and globalization” (Wallace: 2006, 3). Her focus is on what she describes as Anglophone European Theatre and identity. Steve Blandford presents a similar theme in: *Film, Drama and the Break-up of Britain* (2007). This book employs devolution as its central motif and “sets out to trace and examine some of the ways that film and theatre in this country have begun to reflect and contribute to a Britain that is changing so rapidly in its sense of itself, that many would argue it amounts to a break-up of the very idea of there being a meaningful British identity at all” (Blandford: 2007, 7).

Recent reappraisal of the theatre from this period has also come from Amelia Howe Kritzer in *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain New Writing: 1995-2005* (2008), which seeks to assert that the new writing of the period challenges political apathy and makes the claim that there is an upsurge in political theatre. She moves away from a consideration of the violence and abuse that troubled Gottlieb, but here I shall argue that the violence forms part of the political commentary upon which these plays made on family life. In Howard Barker’s play *Scenes from an Execution*, (1986, Almeida Theatre, London), one of the characters, Urgention, states that “It offends today, but we look harder and we know, it will not offend tomorrow” (Barker: 1990, 301). These words were an accurate prophecy for much of the new writing of this period, as many of those initially hostile critics came to appreciate the work they railed against during the first performances, although few came to see the positive and hopeful signs that they contain. Many of the plays written between 1993 and 2001, as well as numerous texts both before and after this period, contain victims, abusers, violence, torture, death and grim pictures of contemporary life and appear to end bleakly. Few of these plays provide satisfactory answers to the questions they pose, leaving a shell-shocked audience to find their own answers. It is this aspect of

these works which is perhaps the most unsettling characteristic of much of this body of work. I firmly believe, however, along with the writers of many of the plays, that the majority are optimistic, and in fact offer visions of utopia.

These works confront the audience with the more harrowing aspects of modern urban life and for a brief time created much controversy. Sierz, in his article, 'Still In-Yer-Face? Towards a Critique and Summation,' which was written for *New Theatre Quarterly*, states this 'new wave' came to a halt at the end of the Nineties with:

....the death of Sarah Kane in February 1999, the huge West End success of Conor McPherson's rather gentle redemption play, *The Weir*, the failure of Irvine Welsh's shock-fest, *You'll Have Had Your Hole* – all were signs that the phenomenon that attracted so much public attention in the mid-nineties was rapidly losing its energy (Sierz: 2002, 17).

Sierz goes on to say that this type of theatre had "done its job – kicked down the door of complacency in theatre" and that it gave "theatre the oxygen of publicity, and helped inspire the diverse new writing culture that has since emerged" (Sierz: 2002, 24). He may as well be right, as once shock tactics become the norm, they cease to shock or create the basis for discussion. However, as the following chapter demonstrates, I argue that this 'new writing culture' continued beyond the death of Kane and into the new century. These 'shock tactics', described by Sierz, jolted the spectator out of passive observation and invited them to consider the juxtaposition of theatre events with life outside the auditorium. Drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, I examine how these plays, through their heightened sense of theatricality (particularly with regard to both structure and characterisation), invite audiences to reflect on the social structures of the family. I am interested in questioning how this heightened sense of theatricality creates a 'distanciation' that in turn allows for a recontextualisation of social structures.

## **The Political Climate of the Nineties**

The period covered by this thesis was a turbulent time for Britain and its people; this is clearly demonstrated in many of the plays produced at the time. It is important to consider the major changes in global and national politics, as this gives a context for why I assert that the plays of the period are both political and utopian.

In November 1990, Margret Thatcher resigned after eleven years as Prime Minister. Although this event occurs before the start of the period that I focus on here, her government's ideology and policies continued to influence society in Britain well into the year 2003 and beyond. Theatre scholar Keith Peacock comments on her extended influence when he observes in his study of British theatre in the 1980s that "She was...the only twentieth century Prime Minister to lend her name to a political doctrine" (Peacock: 1999, 11). When John Major took on the leadership in 1990, he inherited a country in the midst of a recession, in a year of poll tax riots and the passing of a new National Health Service and Community Care Act, and one where internationally Germany was reuniting and the first Global Warming conference was staged. In a statement given outside 10 Downing Street on the morning of Friday 10th April 1992, after his party claimed victory in the election of that year, Major stated that:

When I first had the opportunity of standing on the steps of Downing Street, I said that I believed in a nation at ease with itself, the development of a truly classless society with opportunities for all from wherever they came to do whatever they can with their own lives by their own efforts and with encouragement to achieve everything that they can (Major: 1992).

Political historian Arthur Marwick wryly observed that "seldom were decent hopes more callously dashed" (Marwick: 2003, 336). He goes on to say that:

While rampant Thatcherism produced an increasingly divided and polarized society, the forces of pluralism and dissidence, and one might add, the supporters of a genuinely civilised and caring society lacked...any effective political mechanism (Marwick: 2003, 337).

Being born in 1967, my formative years were those where Thatcher was Prime Minister and, although there was no change to the party in government, her resignation was a personal watershed. The thought that the Conservatives would be voted out of power seven years later was unthinkable and I fully endorsed Marwick's sentiment. I felt at the time that I lacked any effective political mechanism, as did many of my generation, the same generation who were writing and producing the plays discussed here.

The early Nineties were a period of deep recession, with rising unemployment in both working class and middle class life, with the so-called "brain drain" of scientists leaving Britain, as well as with the privatisation of national services and rises in crime rates. At this time, doubts and questions were raised about the criminal justice system when the Guilford Four and the Birmingham Six were released. By the mid Nineties, the country saw the arrival of the Child Support Agency (with its assigned task to seek out and charge absent fathers), and the Social Security Act of 1994, which introduced changes to unemployment and disability benefits so that there were now 'incapacity benefits' and 'job seekers allowances' instead of unemployment benefits. There were "an estimated 1.8 million people who found that their homes were worth less than the money they had paid for them (Marwick: 2003, 478). The mid nineties also saw the departmentalisation and privatisation of the railway (1993) and major rail disasters in 1991, 1994 and 1995. The Citizens Charter was introduced during this period; it stated targets for public services and ways for people to claim compensation, but did little to improve services. It was the age of responsibility. Parental choice and compulsory testing were introduced into the school systems. The period also saw major child abuse cases and a number of highly publicised child murders that included James Bulger and Stephen Lawrence. Also, 1994 was the year in which Jonathon Zito was the first casualty of the Care in the Community Act when he was murdered by a recently released mental health patient. These linguistic and cultural shifts, with a

renewed focus on both the family as the unit of responsibility and childhood in general, were accompanied by concerns of poverty.

Marwick, in a comment on the number of rough sleepers and beggars in the UK, asserted that the number of homeless people living on the streets was:

...in essence a direct product of a divided, and increasingly, atomized society – a society, in short, at odds with itself. There was also an issue of rejection, neglect and deprivation: and that, in essence was a direct product of the running down of social services and the introduction of ‘reforms’ aimed more at making future tax cuts possible than at the needs of those least able to help themselves abused youth, alcoholics and addicts the mentally sick and the senile (Marwick; 2003, 372).

This zeitgeist permeated the writing of the time and this sense of a divided and changing society, with no hope of reprieve, influenced the plays of the period. There was a brief shift in the pessimistic atmosphere, however, in 1997, when Tony Blair’s New Labour party won the general election, bringing a new sense of hope amongst the Left where there had been none before. With the end to 18 years of Conservative government, there was a sense for some, including journalist and political broadcaster Andrew Marr, “that everything was possible for people of determination” (Marr: 2003, 514).

The second half of the period I consider in the thesis was at first filled with this sense of optimism, during which it was cool to be British, and artists, musicians and fashion designers from the UK were recognised internationally and a peace agreement was in place with the IRA. In addition, 1997 was the year in which a more pessimistic David Hare gave a lecture on the poor state of British theatre, and soon the sense of optimism dwindled as the highly anticipated changes were slow to come. Instead, there was a major bomb blast from the IRA in Omagh, and the UK started operation Desert Fox in Iraq with the USA. In the UK, stiffer sentences for crime were introduced. In 1997, it also became official that the UK had the highest rates of teenage drug use, and the death of Leah Betts as a result of recreational drugs became headline news. There

were numerous rail crashes in both 1999 and 2000, truck drivers went on strike over fuel prices, and we saw the first anti-globalisation riots in London. In Northern Ireland, the Holy Cross Primary school children were escorted to school amid abuse and projectile weapons and the murders of Sarah Payne, Anna (Victoria) Climbie and Damilola Taylor made the headlines. We had foot and mouth disease in the UK and 9/11 started the 'war on terror,' while parts of the UK saw the worst rioting in many years. These events all framed part of the political background that set the context for the new theatrical writing of the period. Many of the works discussed here draw directly on the events of the time, but all reflect the zeitgeist

I question if this might be the main value of the plays discussed here, and how this was particularly important in the early Nineties when the zeitgeist was one of having no alternatives or at:

a time when everything is blocked by systems which have failed but which cannot be beaten – this is my pessimistic appreciation of our time – utopia is our resource. It may be an escape, but it is also the arm of critique. It may be that particular times call for utopias (Ricoeur: 1986, 300).

I ask if the period from 1993-2001 'called for utopias', and how the theatre responded to this call in the new theatre writing of the time. The following chapter examines the key theoretical lens through which I provide my analysis, as I consider the positioning of the audience and my reading of these plays as political theatre.

## Chapter Three: Reflexive Theatre

***'Like it's got gaps. You make the pictures up in the gaps.'***  
(*Gas Station Angel*: Ed Thomas 1998)

This chapter offers a theoretical structure that will be evident in the rest of the thesis. It considers how dramatic writing can be structured to position the audience as meaning makers and potentially as agents for social change. I argue that the critical engagement of the audience is activated in moments when there is a rupture in the form or narrative of the play that jolt the spectator into a critical awareness of the performance as social commentary, or whereby the internal logic of the theatrical event is intentionally disrupted. Here I am interested in these moments when 'gaps' invite the audience to consider representations of the family and encouraged them to contemplate radical alternatives. As an audience member in 1994 I was struck by the representations of families in four plays; Anthony Neilson's *Penetrators*, Sarah Daniel's *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*, Phyllis Nagy's *Butterfly Kiss* and Philip Ridley's *Ghosts From a Perfect Place*. In each the fictional "stage family" was destructive and proved to be a dangerous place.

In January 1994 I saw Anthony Neilson's *Penetrators* at the Royal Court Upstairs. The plot of this play revolves around the relationship of three male friends. The peaceful banter and living arrangements of the characters of Alan and Max are disrupted when Tadge arrives having deserted from the army. Tadge's character is both verbally and physically abusive throughout the play and it is clear that, although the army has heightened his psychopathic tendencies, the root of his problems can be located in his family relationships. Families are specifically highlighted as being problematic in scene four of the play when Max 'abuses' Alan's stuffed teddy bears by making it appear that they are having sex. Alan stops Max from taking the game further when "smiling evilly, he makes threats to unzip his flies and sodomise one of the teddies" (Neilson: 1998, 74). At this point Max declares:

**Max** Your're too sentimental. The teddies like to fuck

**Alan** They don't.

**Max** What do you think they do on their picnics? After the food's gone and they're tanked up on Bucky? They're beasts of the wild.

**Alan** They're not beasts of the wild. They're part of the family.

**Max** Families are built on fucking. Fucking and secrets.

*(Pause)*

When I became a man, I put away childish things

(Neilson: 1998, 74).

The childish things that Max puts away as an adult are the sentimentalised myth that families are safe places to be. As an audience member from this point on the 'teddies' became linked in my mind with families and in scene six when Tadge rips one of them to pieces it was hard not to see this as his desire to rip apart his family. The tearing up of the soft toy was a long and protracted scene of violence that was uncomfortable for the audience to witness. The progress of this act is reflected in the progress of the play itself as it moves from light-hearted banter and much hilarity to one of menace, violence and uncomfortable situations. When the scene in which the teddy was ripped apart started there was much amusement and laughter in the audience, but as the scene progressed the laughter stopped and an uncomfortable silence settled over the auditorium. I was fully focused on the stage actions and in consideration of what might have led the character to behave in such a way . I found the answer in the closing lines of the play:

**Tadge** Your mum used to give me sweets, eh? After tea...I wasn't allowed to have sweets, was I?...I used to like coming to your house (Neilson: 1998, 116-7).

I left the theatre with these lines ringing in my ears and surprised that the destruction of a soft toy had created such a heightened and thoughtful response, as well as reflecting on the negative aspects of the concept of the family. This was particularly striking to me as this was just two months after the trial of Thompson and Venables, during which much attention was paid to the problematic family life of both boys and the media was full of stories about the demise of family life and values in the United Kingdom.

A month later I was back at the Royal Court in the audience for Daniel's play *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*. The play focuses on the characters of Esme and Shaz whose lives have been destroyed by abusive fathers whilst living within their nuclear family homes. Both characters live isolated and lonely lives, Esme an elderly spinster and her estranged niece, a recently released mental patient, Shaz. Through a convoluted plot both characters find consolation and the will to live a new life together as fugitives running from the law. It is a bleak play, explored in more detail later in this thesis, full of stories of abuse, violence and neglect, but they are stories told with humour. At the end the neo-family forged by the two central characters is somewhat unrealistic and yet it offers a hope of a different way of life. As the two women enjoy the sunshine on a cruise boat sailing away from all their problems and the police who are following them, there was an undeniable sense of utopia in the last moments of the performance. It gave me pause to think about alternatives to nuclear families and made change seem possible.

In April of the same year I saw both Nagy's *Butterfly Kiss* at The Almeida Theatre and Ridley's *Ghosts from a Perfect Place* at the Hampstead Theatre. Both of these plays focus on characters with troubling family lives, both are deeply bleak and contain imagery of violence and abuse, and yet both, as discussed below in more detail left me feeling strangely uplifted, and musing once again on the institution of the family. Taken together these four plays left me in no doubt that under certain circumstances theatre may reflect contemporary social attitudes, but more than that, that theatre can also pave the way for presenting what is not – or what is not yet. Theatre scholar Alan Read claims that "theatre is not political because it cannot predict its outcomes nor can it determine its effects beyond itself" and continues to say that "theatre has no political power" (Read: 2008, 53). I will argue that the plays I discuss in this thesis are inherently political in that they frame and exhibit contemporary issues using techniques that display the structures of both government and society, specifically in reference to the family. I draw on this view, and on Paul Ricoeur's development of Gadamer's work to

demonstrate how the plays discussed encourage the audience to consider the concepts of family and childhood and position the spectators as potential agents for change as a result of 'making new' meanings for themselves.

To examine how theatrical performance can position the audience as potential agents for social change, I shall apply reader response theory to specific plays. I draw on Wolfgang Iser's 'Interaction between Text and Reader' (1980) and Paul Ricoeur's theories of the imagination outlined in his series of lectures *Ideology and Utopia* (1986). Both theorists argue that readers of text are the makers of the meaning of text and that through their readings new connections may be made and new possibilities considered. I argue that these theories, when applied to theatre, provide a critical and political lens through which to look at representations of the family. This chapter then considers the ways in which meaning is created by audiences, suggesting that this is independent of the writer's, (or directors) meaning. The text itself initiates and sets the terms for the communication, but does not bind the reader's responses and interpretations giving the text autonomy of its own.

Ricoeur argues that:

... what must be interpreted in a text is a *proposed world* that I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my own most possibilities. That is what I call the world of the text, the world proper to *this* unique text (Ricoeur: 1991, 83).

Ricoeur called this process 'distanciation' (Ricoeur: 1991, 35). Focusing his work on literature he argues that text allows for unique interpretation in the actual written words, claiming that because the words are on a page that they have no "trace of affective affinity with the intention of an author", in this way text creates "understanding at and through distance" (Ricoeur: 1991, 84). This chapter considers how the plays of 1993-2001 invited audiences to reflect critically on models of family life using theatricality to create an "understanding at and through a distance" and how this in turn makes the theatre of the Nineties political.

### **Reader Response Theory: The Audience as ‘Meaning Makers’**

The main tenet of Reader Response Theory, as outlined by Fish (1967), Holland (1968), Barthes (1970), Iser (1980), Jauss (1982), Sauter (2000) and Knowles (2004), is that literary works derive their meaning from the interactions between the structure of a text and its recipient. In the theatre this means that the interpretation of a play rests on a gap between the author and the audience and that comprehension of meaning is established by the audience. According to Iser:

As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text, and relates the different views and patterns to one another, he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too (Iser: 1980, 106).

In this way the audience both receives and composes communication at the same time. Iser draws on R. D. Laing’s *The Politics of Experience* (1967) to clarify that interpretation is necessary because “all men are invisible to one another” (Iser: 1980, 108). In other words no one can experience events or understand exactly what another’s intentions are as we do not approach them from precisely the same position and so their intentions remain ‘invisible’ or unknowable. Therefore people make assumptions from their own experiences. There is, however, a gap in our experiences, or a lack of ascertainability, that the reader furnishes with their own understanding. Or to put it another way, the reader ‘fills in’ these gaps. The reader consequently interprets the text in light of their own experiences and knowledge. In this way, then, the gaps or interstices in the dialogue and structure of a text “stimulate the reader into filling the blanks” (Iser: 1980, 110-111). This results in the unsaid coming to life in the readers’ imagination. The reader is drawn into events and is “made to supply what is meant from what is not said” (Iser: 1980, 111). The readers bridge the interstices creating a form of dialogue between the text and its receivers. In this way the readers build upon the gaps and so the “gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves” (Iser: 1980, 111). This interpretation is therefore, both socially and culturally defined and meaning becomes

dislocated from the author and his or her intentions and original context and placed with the receivers.

In theatrical performance the audience members are required to read the production at the same time as being part of a collective although some decoding has been done by the director and production. The theatre codes and conventions of plot, dialogue and characters have all be elucidated by the production process, and the production of a play initiates and controls some of this process although audiences make their own meaning from what is offered. Iser explains that in literature:

Threads of plot are suddenly broken off, or continued in unexpected directions. One narrative section centres on a particular character and is then continued by the abrupt introduction of new characters. These sudden changes are often denoted by new chapters and so are clearly distinguished; the object of this distinction however, is not separation so much as a tacit invitation to find the missing link (Iser: 1890, 112).

When applied to theatre, Reader Response Theory works in a similar manner but the theatre is a collective and multi-sensory experience whereby the audience's imagination is perhaps stimulated more obviously than a reader alone with a book. In text, Iser, states that the *unsaid* comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the *said* "expands" to take on greater significance than might have been supposed and so even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound (1980, 111). With the added dimensions of a live production where the gaps and abrupt changes in directions, place and character are visceral their "significance" becomes more profound still. The production's interstices, or fractures, abrupt changes and multiple viewpoints "stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the" audience member (Iser: 1980, 111-2). Through both the play and the production the audience are "guided to adopt a position in relation to the text" (Iser: 1980, 112). The text is, therefore, not complete without the audience's interpretation. Theatre academic Willmar Sauter usefully explains the role of the audience in his book *The Theatrical Event* (2000)

It is important to keep in mind that in the theatre the "message" is not something which is neatly packed and distributed to an

anonymous consumer; instead, the meaning of a performance is created by the performers and the spectators together, in a joint understanding (Sauter: 2000, 2).

As 'meaning makers' the theatre audience is, therefore, an active body, participants, who as author of *Theatre Audiences*, Susan Bennett, states:

are thus trained to be passive in their demonstrated behaviour during a theatrical performance, but to be active in their decoding of the sign systems made available (Bennett: 1997, 206).

It is this positioning of the audience as meaning-makers that can create the potential for theatre performance to be politicised, if the form or structure of the performance maximises the opportunities to engage the audience in this way. As the performance moves between scenes and acts offering different viewpoints via different characters and situations the audience's attentions and engagement "travels between all these segments its constantly switching...bringing forth a network of perspectives," creating a "referential field" of vision (Iser: 1980, 113-114). Within this referential field each perspective forms a backdrop for the next, each remaining in the peripheral sight of the viewer while they focus on the next. The fissures in structure and characters, alongside those of multiple viewpoints, allow the audience to interpret what they have witnessed and also to consider these in juxtaposition with the world in which they function outside the theatre space. When a production focuses on tragic social dilemmas, this referential field can be seen to be "making the irrational and passionate intelligible" (Erickson: 2003, 166). So that events that would have seemed incomprehensible to an audience member before the theatre performance, might be rendered as completely explicable as the result of the performance. An example of this is the domestic violence enacted by the character of Jay in Judy Upton's play *Bruises*, (1995, Royal Court theatre, London). When I first saw this play Jay's violent outburst towards Kate in the early scenes was shocking. There was an audible gasp from somewhere in the auditorium. The violence felt both unpredictable and inexplicable and the tension built within the audience just before each of the following assaults, as each attack escalated the levels of violence. At first the violence

appeared to be irrational, but it became intelligible when witnessing the physical abuse the character of Jay suffers at the hands of his father. It became clear that Jay was behaving in the same way his father behaved towards both his wife and son. I still disliked the character, but his behaviour made sense when juxtaposed with the behaviour of his father. In this way I argue that theatre is perfectly positioned to “make the irrational intelligible” by creating characters who are repellent and yet with whom the audience can sympathise. The polarity between right and wrong, good and bad breaks down and can be seen as a continuum where archetypes are shattered and understanding is fostered.

Iser uses the example of *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding to make his point that social norms can be brought into question by the presentation of a hero who challenges conventions constantly throughout the text. The reader is therefore invited to consider the imperfections of Tom Jones or to consider how these norms demand a reduction of Tom’s impulses and character. Through the multiple and shifting viewpoints offered by the plays discussed within this thesis, the audience is encouraged to empathise with murderers (*Five Kinds of Silence*, Stephenson: 1996) soldiers who have committed brutal acts (*Blasted*, Kane: 1995) child abusers (*Age of Consent*, Morris: 2001), perpetrators of domestic violence (*Bruises*, Upton:1996), isolated and lonely children (*The Children*, Bond: 2000), victims of abuse (*The Madness of Esme and Shaz*, Daniels: 1994), figures of authority (*Tuesday*, Bond: 1997), and those living in poverty (*Shopping and Fucking*, Ravenhill: 2001). Part of the reason these plays were originally so unpopular with the critics was exactly this empathy created by the production for the less desirable elements of society but through these texts it becomes possible to imagine oneself in the same position as some of the protagonists and antagonists and ask – what would I do in that situation? How far would I be prepared to go if that were me? Thus placing the audience in a web of relationships that can result in the reconsideration of characters for which there was previously no sympathy.

In Phyllis Nagy's *Butterfly Kiss* (1994, The Almeida Theatre, London) the audience is presented with the character of Lily who is on trial for killing her mother. Throughout the play the audience is invited to consider the imperfections in Lily's character that led to murder and how these appear to be routed in a loyalty to the nuclear family structure. The play is littered with examples of people convicted of patricide and matricide. The 'myth' of the "average" family structure is explored at length in the play, demonstrating the diversity of families as discussed in Chapter Three.

The character of Jackson, Lily's lawyer, explains that:

Funny thing is, lots of people pretend to be in the ranks of the average. Yes, they'll tell you, I *do* have one and a half brothers. I *did* live in Massapequa Park. But when the questions begin to roll, you learn that there was no Buick station wagon with wood-panelled doors. And the half-brother is retarded, stashed away with his grandma in Allentwon, PA (Nagy: 1995, 84).

As an audience member of *Butterfly Kiss*, I was invited to consider both the imperfections of Lily's character and how adherence to the perceived norms of the nuclear family have contained and restricted the character to such an extent that she became violent and destructive. I, with the rest of the audience, was positioned to consider both the damage that the social conventions of family life might lead to, and how these conventions might exclude other options. Iser asserts that it is this exclusion that the reader focuses on. He states that:

[the] negation of other possibilities by the norm in question gives rise to a virtual diversification of human nature, which takes on a definite form to the extent that the norm is revealed as restriction on human nature. The readers' attention is now fixed, not on upon what the norms represent, but what their representations excludes...negated possibilities (Iser: 1980, 117).

Iser's comments here are about text, but in theatre it is also possible to ensure that the "readers' attention is now fixed" and in the case of *Butterfly Kiss*, it is fixed on the nature of family structures. Theatre is therefore no different to other forms of 'reading' the material presented and audience members can be equated with being readers of theatre and being part of the movement of Reader Response Theory.

Sauter pairs perception with presentation in theatre arguing that theatre is a “communicative event” (2000, 20).

Reception describes the process taking place after a performance (i.e., is a consequence rather than an integral part of the theatrical event). While perception focuses on the communicative process, reception describes the result of the communication (Sauter: 2000, 5-6).

In some cases I believe this to be true, however, I would suggest that in the plays discussed here situations are created within the presentation where the audience is encouraged to “receive” and not just “perceive” whilst in the moment of the presentation. Audiences at the end of *Butterfly Kiss* in 1994 with the prominence of references to families in the media and political rhetoric of the time, see the familiar image of a nuclear family disintegrating. Then maybe imagine the possibilities of not conforming to this model and picture how the character of Lily would develop in a different social unit where she is able to choose her family model.

Reader response theory assumes that there is a distinction between what is written and how the text is interpreted by the reader (or audience). The basis of this concept can be found in hermeneutics. Sauter draws on the hermeneutic tradition observing that “not every spectator experienced the same theatrical performance in the same way” drawing the conclusion that:

The message of a performance relied as much on the audience’s way of perceiving and interpreting the stage actions as on the images and political references presented on the stage itself (Sauter: 2000, 2).

Sauter draws on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (1960) which developed the theory of hermeneutics, by using Gadamer’s concept of “horizons of expectation which “explains that every interpretation of an object to a large degree is a personal one” (Sauter: 2000, 4). Within a theatre audience a “fusion of horizons” takes places whereby the concepts presented are recognized by many of the individuals within the audience meaning that their individual interpretations demonstrate a

“great deal of resemblance” (Sauter: 2000, 4). In theatrical performances a “chain of interpretations” has already occurred before the audience witnesses the event:

this means that a number of artists participate in the process (dramatists, translator, director, designers, actors, technicians etc) All of these processes can be equated to a constant flow of hermeneutic processes of understanding (Sauter: 2000, 12).

The hermeneutic flow is based on the prior knowledge and experiences of all those involved before the presentation to an audience who then reinterpret that presentation in the light of their own prior experiences.

This prior audience knowledge includes the material conditions of the production as well as the conditions of the actual reception. In his 2004 text *Reading the Material Theatre* Ric Knowles outlines his “mode of performance analysis that takes into account the immediate conditions, both cultural and theatrical, in and through which theatrical performances are produced, on one hand, and received on the other” (Knowles: 2004, 3). This mode is based on the triangulation of “the raw theatrical event shared by practitioners and audiences” the “material conditions that shape both what appears on stage and how it is read and “the context within which the performance happens” (Knowles: 2004, 3). In this way Knowles undertakes what he describes as a “material semiotics” of theatrical production that takes into account every aspect of the theatrical experience and considers how each affects the audiences’ interpretation.

These contemporary developments in reader response theory and hermeneutics underpin the way in which the existing knowledge and understanding of the audience prior to the performance is then used to interpret the text thus explaining how new meaning is created from the text that is then applied to future experiences and how this creates new understandings of the world. It is the work of hermeneutics to:

Seek in the text itself, on one hand, the internal dynamic that governs the structuring of the work and, on the other hand, the power that the work possesses to project itself outside itself and to

give birth to a world that would truly be the 'thing' referred to by the text. This internal dynamic and external projection constitute what I call the work of the text. It is the task of hermeneutics to reconstruct this twofold work (Ricoeur: 1991, 17).

Applied to the dramatic representation of the family in the plays discussed here, Ricoeur's argument suggests that theatre performances give us an understanding of society. For example, a 'fictional' nuclear family presented on stage projects the concept of a family outside of the performance enabling the audience to compare the fictional representation with the reality of family units outside of the theatre. When the fictional representation of the family unit is seen as potentially harmful to the people within that unit, the spectator is invited to draw comparisons with those same structures in the world beyond the theatre. In *Butterfly Kiss* the audience is presented with no fewer than six examples of families where one family member has murdered one or more of the others. The play asks direct questions about the concept of the "average family". Jackson asks Lily directly where the average family can be found:

Well. If nobody I know comes from an average American family, and if nobody they know comes from one, and so on, who compiled the data on the national averages?...Where are all the folks with two and a half blonde and perfect children? Where do they hide? (Nagy: 1995, 85).

I suggest that a comparison is set up for the audience to consider the social construction of the fictional families of the characters they are watching and their own lived experiences of families.

In this play and the others discussed I suggest that this comparison is set in motion to enable the audience to question the naturalisation of the nuclear family unit and provide the audience with a better understanding of the social construction of the family. In some of the plays discussed in this thesis, such as *Butterfly Kiss*, the text itself directly invites this comparison, in others, such as *Gas Station Angel* (Thomas: 1998), the writers use troubled and troubling families as the background to the plays in a more subtle manner and the invitation to make this comparison is

more indirect. In each, the performances have the potential to say something about themselves and something about the world of the reader. This interpreted meaning is, dependent on the 'reader' or audience and is therefore related to but slightly removed from the writer's, (or director's) intended meaning. It may also be separated from the sociological conditions prevalent at the time of the original production. The text itself initiates and sets the terms for the communication but does not bind the reader's responses and interpretations. This process or 'distanciation' and the autonomy it creates are what make these plays political in nature.

When applied to theatre, Ricoeur's notion of 'distanciation' may be strengthened by structural and narrative devices. These theatrical devices enable the audience to experience the world of the text in a tangible and dynamic way. Theatre also allows the 'reader' or audience to be further removed from the direct situations presented by a series of fissures in dialogue, plot, characterisation and genre that distance the audience and allow them time *in* the event to provide a reading of what is presented to them. This distance provides an inherently political purpose in those performances where the play text provides interstices which the audience must actively bridge if they are to derive understanding. In particular the reading of the family unit as a political construct enables the troubling of family structures. It is the troubling of these social norms that makes the plays discussed within this thesis political.

### **The Political Potential of Distance**

Distanciation or space for the audience to question is created in the 'gaps' left in the plot of plays. These gaps are moments when there is a rupture in the narrative or characterisation of the play that jolt the spectator into an awareness of being in the audience of a performance, or whereby the internal logic of the theatrical event is disrupted. It would also be possible to argue that the presence of live actors works in a similar manner, although in this study I shall be limiting my analysis to

the textual elements of the plays and specifically focusing on family structures. During this time period representations of the family and the neo-family, while not always central to the plot, often provide the context and background to the narrative and action witnessed on stage. Family works in this way in Philip Ridley's *Ghosts from a Perfect Place* (1994, Hampstead Theatre, London). The plot focuses on the stories of Travis Flood, an aging East End gangster, as he returns to his "glory days" and the area the character grew up in, to reminisce. It also features the stories of the women of the Sparks family. The narrative is revealed in a series of flashbacks to the tragic events of the past where Flood terrorised the Sparks family, and the present where Rio Sparks terrorises Flood. Family structure is not central to the plot, but family loyalties and allegiances place the character of a child in a position where she sacrifices everything to protect her family and these sacrifices are central to the narrative and to the structuring of the play.

*Ghosts from a Perfect Place* is a good example of such a play as it presents the audience with a series of non-linear flashbacks that show the history of the characters. In the gaps between the information garnered in the scenes, the audience 'fills in the gaps' and arrives at the conclusion that Flood raped the child Donna, and is now being tortured in the present by his biological grand-daughter. The narrative offers no solution to the characters' current misery or suggestions as to what could have been altered in their pasts to avoid the tragic events of the Flood family. As with many of the plays discussed in the following chapters there is instead a prevailing sense of doom, catastrophe, devastation, destruction, or simply despondency and despair with no solution offered or suggested. *Ghosts From a Perfect Place* has no resolution or definitive ending. Flood and Rio know the truth about their interrelated history but there is no reconciliation, or change in their lives and Torchie remains unaware of the discoveries the two have made in her absence. The characters are all still alone and their lives have not been changed by the events of the play. Inherent in this play is the social and moral proposition that Thatcher's sentiment was right and that there is no thing

as society and the weight of its lack and with it the lack of a public sense of responsibility is felt. This for me is where the play is seen to take on an inherent political quality. This lack of a closed ending is another form of 'distanciation' whereby the audience seeks resolution for itself, based on the narrative content. This process happens during the moment of performance rather than, as Sauter's theory suggests, after the theatrical event. It does not involve imposing a solution on the play itself, but rather a consideration of how things might have been. It creates "understanding at and through distance" (Ricoeur, 1991 84). This consideration extends to the world beyond the play, whereby the text increases understanding of family structures. Hence the meaning is not found "behind the text, as a hidden intention would be, but in front of it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals" (Ricoeur: 1991, 84). What is revealed when considering the representations of family and childhood in the plays discussed here is the constructed, controlling and limiting nature of these concepts and this revelation is political.

I have chosen to discuss plays where the structures are abrasive and fractured, structured so that they are somewhat 'open' texts that require the audience to be active meaning-makers, actively making the connections that make the plot and characters readable or understandable. The form itself contains gaps or 'blanks'. Meaning is made as these blanks "trigger off and simultaneously control the reader activity... [and] indicate that different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected" (Iser: 1980, 112). This porous or fluid structure is most obvious in Sarah Kane's *Crave*, (1998, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh) or *4.48 Psychosis* (2000, Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London), or those texts which Hans-Theis Lehmann describes as postdramatic in his 2006 book *Postdramatic Theatre*. These plays demonstrate "less a succession... [or] development of story more an involvement of inner and outer states" or are theatre which "deliberately negates, or at least relegates to the background, the possibility of a developing narrative" (Lehmann: 2006, 68).

Post-dramatic plays may contain indistinct characters that morph into one another and offer little signposting to the audience and whereby the spectators have much work to do in making sense of the production. These plays offer a structure that allow the audience to see a multiplicity of relationships, where “a simultaneous and multi-perspective form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive” (Lehmann: 2006 16). This can be seen in *4.48 Psychosis* the opening scene of which follows:

(A very long silence)

But you have friends.

(A long silence)

You have a lot of friends

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive?

(A long silence)

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive?

( A long silence)

What do you offer?

(silence)

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a consolidated consciousness resides in a darkened banqueting hall near the ceiling of a mind whose floor shifts as ten thousand cockroaches when a shaft of light enters as all thoughts unite in an instant of accord body no longer expellant as the cockroaches comprise a truth which no one ever utters

I had a night in which everything was revealed to me. How can I speak again? (Kane: 2000, 205)

There is no dialogue or characterisation marked in the script itself and the director and eventually the audience must interpret for themselves how many people are present, or who these people are and what the context is. I am interested in representations of the family in theatre productions as social reality, not those examples of ‘postdramatic theatre’ where a linear narrative is not discernible, but those works which teeter on the cusp of the postdramatic and the dramatic, those texts that use the illusion of a reality but which contain small fissures and breaches, or interstices in the structuring of the plot, characterisation and genres. A play that particularly illustrates this point is *Gas Station Angel* (Thomas: 1998) where two families, the Aces and the James, are

recognisable as conventional nuclear families, but appear in a performance where the audience must work hard to make sense of the shifting viewpoints to discern a logical plot.

I first encountered *Gas Station Angel*, (1998, Newcastle Playhouse) when directing it with a group of BA Drama students in 2000. At this time I was struck by its representation of families as dangerous places to be and also by its dramatic structure. It is a play which contains many “gaps” or in the words of one of the characters:

**Ace:** it's got gaps...Like it's not all hard and fast; like there are rules but there are still gaps...like to fill in, the meaning ...you got to work the meaning out for yourself... Like it's got gaps. You make the pictures up in the gaps (Thomas: 1998, 62).

The character is talking about his enjoyment of the Welsh language, he claims that to understand it and in fact to be Welsh “at the end of the twentieth century you got to have imagination” (Thomas: 1998, 63). In this section he could be talking about being an audience member at the end of the twentieth century, or in fact the audience of *Gas Station Angel* where you have “to work the meaning out for” yourself. In this play the playwright, Thomas, is self-consciously identifying the dramatic structure used.

The narrative of *Gas Station Angel* is presented via an extended story-telling process between Ace and his father, as Ace retells the story of meeting and falling in love with Bron. The story is told in non-linear sequences with flash backs and the mingling of two family histories and the setting is described in the following terms:

Ever fluid landscape but based on the remaining half of a house whose other half has fallen into the sea. Dislocated, unreal, fantastic, functional, witty and full of possibility. Beds turn into cars. Mountain becomes beach, airport becomes supermarket, this world the underworld. Shapes and structures bent and shaped to become something else Transformation is everything, magic and invention vital. Dreams, myth and reality exist on the same plane as long as the sky doesn't fall down to earth (Thomas: 1998, 2).

In this convoluted non-linear plot audience members are presented with easily identifiable characters in relationships that are recognisable. It is possible, for example, to recognise that the character of Manny is Ace's father and that the characters of Ace and Bron are in a romantic relationship. The scenes of the play are shown in nonlinear sequences as the play moves from the past to the present and back again. This places the responsibility for decoding elements of the plot and the narrative on the audience. These are theatrical devices that create distancing. Other examples of this might include a shift in genre or context that is not explained by the play and can be seen in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) in which a hotel in Leeds is transported to a war in Eastern Europe or where locations and timeframes suddenly transform or are juxtaposed with each other as in *Handbag* (1998) and *Mrs Clapp's Molly House* (2000) both by Ravenhill. Further examples are scenes where naturalistic characters converse with imaginary figures, as they do in Caryl Churchill's *Skriker* (1994). These theatrical devices are designed to stimulate the audience into active spectatorship, into working to fill the "blanks". They create a deficient image of reality, or a verisimilitude composed of interstices that must be filled with meaning; those texts that appear on the surface to be stable and complete and to offer social realism but through whose forms and the interstices in the form, meaning is made.

In *Gas Station Angel* two dysfunctional families are presented to the audience both of whom keep secrets that destroy family relationships and homes, literally in the case of the Hywell family whose house falls into the sea. These two fictional families and their adherence to the naturalised social construct of the nuclear family unit between them hide secrets about neglect, isolation and murder. The character of Bron pertinently observes that:

this town is no different to loads of other towns around the place, around the world if it comes to that, and this family just the same too, give or take a few things. I mean we may be on the extreme side of things but the principle's the same. Secrets and lies. A

fucked-up past. Maybe if we faced up to the past then maybe we wouldn't find the world so confusing (Thomas: 1998, 20).

Here a fictional character questions the institution of the family. This questioning is only possible if the theatrical performances in question are those that mimic reality. Michael Patterson argues that:

by portraying recognizable characters on stage in acceptably realistic situations, the audience has the opportunity to compare their experience with that portrayed in the play...we are able to see characters sufficiently like us to be able to consider their behaviour (Patterson: 2003, 17).

In *Gas Station Angel*, the audience recognizes the familiar family roles. This is easy to do as they claim to be "the sons and daughters of our mothers and fathers" and declare that they "haven't travelled far see" (Thomas: 1998, 66). The audience recognises characters living in "sufficiently" similar patterns to those in the world outside of theatre consider the behaviour that keeps them, themselves restrained in the same family patterns. To make this connection between the fictional stage world and the world outside the audience member must be able to recognise the world they know, and then on leaving the performance they will have an increased understanding of the world in which they live. Ricoeur argues that this becomes possible when the reader is engaged in a narrative set within a familiar context, if the context is recognisable and the story engaging then new meaning is created from the juxtaposition of the familiar setting and material of the plot or as Ricoeur puts it: "As a reader, I find myself only by losing myself" (Ricoeur: 1991, 85). *Gas Station Angel*, enables the audience member to lose themselves in the dramatic plot and characters individual stories and then find representations of their own lives in that plot in the fissures in narrative and form that allow for a distancing in the moment of performance for reflection. Specifically, I would argue that it prompts reflection on adherence to a family structure that can be seen as penalising its members and stifling their individuality and development.

In this way the play becomes a metaphor for an aspect of life outside the theatre. In order to explain the reading of the narrative of a play, and so this metaphor, Ricoeur usefully expands the concept of mimesis into three related elements of reading. He calls these elements mimesis<sub>1</sub>, mimesis<sub>2</sub>, and mimesis<sub>3</sub> (Ricoeur: 1984 54). To interpret plot some preliminary understanding must exist within the audience, with this preliminary understanding it is possible to grasp the essence of the narrative; we know how the real world operates. Karl Simms in his 2003 text on Ricoeur simplifies this to say that when “approaching a plot we are already asking such questions as ‘what’, ‘why’, ‘who’, ‘how’, ‘with whom’, and ‘against whom’ (Simms: 2003, 84). Ricoeur describes this as the readers’ practical understanding; this is Mimesis<sub>1</sub> or “prefiguration” (Ricoeur: 1984, 55). During this stage the reader will predict what might happen. In the theatre discussed in this thesis the practical understanding can be seen to be traditional family structure and beliefs surrounding childhood. The audience is led to the assumption that the family is the approved unit for the support of children and a desirable relationship in which to live fulfilled and fulfilling lives. Initially on witnessing the opening scenes of *Gas Station Angel* the audience perceives that Manny is Ace’s father and thereby makes the assumption that this family and its relationships conform to the normative model that is widely accepted as the ‘natural’ mode for the nurturing of the young.

The following phase is Mimesis<sub>2</sub> which “opens the kingdom of the as if” (Ricoeur: 1984, 64). In this stage the audience processes the information they have received and relates it together in order to follow the lead of the plot. The audience “configures” the separate sections and strands into an “intelligible whole” (Ricoeur: 1984, 64). The audience sees if their assumptions based in the mimesis<sub>1</sub> stage are proved to be correct. To do this they need to look back at the piece as a whole and relate all the separate sections and ‘facts’ together. In plays with disjointed and fractured plots, characters and missives, the audience or reader may have to do much of this work themselves. In this stage of witnessing the theatrical events, the audience relates the assumptions they previously

have of family values and the nurturing environment they have been associated with, to those of the narrative events of the play. This opens the “kingdom of the as if” to ask what if the family construct is not one of nurture and fulfilment and consider alternative social modes and constructs. In *Gas Station Angel* the James family is seen to privilege one child at the expense of another creating an atmosphere of neglect that leads to Bri running away from home. The Hywell family’s insular self-regulation ensures that Bri’s murder at the hands of the demented Mary Annie is kept secret along with his body which is buried in the garden of the family home. The fragmented plot juxtapositions the audience assumptions about family values with the dysfunctional families presented and opens the “kingdom of the as if” and may prompt questions about the dangers for these representations of characters in strictly adhering to the normative concept of the private family regulating itself.

Ricoeur’s third stage, mimesis<sub>3</sub> or ‘refiguration’, is the site of an “intersection of the world of the text and the world or the hearer or reader” (Ricoeur: 1984, 71). In this phase the audience adjusts their comprehension of the world with that of the play, and so has developed a new understanding of the world in which they live that includes the experience of the play. The power of the plays is found in their ability “to open a dimension of reality...and thereby the possibility of a critique of the real” (Ricoeur: 1991, 292). After watching *Gas Station Angel* the audience may take their fresh or renewed understanding of families and neo-families gained by watching the play and hopefully apply it to their thinking in the world outside the theatre, it is this newly discovered, knowledge and understanding and critiquing of the real that might pave the way for change. It is on this basis that these plays are inherently political.

This is only possible through the plot, if the plot is mimetic of the readers world then a circle develops between the world of fiction and the real world – whereby the reader understands the world through narrative.

These plays take the audience beyond what they know. The disruptions can take a variety of forms, such as the nonlinear narrative timelines of *Gas Station Angle* (Thomas: 1998), the fragmented narrative of *This is a Chair* (Churchill: 1999), the unexpected and literal blasting apart of recognisable rooms as in *Blasted* (Kane 1995), the one dimensional flat characters with no context found in Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), the doubling of actors in roles as seen in *A Number* (Churchill: 2002), the appearance of fantasy figures in *Five Kinds of Silence* (Stephenson: 1996), the abrupt violence of *The Beauty Queen of Leanne* (McDonagh: 1996) or the 'theatre events' of Edward Bond. For Bond a theatre event is:

part of the staging of a play, an effect [that] may be deliberately chosen to enact a meaning, and then it is as if the effect had been 'loosened' from the centre. The centre is the site of the drama's logic, the logic of imagination. Logic turns 'effects' into 'events'. A Theatre Event (TE) is the conscious use of 'theatrical drama' to enact or illustrate the centre. It does not comment on meaning but creates it (Bond: 2000, 17).

In other words a theatre event is a theatrical effect designed in order to change the audiences' focus from being on the narrative plot to the meaning beyond that specific storyline that may reflect on the world outside the theatre performance, in which the spectator can find meaning or a critical hermeneutics. It is, therefore, within these moments or 'gaps', where the audience is creating meaning and understanding that the potential lies for this work to be 'political' theatre. Amelia Howe Kritzer defines political theatre by its ability to act as a: "a medium for exposing problems [and] exploring issues" (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 1). The writers of the plays I discuss are exposing problems and exploring the issues that surround the nature of the traditional family and its mechanism for supporting childhood and in doing so are encouraging audience members to think through or explore alternatives. These gaps are what give theatre the ability to do more than hold a mirror to contemporary life through which the audience can view things as they are. The gaps allow these plays to go further than the social realist or

even state of nation theatre traditions that imitate social situations and makes these plays more interventionist in the way that they challenge conceptions and provoke action.

These inherently political plays might be called a theatre of reflexivity. The works produced between 1993 and 2001 that I discuss in this thesis straddle two traditions – in that by using a flawed and incomplete reflection of what *is* the audience are invited to fill the gaps and think of the play, and the world outside the theatre differently. This then creates the possibility of inventions outside the theatre. These works fall between reflectionist and interventionist dominant theatre and form theatre of reflexivity. This reflexivity is only possible in conjunction with the audiences' ability to interpret the signs and symbols offered by the performance and not when the text provides all the answers and when theatre texts are considered as "the products of a more complex mode of production that is rooted, as is all cultural production, in specific and cultural contexts (Knowles: 2004, 10). In this I share the assumption with Knowles that theatrical performance does not "contain meaning" but rather it "produces meaning through the discursive work of an interpretative community and through the lived, everyday relationships of people with texts and performance" (Knowles: 2004, 17). In the words of Bruce Wilshire in his seminal text *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor*: "The difference must come from a change in the interpretive attitude of the viewer, not from the things themselves" (1991, xii). This makes the audience part of the meaning making process.

Wilshire's hypothesis is that:

theatre is a mode of discovery that explores the threads of what is implicit and buried in the world, and pulls them into a compressed and acknowledgeable pattern before us in its "world". Theatre discovers meaning, and its peculiar detachment reveals our involvement (Wilshire: 1991, xiv).

The playwrights discussed in this thesis leave interstices within their structures and narratives in order that the audience is encouraged to work to fill in the gaps and, therefore, these works carry the impetus to

create social change as result of this. It is the impetus to create change that makes the plays discussed here political.

### **The Imagination and its Potential for Social Change**

Joe Kelleher argues in *Theatre & Politics* that: “theatre remains unpredictable in its effects, given that its effects reside largely not in the theatrical spectacle itself but in the spectators and what they are capable of making of it” (Kelleher: 2009, 24). The potential for social change is then unpredictable. What is more dependable is the notion that “theatre may be capable of stopping us in our tracks” (Kelleher: 2009, 42). Once ‘stopped’ an audience is invited to reflect and in these reflexive moments the potential for change may be glimpsed. In her book, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (2005) Jill Dolan is more optimistic drawing on the idea of the active spectator in order to make the claim that:

Live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world... audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public, in which social discourse articulates the possible rather than the insurmountable obstacles to human potential (Dolan: 2005, 2).

Whilst this seems extremely optimistic, theatre performances can stimulate audience members into questioning their own experiences of the world in which they live. This questioning may lead to the imagining of a different way to live, and this in turn makes theatre potentially utopic.

Ricoeur’s definition of utopia is useful here in that he does not use the word utopia to suggest a dream of a better place but the capacity and desire to change reality To use the words of George Taylor, editor of *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* for Ricoeur: “the utopia is not only a dream, though for it is a dream that wants to realised. The intention of the utopia is to change – to shatter – the present order” (Ricoeur: 1986, xxi). This capacity to change can be seen in Ricoeur’s second of three

stages of utopia. The first being fantasy or the completely unrealizable”, the second the desire for an “alternative power” and the third leading to the “exploration of the possible” (Ricoeur: 1986, 310)” It can also be seen in Ernst Bloch’s two stages of utopia. In his *The Principle of Hope* (1986) Bloch describes people as being unfinished, or living in a state animated by dreams or desires of a better life, or utopian longings for another way of being. Bloch defines two utopias the abstract, or the dream and concrete or the utopia that constitutes a real possibility. The distinction between the two for Bloch resides in the “the power of anticipation, which we [call] concrete utopia (Bloch: 1986, 157). In other words the concept of utopia contains anticipation or what both Bloch and Ricoeur call the “Not yet”. For both philosophers the not yet, is the, what might be, and creates the possibility of change. The key point here is that this possibility of change is rooted and seen from within the dominate ideology.

Ricoeur describes ideology and utopia as being “two opposite sides or complementary functions which typifies what could be called social and cultural imagination” (Ricoeur: 1986, 1).

Whether distorting, legitimating or constituting, ideology always has the function of preserving an identity, whether of a group or individual...utopia has the opposite function: to open the possible. Even when an ideology is constitutive, when it returns us for example, to the founding deeds of a community – religious political etc – it acts to make us repeat our identity. Here the imagination has a mirroring or staging function. Utopia, on the other hand, is always the exterior, the nowhere, the possible. The contrast between ideology and utopia permits us to see the two sides of the imaginative function in social life (Ricoeur: 1986, 182).

So the social imagination for Ricoeur operates both in a constructive and a destructive way as both “confirmation and contestation” of the present (Ricoeur: 1986, 1). In mimetic theatre performance the social imagination of the audience can view the present and the prevailing “false consciousness” and through a critical hermeneutics can critique the present and configure a utopia or a “productive an imagining of something else, the elsewhere” (Ricoeur: 1986, 266). Having reached

the position of elsewhere then the 'reader' or audience members look back from the 'no where' to re-examine the place from which they have come, at which point the present " suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. The field of the possible is now open beyond that of the actual; it is a field, therefore, for alternative way of living" (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). In this way it becomes possible for "imaginative variations on the topics of society, power, government, family, religion" (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). A theatre performance that foregrounds the structure allows the audience to radically rethink "what is family, what is consumption, what is authority" (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). This critical hermeneutics then opens a gap between what exists and the utopian vision the imagination then "attempts to fill this gap between the dream and the present state of things" (Ricoeur: 1984, 288). When a theatre production invites the audience to fill the gaps they are positioned as potential agents of change and thus political.

Ricoeur uses the term 'social imagination', in his *Lectures in Ideology and Utopia* (1986) as he discusses how it is possible to imagine a utopia from within the dominant ideology. He argues that it is the 'social imagination' that makes this possible – this capacity, he states, allows the exploration of what it is to be human to take place while one is caught within an ideology. In this his starting premise is that there is no one ideological stance and that all thought and therefore action is mediated by ideology; *mediated* but not *bound* by ideology. In *Lectures in Ideology and Utopia* (1986) he expands on this theory by claiming that moments of 'distanciation' can be created from within an ideology that opens a space for critique. My hypothesis is that theatre performances can create these moments of distanciation that allow a critique of the present providing they offer a mimetic representation of that present and 'the space' or interstices for reflection. Within these moments of distanciation, or these interstices, the imagination moves from the constituted to the constituting and possibly from confirmation to contestation. In order to establish this position it is worth taking the time to explore Ricoeur's work in more detail.

Central to Ricoeur's theories is the idea of the "Mannheim paradox", whereby:

The paradox is the nonapplicability of the concept of ideology to itself. In other words, if everything that we say is bias, if everything we say represents interest that we do not know, how can we have a theory of ideology which is not itself ideological? The reflexivity of the concept of ideology on itself provides the paradox (Ricoeur: 1986, 8).

This results in a false consciousness so that we can "speak [or think] about ideology, but our speech [or thought] is itself caught up in ideology (Ricoeur: 1986, 160). In this way there can be no "uninvolved or absolute onlooker" (Ricoeur: 1986, xxvi). This would appear to imply that human beings are therefore trapped in a closed loop – it is impossible to think about our ideological state of being because we can only do so from within this thought pattern and therefore our thinking will still be from within that ideology. This would be binding if it were not for "the most primordial, most hidden dialectic – the dialectic that reigns between the experience of belonging as a whole and the power of distancing that opens up the space of speculative thought" (Ricoeur: 1977, 313). For Ricoeur distancing is a "positive component" in text that enables the "critique of ideology" (Ricoeur: 1991, 290). Through distancing the "text may escape from the author's restricted intentional horizon" and "recontextualise itself differently in the act of reading" (Ricoeur: 1991, 290-291). It is this "recontextualisation" through distance that accommodates the critique:

The power of the text to open a dimension of reality implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby the possibility of a critique of the real. It is in poetic discourse that this subversive power is most alive (Ricoeur: 1991, 292)

In these moments of distance from the author, or the text itself, it becomes possible for the reader to relate their prefigured knowledge and in the gap created by the distance reconfigure what they know about the world. When the subject matter is reflective of the world the reader knows then this distance can create the space within which the reader

can critique the conditions or ideology which surrounds them. It is here, in this moment of critical distance, that the audience is cited as an agent of change, as questioning paves the way for considering alternatives. If the ideology examined is demonstrated to fall short or to limit potential then that model is shown to be failing, or to use the words of Ricoeur “the order which has been taken for granted suddenly appears queer and contingent” (Ricoeur: 1986, 300). In this moment the reader may create an alternative. For Ricoeur this is the moment where “utopia” may be glimpsed. He argues that:

The result of reading a utopia is that it puts into question what precisely exists; it makes the actual world seem strange. Usually we are tempted to say that we cannot live in a different way from the way we presently do (Ricoeur: 1986, 299).

Ricoeur points out that “the deinstitutionalization of the main human relationships is finally...the kernel of all utopias” but that this then leads to the question of what to replace them with.

We should also ask whether utopias deinstitutionalize relationships in order to leave them deinstitutionalized or in order to reinstitutionalize them in a supposedly more humane way (Ricoeur: 1984, 299).

I would argue that it is not the role of reflexive theatre to resolve this uncertainty but to reveal the question. The aims of the works discussed in this thesis are, to my mind, to disturb challenge and leave the audience contemplating the possibility of change and providing optimism by recognising that change may be possible.

These plays are rooted in the challenges of actual events , in that they represent situations the audience will recognise as familiar, soldiers returning from a war in the Middle East (*Tuesday*, Bond: 1997) a stabbing in school playground (*Eleven Vests* , Bond: 1997 ), child abuse (*Five Kinds of Silence*, Stephenson: 1996), teenagers who self-harm (*Faust is Dead*, Ravenhill: 1997), corrupt figures of authority (*Butterfly Kiss*, Nagy:1994), war (*Blasted*, Kane: 1995), and poverty (*Yard Gal* , Prichard: 1998). The structure of the plays, by providing the interstices

and referential frame, also allow the space for imagining an alternative if only fleetingly. These plays go some of the way to creating the circumstances in which a social imagination could be engaged. I argue throughout this thesis that theatre can, by presenting the current social climate, specifically in relation to the family unit to an engaged and active spectator provide the conditions in which that spectator can reflect in the moment of performance on the fictional circumstances presented and juxtapose these with the real circumstances at play beyond the theatre and therefore think 'beyond' the familiar and begin to imagine alternatives. Having come this far those audience members will now have the potential to be agents of change. If theatre can engage a social imagination there will be no simple solution just as no simple solution to situations is presented in the plays discussed here.

Here, then, the audience's agency to create constructive social change rests on the nature of the imagination and the capacity to envision a canvas of human relationships. This imagination must emerge from the hard realities of human affairs and theatre can engage the 'social imagination' and thereby imagine an alternative from within the given situation. In other words within theatre the "everyday reality is metamorphosed by what could be called the imaginative variations that literature carries out on the real" (Ricoeur: 1991, 83). This connection of the imagination and the audience as agents of change forms the basis of the following chapters, but before considering the plays that trigger this response as this thesis specifically focuses on change in family structures and 'imaginative variations' on the family, it is important to deconstruct the term family and its usage in the period discussed here. The following chapter will, therefore, consider the family as a social construct and as a political device.

## Chapter Four: Deconstructing the Family Unit

### ***'...It's not an ordinary family'***

(Phaedra's Love: Kane 2001)

One of my major concerns in this thesis is to ask how playwrights responded to the changing views of childhood and family structure in post-Thatcher and post-Bulger Britain. The plays I discuss in this thesis are positioned as inherently political and politically charged, in that they frame contemporary issues associated with families. This chapter considers the family as a social concept, as such the definitions of what constitutes a family change within different historical contexts. In this chapter I argue that these plays demonstrate that what has been taken as "common sense" in the form of the family is a social construct. In doing so I shall offer a deconstruction of the family unit and introduce a reading of four plays; Caryl Churchill's *Blue Heart* (1997), Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), Churchill's *A Number* (2002) and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1998). Each of these plays places the family at the centre of the plot, illustrating an aspect of this social construction and the damage that it may cause to individuals within the family unit. These plays require audiences to reconsider such social structures and invite critical perspectives on the dominant ideology of 'family' life.

Many of the plays of this period show that nuclear family remains an ideal but that it is one that may bring disastrous consequences for individuals. These plays question the family unit, and I suggest that when the family is accepted as the norm or where it is naturalised, a number of issues regarding the safety of children are raised. In my reading of the plays, each deconstructs the family unit, thereby providing a critique and inviting a reconsideration of it. Here I demonstrate that the plays of this period emphasize and implicitly critique the construct of the family, revealing it to be a unit of control. Each play examined in this chapter uses images of family structures as a foundation for the

narratives in such a way that the audience members are positioned to question its naturalisation.

### **The Family as a Social Construct**

Sociologist Caroline Knowles describes the way in which the family “operates as a barometer of a more general social malaise” (Knowles: 1996, 21). As a result she argues it is an institution that is “constantly scrutinized for signs of decay and decline” (Knowles: 1996, 21). The word family itself conveys a complex construct that has a variety of meanings. According to the postmodern feminist thinker Linda Nicholson, the word family when used by English-language speakers can mean one of two things; it can refer to the relatively small unit composed of people related by marriage or blood who live together; however, there is another sense of “family” where “family” refers to all those people with whom one is related” (Nicholson: 1997, 28-9). In the context of this work I will be using the former meaning. Nicholson makes the point that this dual meaning enables a “slippage” in language so that when:

conservatives claim that “the family” is under attack, their concern is not with the preservation of “the family” in this sense. Rather, the kind of “family” they are typically referring to... is, the unit of parents with children who live together. However, this concern is typically justified with the argument that what is being destroyed is “universal”. In other words, there is a slippage in the use of language so that the universality of one type becomes claimed about another only because the two institutions share the same name, that is, “the family” (Nicholson: 1997, 29).

Both Nicholson and Knowles were writing in the Nineties, just as there were a number of contemporaneous political debates forming around the concept of the family. Knowles observes that “the family has long been seen as an index of the general health and well-being of society in a eugenic sense” (Knowles: 1996, 19). She goes on to say that changes in the family unit caused by or resulting from “divorce, illegitimacy, single parenthood, and abortion” are taken “not as signs that the family is changing, but as signs of family (and hence social) decay” (Knowles: 1996, 19). The “slippage”, as in the words of Nicholson quoted above, in the meaning and use of the word family enabled the political rhetoric of

the day surrounding family values to imply that a normative concept was under threat and that as a result there was a threat to the moral values of contemporary society. In reality what was occurring was the reevaluation of the socially constructed family unit consisting of two parents and their children living together.

Foucault's influence on social theory in the 1980s and Nineties made it possible to see that the family unit is a powerful agent of social control and self-regulation. Nikolas Rose describes it as a "social mechanism for providing and regulating the subjective capacities of future citizens and as the privileged pathway for the fulfilment of individual wishes and hopes" (Rose: 1989, 155). This Foucauldian notion of the biopolitical is central to understanding how the family is socially produced and maintained. Foucault argues that power is decentralised and highly dispersed: "Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault: 1980, 93). He continues to say that power is "exercised from innumerable points" and "relationships" (Foucault: 1980, 94). Foucault first demonstrates the development of the transference of power within society from that which is external to the family, to one that is internal, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Knowles has similarly observed that this: "notion of power is particularly applicable to understanding the family. The family is generated, sustained, and shaped through webs of power relationships which operate around and within it, and which regulate in both subtle and obvious ways" (Knowles: 1996, 31). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies the transition of government of the individual through the fear of, and the spectacle of, corporal punishment to a more subtle training of the individual. This is a development from an external form of government to an internal form of power that leads to self-regulation and self-government or "governmentality" is one which Foucault sees as the modern implementation of the law:

...governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementaries and conflicts between techniques which assure

coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (Foucault: 1993, 204).

The family represents this model as a microcosm of the state, whereby:

...the head of the family will know how to look after his family, his goods and his patrimony, which means that individuals will, in turn behave as they should. This downward line, which transmits to individual behaviour and the running of the family the same principles as the good government of the state, is just at this time beginning to be called "police" (Foucault: 2000, 207).

In other words the head of the family will police this family and they will obey the laws and do what is expected of them and in return he/she will look after them.

There are three dimensions of power at play in the concept of the family, the first of which is the "power to name" (Foucault: 1977, 231) which is concerned with classification as a way of imposing social order.

Secondly, there is the power to constitute subjects as 'normal', and thirdly, the operations of networks of discipline that surrounds the family.

Together these dimensions of power position the family to be both the target and architect of disciplinary apparatus, making it, according to Knowles, "a nodal point in a web of social practices and regulations which operate within and around it. The family is both the outcome of disciplinary society and a disciplinary force itself" (Knowles: 1996, 33).

Foucault's framework for understanding power relations enables us to ask critical questions about the nature of families and their constitution by making the constructed nature and the power structures at play within, and around, them apparent. Governmentality is a model of social efficiency whereby the health of the nation is managed through the family. Families are considered to be a failure if the child does not learn moral standards in the home as the locus of morality is perceived to be the home. Where docile bodies are produced (self-regulation through the threat of surveillance) society's values become naturalised and normalised and the government becomes one where government has been internalised. Foucault uses the metaphor of Bentham's Panopticon to explain how disciplinary power functions in society, whereby prisoners

live in isolation, under the threat of constant surveillance from an unseen but omniscient and omnipresent figure who has the power to punish them for misdeeds. Thus through the spatialisation of bodies, surveillance and a hierarchical figure, individuals are ‘threatened’ into self-regularisation and as such it becomes internalised as a form of biopolitics.

Every family unit can be seen as a miniature panopticon in which each individual monitors their own behaviours. Here I argue that theatre is able to make visual the constructed nature and the power structures at play apparent. In particular it reveals the power structures at play within the family when it is used as focus of a play. For example in Peter Morris’ *Age of Consent* (2001 Pleasance, Edinburgh) Timmy, the child murderer, describes this panopticon at work when he says:

...what they like is to set up the camera inside your own head. So that you’re watching yourself. So that every time you do something there’s a bit of yourself watching you do it. Inside your head (Morris: 2002, 9).

The self-regularising described by Timmy is compounded by urban architecture and the modern housing estate. In *The Architect* (1996 Traverse, Edinburgh) by David Greig, Leo begins to see the houses he designed in decidedly Foucauldian terms where:

A thousand families...self-contained flats...connecting walkways...public galleries and ...space and...structure...A family in each flat. Each block a community...The city encircled by estates, each one connected to the others and to the centre (Greig: 2002, 192-3).

And where “anything you build can be turned into a prison” (Greig: 2002, 193). In the next section I will use Caryl Churchill’s play *Blue Heart* (1997) to explore this position more fully.

### **Troubling the Family – *Heart’s Desire***

In the two plays that form *Blue Heart* (1997, Out of Joint national tour) Churchill presents her audience with two families in narratives that centre on family relationships and reunions. Theatre scholar R. Darren Gorbett

identifies the focus of the plays as being “the regulation of normalcy and deviance” observing that the deviance is found in the “linguistic and the nature of performance, both constitutive and disruptive” (Gorbert: 2009, 117). Churchill has argued that it is the work of playwrights to ask questions about the nature of society:

Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions. We need to find new questions, which may help us to answer the old ones or make them unimportant and this means new subjects and new form (Churchill: 1960, 446).

I am particularly interested in the questions her work raises about the nature of the familial. Here I will discuss her use of reflexive theatre devices specifically the gaps that Churchill creates in the structures, narratives, and dialogue in her plays that lead the audience to question the familiar family form. Churchill's plays of this period do not just develop new devices for theatre but, according to theatre scholar, Dan Rebellato they ask questions that in turn “search for new ways to live in contemporary society. Churchill herself never gives the answers but structures her “plays [to] ask questions that they do not themselves answer” (Rebellato: 2009, 174). In this work, Churchill's is consciously political both in content and form. Mark Ravenhill comments in *The Guardian* (2008) that in Churchill's work “there is constant search for new kinds of language and theatrical structures: devices that can reveal the essence of a moment” (2008, 23). In the plays discussed in this thesis Churchill presents her audiences with a series of recognisable family relationships that are deconstructed. In each Churchill uses images of family structures as a foundation for the narratives in such a way that the audience members may begin to question the family's naturalisation. This allows the audience to recognise the ideological constructs of the real world through the representation of characters and situations on stage. In doing so she is drawing attention to these constructs through her theatrical inventiveness. In other words, her stage devices work to defamiliarise situations providing moments of distancing which allows the audience to observe them anew.

The plays of *Blue Heart* demonstrate breakdowns structurally; the first in action and the second in language. This disturbed and disturbing representation of family life is demonstrated by the characters' attempt to cling to the idealised image of the familial even as the plays structurally disintegrate around them. As the form of the play disintegrates, so do the lives of the characters and the audience is invited to question the institution of the family and the damage it inflicts on the individuals who cling to its prescribed roles. This desire to hold fast to the family structure can be seen as a result of the depth to which the imagery of idealized family life has permeated the fabric of social existence. In my reading of the first of these two plays, *Heart's Desire*, the characters can be seen as remaining within family structures that causes them both anguish and distress. Each of them is trapped in a succession of repeats whereby the dialogue and content change slightly but the end result never does; the family remains waiting for an absent daughter. The play represents a family that is neither happy nor content. The overall impact of the repetitions can be seen to summarise the frustrations exhibited by each of the family members.

A Foucauldian reading of the family unit regards it as an agent of control that developed as a way of responding to threats to society and of regulating the quality of the future population and the strength of the nation. Political scientist Jacques Donzelot describes this development as a move from the government *of* families to government *through* families, whereby the family becomes a means to regulate or police the society. Donzelot uses the following definition of policing, stating that the family unit fulfils the policing function in society:

The purpose of policing is to ensure the good fortune of the state through the wisdom of its regulations and to augment its forces and power to the limits of its capability. The science of policing consists therefore of regulating everything that relates to the present condition of society, in strengthening and improving it, in seeing that all things contribute to the welfare of the members that compose it. The aim of policing it to make everything that composes the state serve to strengthen and increase its power and likewise serve the public welfare." (Johann von Justi, *Elements generaux de police* (1768) in Donzelot: 1979, 7).

Applying Foucault's theories of the institution to notions of the family, Donzelot analyses how the family as a social concept has developed as an agent of social control. In my reading of *Heart's Desire* I argue that Churchill is inviting the audience to consider the socially constructed and controlling family unit and critique the adverse effects it appears to have on the characters within the family structure.

*Heart's Desire* opens with a father, mother, an aunt and a brother awaiting the arrival of Susy, a daughter, from Australia. At first glance this is a trivial domestic and unremarkable naturalistic scene, however, within moments Churchill's script changes this dynamic as the scene loops back and resets itself to the beginning.

ALICE and MASIE. ALICE *setting knives and forks on table*, MASIE *fidgets about the room*. BRIAN *enters putting on a red sweater*.

BRIAN            She's taking her time.

ALICE            Not really

*They all stop, BRIAN goes out. Others reset to beginning and do exactly what they did before as BRIAN enters putting on a tweed jacket* (Churchill: 1997, 5).

The opening dialogue and actions are repeated four times in quick succession with each repetition adding a few more sentences of dialogue. Eventually more of the scene is played out but each time it is 'reset' to reveal a different event or topic of discussion as the audience is left to work out what is happening. The scene is interrupted with a variety of intruders that include masked gunmen, a ten foot bird, a horde of screaming children, and ends with the same lines that it started with. The effect of this continuous replaying, is to present the audience with a family which is in turn frustrated, oppressed, abused and terrified as they go through the everyday motions of recognisable family routine and ritual. Theatre scholar Amelia Howe Kritzer has made the observation that:

What does get communicated through the confusion of starts and stops and changing viewpoints is the suffering of individuals in this family. Each character inhabits a microcosm of profound pain (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 69).

A close examination of the 'suffering' and 'pain' evident in some of representations of family members reveals that the anguish and distress evident here is a direct result of the adherence to the familial structure. This adherence to a structure that is seen in this play to be damaging to individuals is the result of the privileging of position of the family in society that is generated, shaped and sustained through power relations that operate within it and around it. Churchill draws attention to the constructed nature of the family unit through the fragmentation of the scene. The ironic title of *Heart's Desire* draws attention to the unhappy relationships of Brain and Alice and invites the audience to question the idea of the happy, self-supporting and regulating, nurturing traditional family.

The idealised image of the family home as being both natural and normal as pointed to in the ironically titled *Heart's Desire* was also portrayed by a succession of governments and continual media images. This was particularly so in the 1980s and early Nineties. Sociologists Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh writing in 1982 claimed that at this time the institution of the family was "the focal point of a set of ideologies that resonate throughout society. The imagery of idealized family life permeates the fabric of social existence and provides a highly significant dominant and unifying complex of social meaning" (Barrett and McIntosh: 1982, 29). They argued that the institution of the family has been privileged to such an extent within contemporary life that those living outside such a 'traditional' social arrangement are isolated to the extent that many try to fit this mould of living. By the mid to late Nineties the debates surrounding the family had shifted to consider the ways in which ideal or 'fictional' families had been internalised. Michael Shapiro claimed in 2001:

As a result, given the significant gap in which the fictional family precedes the actual one, in terms of both configuration and the quality of emotional exchanges, fictional forms dominate contemporary understandings of family life, which historical evidence shows to be more a 'regulative fiction than a reality', it is a mythical entity shaping the conservative family values movement (Shapiro: 2001, 5).

This naturalisation may result in the family taking responsibility for its members not as an imposed governmental dictate but as a perceived innate desire whereby the family has aspirations for the success of its individual members in line with the political aspiration of the nation. The family is thereby internally governed by its own desires, and ambitions to succeed and to provide for its members making the family:

...an organic component of a society and a population, with its own internal living processes, to be shaped, educated and solicited into a relation with the state if it was to fulfil its role of producing healthy, responsible, adjusted social citizens (Rose: 1999, 128).

The enduring idealised image of the family creates high expectations of this institution, expectations that it cannot possibly live up to; it also creates a sense of pity for those which cannot form their own family unit and a strong desire to create one or search for that idealised way for life. Barrett and McIntosh argue:

the family is seen as naturally given and as a socially and morally desirable. The realms of the 'natural' and the soci-moral are nowhere so constantly merged and confused as in our feelings and thoughts about the family (1982, 26).

They discuss this 'anti-social' aspect of family structure at length in their 1982 polemic, observing those living outside families are stigmatised:

What happens outside families is much affected by the existence of the family as a privileged institution...Those who do not are isolated and deprived...couples who do not have children are frowned upon...the popular image of the family – the married couple living with their young children – is constantly projected as the image of normality and of happiness (Barrett and McIntosh: 1982, 76-77).

Foucault cites the family, or the "parent-children cell", as "the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal" (Foucault: 1984, 206). The family polices what is considered

normal and what is abnormal, and this is internalised. Thereby the pressure of normalising judgement creates the desire for individuals to search out family structures and cling to them regardless of the damage they sometimes inflict on their members. The institution of the family has been privileged to such an extent within contemporary life that those living outside such a 'traditional' social arrangement are isolated to the extent that those within such a structure will adhere to it any almost any cost, even though many commentators have argued it is a deeply flawed concept. In *Heart's Desire* the characters are metaphorically trapped in the family unit by the repetitions that structure the play.

This adherence to the family structure can be seen as a result of what Foucault would have described as "normalisation" and it in turn results in "socialisation". Families can be seen as agents of socialisation as they are a means for the transmission of behaviour and roles to the next generation, whereby the individual accepts the values of his or her parents and thus the family becomes a means of mediating between the state and the individual. The normalisation of these control mechanisms results in the idealization of both motherhood and fatherhood and so the family is presented as a model to aspire to. This ensures that families produce future responsible citizens and place the child at the centre of the family unit, in the position of being the governmental "ideal and target" who is "inextricably connected to the aspirations of authorities", and has resulted in the "environment of the growing child" being "regulated financially...and pedagogically" and whereby "legislative obligations are imposed upon parents" (Shapiro: 2001, 123). In this way the family becomes the "locus of inculcation of morality into children" (Rose: 1989, 156). As Donzelot argues in his book the family becomes the means for policing the state. Therefore the family becomes a mechanism for social control and fulfils both an economic and a social function:

...the family has come to operate as a social mechanism for producing and regulating the subjective capacities of future citizens and as the privileged pathway for fulfilment of the individual wishes and hopes (Rose: 1989, 155).

This results in the family taking responsibility for its members not as an imposed governmental dictate, but as a perceived innate desire. The family is thereby internally governed by its own desires, and ambitions to succeed and to provide for its members and so making the family:

...an organic component of a society and a population, with its own internal living processes, to be shaped, educated and solicited into a relation with the state if it was to fulfil its role of producing healthy, responsible, adjusted social citizens (Rose: 1999, 128).

In my reading of *Blue Heart* the audience witnesses the disintegration of the myth of the domestic family ideal, however, the audience is not led directly to this position but is drawn into the events and made to “supply what is meant from what is not said” (Iser: 1980, 111). The critics of the first production were split between those who thought that the “dramatic innovations do little more than prove an intellectual point” (Curtis: 1997) and those who thought that together these works were “substantial, provocative, immensely stylish works which create an unsettling mixture of wild laughter and profound unease” (Spencer: 1997), or in the words of Michael Coveney, plays for which “you have to sit up and listen a bit” (Coveney: 1997). I would argue that more than merely requiring the audience to sit up and listen, these plays are reflexive and therefore political. They actively invite the audience to make connections between the breakdown in structures of the plays and the breakdown of families represented and therefore reconsider the nature of family relationships.

In *Heart's Desire* the breakdown of the structure of the narrative, reflects the images the audiences receives of a family structure that is breaking down but to which the individual members cling to even though they threaten to leave on many occasions. The action and dialogue repeats in a cyclical pattern so that there is no development or communication between the characters. The overall impact of the repetitions can be seen to summarise the frustrations exhibited by each of the family members. Each of them are trapped in the succession of repeats

whereby the dialogue and content change but the end result never does, the family remains waiting. This monotony is highlighted in one of the repetitions in which the characters just state the last word in each of their lines. At one point in this cycle the lines are simply:

BRAIN	Again.
ALICE	Again.
BRAIN	Again.
MAISIE	Waiting.
ALICE	Getting hungry.
BRIAN	Eat.
ALICE	Lunch.
BRAIN	Bed

(Churchill: 1997, 25).

This sequence describes the cycle of days waiting for something, anything, to happen in which the waiting and the days are structured around mealtimes and sleeping. Here the characters represented are waiting for death in Maisie's case, or for Susy to return, or for somebody to speak the truth. The repetition and references to recurrent arguments that make up Brain and Alice's dialogue imply that these are everyday events for this family regardless of Susy's impending return. Watching the play I read this family as a microcosm of family units in general. The resetting and repetition created for me a theatrical event which Ricoeur described as: "understanding at and through distance" (Ricoeur: 1991, 84). When I was in the audience my consideration extended to the world beyond the play, and so, invited a comparison between my own experiences of family life and that of the fictional family on stage. In Ricoeur's terms then the play increased my understanding of life outside the theatre. The recurrences and slips in time draw attention to the routine of family life in an irreplaceable manner. Geraldine Cousin argues in her book *Playing for Time*, that "it is as though the safe domestic world has been invaded by a theatrical form of a computer virus" (Cousin: 2007, 101). The accumulative effect of this 'virus' is to underscore the way in which power has been decentred and located in the family and question the notion of the 'safe domestic world'. The family unit is generated, shaped, and sustained through power relations that operate within it and around it.

A consideration of the family representatives portrayed in *Heart's Desire* demonstrates the restrictive effects of clinging to the nuclear and extended nuclear family structure. Brian and Alice argue throughout the play. Brian's dialogue implies that this is part of their routine with lines such as the often repeated "It's so delightful for you always being so right" (Churchill: 1997, 6). Early on in the performance it becomes apparent that Alice often threatens to leave the family home:

ALICE           That's it.  
BRIAN           It's what?  
ALICE           I'm leaving.  
BRIAN           Oh ha ha we're all supposed to be frantic and  
                  beg you to stay and say very sorry.  
ALICE           I wouldn't bother.  
BRIAN           I'm not going to bother don't worry.  
                  *Exit ALICE*  
MAISIE          Alice?  
                  BRIAN *and* MAISIE *wait* (Churchill: 1997, 7).

Moments later Alice returns briefly to the stage with suitcase in hand and then exits; Brian and Maisie wait and then hear the front door shut. The audience may think that this indicates that Alice has left, however the characters reset to the start of the play and repeat the sequence again. Churchill establishes that this is a pattern that is often repeated, and the repetition invites the audience to question their own recurring patterns of behaviour, recurrent family breakdowns and the re-establishing of familiar and familial patterns. In fact during the play Alice only actually plays this scene out once, in a later version of the argument she claims that she wished Brian had gone because she'd "have stayed here and been happy" (Churchill: 1997, 20). The character continues to say that she hasn't been faithful and has been having an affair for fifteen years. It is clear that this is a representation of an unhappy woman who is powerless to leave or change her situation. Brian repeats the fact that he "should leave... should have gone to Australia" five times – and implies it a sixth in an abbreviated version of the lines, thus demonstrating that neither is happy or content in this relationship.

One of Brian's other 'episodes' demonstrates his own feelings of confinement and self-loathing when he describes his "terrible urge to eat" himself. He starts with his fingers and arms:

And then the shoulders bring the rest of my body, eat my heart, eat my lungs, down my ribs I go, munch my belly, crunch my prick, and oh my whole body's in my mouth ...I've swallowed my head I've swallowed my whole self up I'm all mouth can my mouth swallow my mouth yes yes my mouth's taking a big bite ahh (Churchill: 1997, 22).

This is a disturbing image of self-destruction that at first appears to come from nowhere. It is an image that can be seen to develop from the repeated cycle of Brian and Alice arguing over whether or not he is nice to his daughter and how good a father he is.

BRIAN            When am I not nice to her? am I not a good father is that what you're going to say? do you want to say that say it (Churchill: 1997, 23).

In performance, Brian appears to be expressing his concerns over his parenting skills here. When considered alongside comments from the character of his son, Lewis, the dialogue has a deeper significance. It appears to be suggesting that Brian's interest in his daughter has an incestuous motivation as I will now discuss.

Lewis appears in three segments as the interruption that causes the reset of action, each time briefly but poignantly when considering the theatrical presentation of the family unit. The first of these three, as in the others, he arrives drunk, he demands to see his sister, and give her a big kiss, and he accuses Brian of having hidden her away:

You've probably got her hidden under the table. Dad knows where she is, don't you Dad? Daddy always knows where Susy is. Hello Aunty Maisie, want a drink? Let go to the pub, Maisie and get away from this load of – (Churchill: 1997, 11).

The audience does not discover what the family "is a load of" as the play resets to the start again. There is an unmistakable reference to the closeness of the father daughter relationship played here. By this point the play has reset five times and it is apparent that Susy is not coming home. The audience is encouraged throughout the resettings to consider

why this might be the case, why is “she taking her time”? (Churchill: 1997, 5) Is she just avoiding a quarrelsome family or is there a more sinister reason behind her absence? Is the kiss more than a show of brotherly affection – the audience is led to consider if there is a case of incest between the siblings and that could be why Brian might hide his daughter from Lewis. A second possibility that Churchill flirts with is that the sexual interest in Susy comes from Brian and that he had hidden her away in the past to keep her affection for himself, or is this just a more innocent family relationships playing out? Churchill again offers no answers. Throughout the cyclical structure of the play these and other possibilities play for the audience as the referential fields move from family member to family member.

The second time Lewis appears his conversation with Brian and Alice focuses on his own unhappiness and conflict with his father who tells him:

Lewis, I wish you'd died at birth. If I'd have known what you'd grow up like I'd have killed either you or myself the day you were born (Churchill: 1997,16).

While this segment does not show Brian's parenting skills in a good light it implies with Lewis's whinging that he is not happy. Alice's telling him that he “has to help himself” implies either that he is a self-indulgent drunken teenager who needs to take responsibility for himself, or that Brian is a sadistically mentally abusive man. The audience is given no clues which of these or other possible conclusions to draw. Although it is an inescapable conclusion that family life is not harmonious or healthy for any of the individuals presented here.

Lewis's third reset is perhaps the most ominous; he arrives with the words “It's time we had it out. It's time we spoke the truth” (Churchill: 1997, 24). The audience never hears what this truth is and so is left to imagine what it might be by piecing the fragments together. Here Churchill's form and narrative are fractured, and ‘open’, inviting the audience to actively become meaning makers and work out what that

truth might be. By leaving the sentence hanging, Churchill is inviting the audience to connect the fragments within the referential field of the play and make the play 'readable'. The ambiguity positions the audience to ask what the truth might be, one of child abuse and incest, or neglect of the son in preference of the daughter, or merely sibling rivalry, or just that this is an unhappy family remaining together for conventions sake because they cannot imagine any alternatives.

Brian's dialogue in which he asks if he is not a good father is repeated twice before the scene in which he visualises eating himself and three times after. Each time he asks the questions "When am I not nice to her? am I not a good father is that what you're going to say" the audience replays the juxtaposed scenes with Lewis and surely draws the conclusion that, no he is not. The exact nature of his misdemeanours and the veiled truth that Lewis refers to is never laid bare, but the implication is clear that abuse is possible, if not a certainty, in this symbolic familial unit. The play's title words are spoken by Brian in the brief retelling where Susy does appear with the words "I am here", Brian tells her that she is his *heart's desire* – this leaves more questions with the audience – about the nature of the relationship between this fictional father and daughter as the plot resets yet again for one final run though. Only one thing is certain as they move back to the starting positions, and that is that Susy returning home is no more a reality than the other playings of the scene. The piece ends with the unspoken question of why isn't she there or why won't she return.

The continual resettlings explore the idealized image of the family and reveal what Aston describes as "the alienating dynamic of the familial" (Aston: 2001, 104). When performed together with *Blue Kettle* the audience witnesses two juxtaposed family units that clearly demonstrate the "damage of the familial" (Aston: 2001, 113). These plays demonstrate the effect of this damage on the individuals as both playlets are, as Aston argues, "concerned with the demythologization of the bourgeois family as a twentieth century fiction" (Aston: 2001, 144). In the

second of these two one act plays the audience is witness to the breaking down of communication through the literal breakdown of language, that is also symbolic of the breakdown of family relationships.

### **In Search of the Perfect Mother – *Blue Heart***

*Blue Heart* also focuses on family relationships as the adult Derek searches for a lost mother. This play demonstrates the extraordinary lengths this character will go to in order to establish family connections. The narrative centres on Derek as he tracks down a series of women who each gave up a child for adoption, claiming to be the lost son. In scene eight the audience learns that Derek's own mother is "in a geriatric ward" (Churchill: 1997, 59). This leaves them wondering why he feels the need to make a connection with the five women whom he claims as mothers.

During the opening scene the audience is witness to a potentially moving scene between a mother and son separated at birth:

I told them I'd be ashamed to marry someone that didn't want me and they said all right but it's adoption then. Because you didn't have abortion like now and anyway I was already thinking of it as a little doll...I had a name for you. I called you Tom. But when I gave you up I said you hadn't got a name, I thought who you went to would like to give you their own name, I thought that was fair (Churchill: 1997, 41).

The scene is played straight through as the couple discuss whose nose Derek has inherited and the reasons that Mrs Plant had her new born son adopted. As the two plays were performed together the audience perhaps expects a resetting or a Churchillian playing with the structure or form, but there is none. At the start of scene two Derek and Mrs Oliver are talking about photographs and it soon becomes apparent that Derek has found a second mother.

Now what you'll want to see, I do have this one picture of your father, it's not very clear but it's better than nothing (Churchill: 1997, 42).

Just as the audience is presented with this situation Churchill incorporates a coup-de-theatre that creates a distancing from the plot, a device that focuses on the language used to tell the story. Towards the end of the second scene mother number two, Mrs Oliver makes the statement that:

Exactly and that's not like having nothing is it, having the kettle of seeing your son or not, it's not like before (Churchill: 1997, 44).

Here Churchill substitutes the word "kettle" for that of "choice". This theatricality plays out throughout the remainder of the performance as the words "blue" and "kettle" appear more frequently in the dialogue.

The language substitution is also shared by Enid, Derek's girlfriend who, like the other characters, seems to understand the intention of the misspoken words. Enid, however, does not understand Derek's apparent need and search for mothers and her character appears to have no connection with her own biological family. In scene three she reveals that the one aunt she thought was alive has died: "I phoned my aunt today and she was dead...She's been dead three years" (Churchill: 1997, 45). Derek is emphatic that she should have called before and his own 'mother collection' is a clear indication of his need for a familial connection. This need is a mystery to Enid:

ENID            So how many mothers have you got now?  
DEREK         Five.  
ENID            What are you going to do with them?  
DEREK         I see them.  
ENID            And then what?  
DEREK         We'll see (Churchill: 1997, 46).

That this dialogue takes place moments after Enid's revelation implies that Derek does not want to be without a family connection and that he needs to be surrounded by 'family' members, even if they are not actually his family. This is emphasised by the apparent breakdown in language through the play. Michael Billington's review of the plays stated that:

And when you put the plays together what comes across is the disintegration not just of language but of family life itself: we are into the idea of what Eliot calls two people who do not understand

each other “breeding children whom they do not understand and who will never understand them” (Billington: 1997).

This summary is short-sighted, while both plays do demonstrate a breakdown in both action and dialogue, far from revealing a disintegration of family life both illustrate the lengths the characters will go to keep or to establish family connections. In *Blue Kettle* the breakdown of language is only observed by the audience. The characters themselves continue in depth dialogues where communication is not impeded even when the majority of words have been substituted for either the word blue or kettle:

MRS OLIVER	You blue who is this other kettle who’s played such a big kettle in my son’s kettle.
MRS PLANT	Yes in its blue it’s a big kettle.
MRS OLIVER	It’s the biggest kettle.
MRS PLANT	No, blue blue it’s blue looks kettle them and loves them.
MRS OLIVER	That’s what I’m kettle (Churchill: 1997, 65).

It is clear in performance that the characters have no difficulty in understanding each other. In his essay ‘On Performance and Selfhood in Caryl Churchill’ Gorbett:

Note[s] the precision with which the scene moves to greater clarity in spite of the linguistic play. Each of Mrs Plant and Mrs Oliver in fact knows exactly what she and her scene partner say – and, indeed, the actors playing the roles must behave as if they have said the semantically ‘correct’ words not *blue* or *kettle* (Gorbett: 2009, 117).

The ‘linguistic play’ therefore works to distance the audience from the plot and reflect on the situations portrayed. It becomes clear that Derek is searching for a ‘mother’ with whom he can have an intimate and idealised mother and son relationship. It is almost as if he is auditioning the women to find the best candidate. The final scene of the play shows Derek and Mrs Plant in complete accord in a dialogue that is impossible for the audience to decipher:

MRS PLANT	K k no relation. K name k John k k? K k k Tommy k k John. K k k dead k k k believe a word. K k Derek.
DEREK	B.
MRS PLANT	Tle hate k later k, k bl bl bl bl shocked.
DEREK	K, t see bl.

MRS PLANT  
DEREK

T b k k k k l?  
B. K.

*End* (Churchill: 1997, 68-9).

This allows the distance from the actual words for the audience to consider this pairing of two characters who feel the need for a familial bond so strongly they will make this bond knowing that there is no biological connection and that the relationship is based on a lie.

The form of dialogue in *Blue Kettle* and the structuring of the action in *Heart's Desire* therefore make these plays inherently political as I outlined in Chapter Two, the political is found in the ways in which they "guide the reader's constitutive activity" via "a suspension between textual perspective and perspective segments" (Iser : 1980, 118). This enables the audience to consider the constructed nature of the family unit and its absorption into contemporary society as being the idealised state in which to live.

These two plays together explore the family and parenthood. This internalising of the ideal of the family results in the family taking responsibility for its members as a perceived innate desire whereby the family has aspirations for the success of its individual members in line with the political aspiration of the nation. The family is thereby internally governed by its own desires, and ambitions to succeed and to provide for its members. *Heart's Desire* demonstrates the enduring image of the idealised family and explores the high expectations placed on this institution. Both plays demonstrate that the family unit is not capable of living up to the expectations placed on it. Alice and Brian's family stay together as a unit in complete misery while Derek cannot find the one perfect family he believes exists so he collects many of them. The demonstration of breakdown, in language and action, reflects the breakdown of the family structure that had become so naturalised that it is rarely questioned. Here Churchill invites that questioning and allows for reflection in these reflexive moments that may supply a critical perspective on contemporary life and family structure. In my reading of

these plays Churchill is commenting on both the family model and its dominance, demonstrating that for some, including sociologist Michael Shapiro that:

...far from being a reassuring unit of collective solidarity and protection, [the family] becomes instead a conflictual and susceptible collective that amplifies the symbolic manipulations of economic, political, and bureaucratic agents (Shapiro: 2001, 19).

The idea of the family while appearing to offer “collective solidarity”, but instead being a site of “conflict” and danger, is most effectively portrayed by Mark Ravenhill in *Shopping and Fucking*.

### **In Search of a Father Figure - *Shopping and Fucking***

The naturalisation of the family has been so effective and the appeal of the family has become so strong and enduring that the current belief that the family is equated with “solidarity” as argued by Shapiro, is an extremely persistent one. Mark Ravenhill has commented that his own plays reveal a host of adult children searching for paternalistic father figures and absent or abusive parents (Ravenhill: 2004, 305-314). Here I will demonstrate that *Shopping and Fucking* (1996 Royal Court Upstairs, London) shows representations of a child unable to resist the urge to find a father even though his experiences of father figures are filled with torment and abuse. In *Shopping and Fucking* the character of Mark, a recovering, or sometimes not, drug addict becomes a potential and reluctant father figure for the childlike character of Gary.

The plot of this, Ravenhill’s first full length, play centres on the characters of Robbie, Lulu and Mark and their lives which revolve around the consumption of everything from food to sex and drugs. Here, I shall be focusing on the search for a father figure undertaken through the play, by the character of Gary. When the characters of Mark and Gary meet for the first time, Mark pays Gary for sex. During this encounter Gary reveals his fantasy of being looked after by an older man:

Gary: He’s a big bloke. Cruel like but really really he’s kind. Phones me on the lines and says: ‘I really like the sound of you. I want to look after you’ (Ravenhill: 2001, 26).

Mark's character has already confessed to picking Gary on the strength of his voice: "I liked your voice...I just thought you had a nice voice" (Ravenhill: 2001, 22), thus paving the way for the fantasy to become reality.

Gary longs to be looked after by this absent father; he jumps straight to the conclusion when blind folded and role playing with Lulu, Robbie and Mark that Mark is playing out the role of his own abusive step father:

Gary: Are you him? Are you my dad?...Yes. You're my dad.  
Mark: I told you – no.  
He hits Gary  
Then, he pulls away from Gary.  
Gary: See. See. I know who you are. So finish it (Ravenhill: 2001, 83).

Gary is trying to fit into a family structure even when his only experience of a father figure has been an abuser who repeatedly raped him. He tells Mark of his childhood experiences: "He comes into my room after News at Ten...every night after News at Ten and it's, son. Come here, son. I fucking hate that, 'cos I'm not his son" (Ravenhill: 2001, 32). Even with this experience he longs for a father "I want a dad. I want to be watched. All the time, someone watching me" (Ravenhill: 2001, 33). He searches for an imaginary *real* father who has all the characteristics of his cruel step dad in his self-destructive search for a 'good hurt':

I want to be owned. I want someone to look after me. And I want him to fuck me. Really fuck me. Not like that, not like him. And yeah, it'll hurt. But a good hurt (Ravenhill: 2001, 56).

Realising that the person he is looking for does not exist brings Gary to his lowest point and leaves him begging to take part in a role play which will put an end to his search and possibly his life in the process. Lulu and Robbie take the money they are offered to leave Gary alone with Mark. Mark in turn accepts his role and finally becomes the man that Gary wants him to be, simply because nobody else will play out that role. Mark is aware that leaving Gary to search for someone he will never find is worse than taking the role to its extreme conclusion:

Gary: Are you gonna do it? I want you to do it. Come on. You can do it, because he's not out there. I've got this unhappiness. This big sadness swelling like it's gonna burst. I'm sick and I'm never going to be well (Ravenhill: 2001, 85).

In *Shopping and Fucking* the audience is witness to scenes that portray the sex acts involving Gary's character in graphic detail. Ravenhill and director Max Stafford-Clark used these scenes to position the audience as voyeurs, but in a manner that created a sense of distanciation. While in the audience for an early performance in the first run I remember looking down the lines of spectators to see an audience with their eyes, as mine must have been, averted from the stage in close inspection of their shoes, the ceiling or anything but the acts in front of them. The heightened theatricality of the "simulated sex scenes" worked to remove the audience attention from the plot and characters giving them ample time and space to consider the implications of Gary's search for a father figure and the ultimate self-destruction of this character that is unable to find his perfect father. The audience hears the testimony of a child for whom the traditional family structure has failed but for whom the normalising imperative to find a family is still strong. Gary is shown to feel a need for a family structure even though that this is what will cause his destruction.

Gary's character in this play also demonstrates what happens when families are found to be incapable of disciplining their members and creating 'docile bodies' These troubled and troublesome families are taken in hand by social services, and this governmentality ensures that the parents are educated by qualified experts, who supervise the family closely, a process Donzelot describes as "the tutelary complex" (Donzelot: 1979). The possible dangers of this complex are evident in both Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* and Churchill's *A Number*.

### **The Troublesome Family – *A Number***

In a Foucauldian reading of the family structure Donzelot describes the tutelary complex, in which those unable to maintain the perceived

desired standards are subject to “government through experts” whereby they are shown how to perform the duties by a raft of government agencies, who will, if necessary, remove the child thus labelling the parents with failure and guilt. When troublesome families are unable to perform their role, they are subject to outside influences and systems that encourage and coerce them into taking control through a complex system of experts and tutelage. Donzelot applies this system of control to the family unit and using Foucault’s methods of genealogy traces the development of the family as a unit of control, whereby the individual is educated, normalised and socialised by their family members into regulating their own behaviour. If a family member should prove troublesome then this is the result of insufficient guidance or surveillance of the family and they are responsible for the misdemeanours of the offspring, thereby investing the family with both economic and social functions; training its members to become contributing and moral members of society, who will in turn transmit required behaviour, roles and attitudes to the next generation.

To ensure that troublesome families and delinquent children and citizens are kept in line without state intervention the “political task was to devise mechanisms that would support the family in its ‘normal’ functioning and enable it to fulfil its social obligations most effectively without destroying its identity and responsibility” (Rose: 1999, 128). The solution lay in making the internal regime of the working class family the “object of new forms of pedagogy” (Rose: 1999, 128). A heightened surveillance ensured that families kept their members in order or enabled these new forms of pedagogy to be administered. The immediate result of which is that there is no area of life that is as dominated by surveillance than that of the child and their family whose responsibility it is to instil the correct values and aspirations into him/her. As Rose states:

The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual, or moral danger, to ensure ‘normal’ development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability, and emotional stability (1999, 123).

It becomes the responsibility of, predominately, mothers to see that their children grow and develop to reach their full potential. As such:

Love was no longer merely a moral duty or a romantic ideal, it was the element in which were produced normal and abnormal children. Normality was now to be promoted not through coercion after the event...but by inciting the family itself to take on board the business of production of normal subjects. A new relation between subjectivity and the social order was being formed within the matrix of the family (Rose: 1999, 169).

This 'normality' is partly achieved by the mother observing and measuring their child's development ensuring that it stays in line with that of friends and neighbours off-spring. Parents are aided by school and health systems that measure and examine the child's development at every stage. Thus the development is intensely governed by the parents own desires and guilt at the thought of failing their child. The home defined as a private sphere, where the influence of outsiders is removed and where state interference is not wanted or necessary. It becomes a unit of political aspiration where the family takes responsibility for its members, not because it has to but because it wants to.

When a family proves to be incapable of this, according to Donzelot, these families become subjects of the "the tutelary complex" (Donzelot: 1979). This system ensures that inadequate supervision leads to education of the parents by qualified experts, who supervise the family closely and, if this is effectual, the ultimate shame and weapon; the removal of the children. With the current escalation of self-help and life style documentaries, an extra level of the "tutelary complex" exists whereby every family has a host of celebrities providing them with ways to manage the wayward family member, and these are welcomed into the home as the child has become the emotional investment and self-realisation of the parents. Knowles expands on Donzelot's tutelage complex:

The idea of the tutelary complex makes the point that family life is only a partially private domain. The family constantly erupts into

public concern when agencies of surveillance detect serious violations of certain norms and practices (Knowles: 1996, 34).

In other words troublesome families are exposed to public scrutiny and taught how to behave by outside experts. In *Shopping and Fucking* the experts are no help to Gary. He turns to the social services in desperation telling them the following story:

I knew it wasn't right. I went to the council. And I said to her, look, it's simple: he's fucking me. Once, twice, three times a week he comes into my room. He's a big man. He holds me down and he fucks me. How long? She says. About two years, I say. I say he moved in then six months later it starts. I told her and she says 'Does he use a condom' (Ravenhill: 2001, 40).

This is a critique of the tutelage complex, where the designated expert fails to protect the child due to fears of intervening in the privacy and autonomy of the family. Here Gary opts to seek the advice of the social services and the systems fail, leaving him in at the mercy of an abusive father. This refusal of the authorities to get involved could be seen as the reluctance to interfere with a 'private family' matter. The thin line between the privacy and imprisonment of the concept of the family has been discussed in detail by feminist sociologists Barrett and McIntosh. In their 1982 book they consider the reasons people are "so reluctant to intervene?" (1982, 56). This scene with Gary at Social Services epitomises the problems that may occur in family relationships the bond between them is seen as so special that outsiders should not presume to take a stand" (Barrett and McIntosh: 1982, 56). Gary tells Mark that the reaction from social services was "this look – like panic in her eyes and she says: What do you want me to do?" (Ravenhill 2001, 41) It seems that Gary should not have "presumed that she would take a stand".

A similar failure of the experts to intervene is examined in detail in Martin Crimp's *Getting Attention* (1991, West Yorkshire Playhouse). During this play a toddler is starved, imprisoned and tortured by her step father, and her mother is complicit in these acts which lead ultimately to the death of the child. Throughout the play, in which we never see the child, social services also fail the toddler in a variety of ways that result from the

social worker who is completely ineffectual due to her fear of intervention. In this play, as in *Shopping and Fucking*, the family unit can be seen to be “constructed around the ideas of domestic privacy and autonomy” (Barrett and McIntosh: 1982, 56). In both plays social services refuse to intervene into the private domestic sphere and as a result a child is abused or killed. This ‘private autonomy’ is seen therefore, to place some members of the family in a vulnerable position precisely because of families’ “expectations of security and protection” (Barrett and McIntosh: 1982, 57). The character of Gary, in *Shopping and Fucking* having been offered no help apart from a leaflet, leaves for London clutching his fantasy of finding a father figure and tries to find someone to play out this role: “Because there’s this bloke. Looking out for me. He’ll come and collect me. Take me to this big house...” (Ravenhill: 2001, 42). He eventually finds Mark only to re-enact the abuse scenes he describes with his step dad with Mark, his new father figure. This failure of the tutelary complex was also a feature of Churchill’s play of 2002 *A Number*.

*A Number* (2002, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, London) explores the possible consequences of living within family units that operate an internal and naturalised system of self-regularisation whereby the onus is placed on that unit to create model citizens. In *A Number* Churchill focuses on the possible consequences of not living up to this expectation and entering the tutelary complex. Churchill makes explicit the effects of this complex when the character of Salter, a father, fails to supervise his family effectively. This leads to the ultimate shame and threat of the removal of the children from the family home. Families are considered to be failures if the child does not learn moral standards in the home, as the locus of morality is perceived to be the home. Where docile bodies are produced (self regulation through the threat of surveillance) society’s values become naturalised and normalised and the government of behaviour happens through the codes of conduct being internalised. Every family unit can be seen as a miniature panopticon where each individual monitors their own behaviours. This is

a model of social efficiency whereby the health of the nation is managed though the coupling of family and education. Parents that are considered unable to control their offspring are characterised as being inadequate, this inadequacy warrants a state intervention in the form of experts. As such troublesome or problem families and children are thereby depicted as an *educational* problem rather than a *social* problem.

The plot of *A Number* consists of a series of dialogues between a father, Salter, and his son, or rather three sons who are identical clones. The clones are three of an unspecified *number* of duplicates. Through a series of encounters with the clones, B1, B2 and Michael Black the audience pieces together the plot. The play is enigmatic and was described by the press as being both “strenuously elliptical” (Conveney: 2002) and an “intellectually teasing radically fragmented and dream-like two-hander” (Bassett: 2002). The dialogue is reminiscent of that between Joan and Harper in Churchill’s earlier play *Far Away* (1997, Royal Court Theatre, London). The first son the audience sees, B2, relentlessly questions his father, just as Joan interrogates her Aunt in the earlier play. Here, as there, the adult prevaricates and delivers half-truths and lies until caught out, at which point he reveals a different version of the story, the conception of the clones. B2, just like the child Joan, knows more than he is letting on and reveals his information slowly in stages giving Salter the opportunity to reveal all without being caught out:

B2	There is a thing
SALTER	what’s that?
B2	I did get the impression and I know I may be wrong because maybe I was in shock but I got the impression there was this batch and we were all in it. I was in it.
SALTER	No because you’re my son.
B2	No but we all
SALTER	I explained already
B2	but I wasn’t being quite open with you because I’m confused because it’s a shock but I want to know what happened
SALTER	they stole
B2	no but what happened
SALTER	I don’t
B2	because they said that none of us was the original

SALTER      They said that?  
(Churchill: 2002, 10)

The audience unravels a story and ignoring the blind alleys of car crashes and other lies, and learns that Salter's wife has killed herself leaving him to take care of their young son. Salter neglects the child and eventually hands him to the authorities to be taken into care. When the audience sees B1, the original child from whom the others have been cloned, it sees an abused child that grows up to be both vengeful and violent, who stalks and kills B2 before killing himself. Salter then goes on to meet Michael Black, another one of the number of clones created.

Geraldine Cousin has stated that the play is "an investigation into the nature of both parental responsibility and human identity" (2007, 93). Here I am more interested in the justifications Churchill gives Salter's character for the creation of the clones. After the suicide of his wife, when the child was two, Salter is left as a lone parent:

B2              And then you and the boy you and your son  
SALTER        we went on we just  
B2              lived alone together  
SALTER        yes  
B2              you were bringing him up  
SALTER        yes  
B2              the best you could  
SALTER        I  
B2              until  
SALTER        and my best wasn't very but I had my moments...But  
I could have managed better (Churchill: 2002, 31-  
32).

In an early confrontational scene between B1 and Salter the audience learns that the child was left alone and emotionally neglected by the grieving and alcoholic Salter.

B1              You know I used to be shouting...When I was there  
in the dark. I'd be shouting...Yes, I'd be shouting dad  
dad...shouting on and on. ...shouting and  
shouting...and you never came, nobody ever  
came...I want to know if you could hear me or not  
because I never knew you hearing me and not  
coming or could you not hear me and if I shouted  
loud enough you'd come...or maybe there was no  
one there at all and you'd gone out so no matter how

hard I shouted there was no one there...and I didn't dare get out of bed to go and see...because if there was nobody there that would be terrifying and if you were there that might be worse, (Churchill: 2002, 21-24).

That B1 becomes a dangerous and violent adult as a result of childhood neglect is an obvious conclusion to draw. The nature nurture argument is symbolised here by the aggressive B1 and the more mild mannered, but nervous, B2 with whom Salter "tried to be good" (Churchill: 2002, 34). Finally, Michael Black, who grew up with different parents, can say that he is happy with his life (Churchill: 2002, 50). The interesting thing here is Salter's ambition to recreate the "perfect" son he had before the death of his wife.

SALTER      I could have had a different one, a new child altogether that's what most people but I wanted you again because I thought you were the best...you were the most beautiful baby everyone said. As a child you were very pretty, very pretty child (Churchill: 2002, 21-22).

Churchill offers the audience a representation of a father who wants to re-run his attempt at paternity because he failed the first time around. The family unit of which he is head did not live up to the domestic ideal and did not reproduce a responsible citizen. Salter voluntarily renders his son up to the 'tutelage complex' handing the results of his failed attempts at fatherhood over to the state experts and the care system. A reading influenced by Donzelot's theories would suggest that he self regulates using his own normalizing judgement and intervenes before the state can and does so with a free conscience: "I didn't feel I'd lost him when I sent him away because I had the second chance" (Churchill: 2002, 49). The second chance is an opportunity to produce a responsible citizen as his is state duty as the head of the household.

In my reading of this play Churchill demonstrates, through Salter, the dangerous combination of the family's naturalisation and the technology

that enables a repeat to ensure achieving the archetype. The father's supreme power is highlighted first by B1 who claims that "your father's not young when you're small is he, he's not any age, he's more a power. He's a dark dark power" (Churchill: 2002, 15). This power has the authority and the duty to do whatever is necessary to achieve the expectations set out for the institution of family that is to instruct morality and create future citizens of the state who will in their turn do their duty. *A Number* demonstrates that a willingness to adhere to this structure as an ideal could lead to disastrous results. The play presents the audience with the image of a family striving to reach perfection and failing and this is emphasised both by the staging and form of the play. The set, designed by Ian MacNeil, was sparse consisting of a bare, blank design – a raised wooden square that appeared to float over a shiny black floor below; there was no sense of domestic realism. The floating and empty space removed any domestic familiarity and comforts, focusing the audience's attention on the fact that this a 'domestic' scene laid bare for their scrutiny. Together with the elliptical and fragmented dialogue the stage set worked to offer a distancing and defamiliarise the dialogue between a father and son as they confront their failings. This allowed the audience what Ricoeur might describe as "moments of critique" (Ricoeur: 1991). In these reflexive moments the audience is invited to consider the ideology of the family and in doing so question the naturalisation of the form.

Despite the vagueness and permeability of its nature, the 'family' is imbued with elevated significance. It has been observed by sociologists that, on the one hand, the family is seen as uniquely suited for the upbringing of children, not only to meet their needs for love and commitment but also to create stable citizens and foster social order (Parsons and Bale: 1956; Pringle: 1980). On the other hand, dangers exist of rose-tinted 'familism', in which families are seen as inherently good and 'the family' is portrayed uncritically as an institution to be supported and as a solution to social ills. In reality, family relationships can be major contributors to social problems (Hill and Tisdall: 1997, 66).

The family as a term is also problematic. The political rhetoric of the early Nineties often refers to the ‘traditional’ family, but this notion of a traditional family is misleading and confusing as family forms are constantly changing and evolving. The following section will consider the notion of the traditional family in the early Nineties during this time the traditional form was usually taken to be the nuclear family.

### **The Invisible ‘Alternative’ Family - *Phaedra’s Love***

In her essay entitled ‘The Myth of the Traditional Family’, Linda Nicholson claims that: “the categories we have for organising families – particularly the language that sorts them into “traditional” and “alternatives” ones – make too many of us needlessly ashamed of the way we live” (Nicholson: 1997, 27). She argues that they make people needlessly ashamed because of the deceptive nature of this terminology:

for the language of the categories is duplicitous. The “traditional; family is not that traditional, its most basic features emerging out of certain transformations in social life occurring in Western Europe and North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Nicholson: 1997, 27).

In this essay she outlines the view that the so-called ‘traditional family’ has no more claim to being natural or normal than other forms and that the idea of what constitutes the *traditional* family alters considerably, thereby:

if one compares the “traditional” family of the 1950s to the one of the Nineties, they are not the same. Such historical observations lead me to the next stage of my argument: that the distinction between the “traditional” and “alternative” family functions not descriptively but normatively, legitimizing certain family types over others on the basis of dubious historical assumptions (Nicholson: 1997, 28).

The family type legitimised in Nineties Britain was that of the nuclear family.

The nuclear family is demonstrated in the plays discussed in this thesis to offer little support or nurturing of those within this structure and yet they show representations of individuals who cling to that structure as a

result of the normalisation and rationalisation of this model. Many of these family units are technically *untraditional* in that they are comprised of step parents, step siblings, second marriages, and absent parents. To the casual observer they appear to be 'traditional' family units, consisting of a mother, a father and their children. Thus they are 'invisible alternative families'. Nicholson (1997) outlines the way in which invisible alternative or deviant family structures have been reconciled with the traditional model:

People have reconciled older notions of a "traditional" family with the rising divorce rate by discounting the importance of prior marital history or means by which children have been acquired. Without such discounting, too few contemporary families would be "traditional" and the label itself would become dangerously irrelevant (Nicholson: 1997, 36).

In this way the alternative family structure has in contemporary society perpetuated the myth of the 'traditional' family. By appearing to conform to the stereotype they fortify the assumption that it is the conventional standard and "reinforce ideas about the pervasiveness of the "traditional" family" (Nicholson: 1997, 37). Nicholson summarises her argument in the following way:

In general, however, the belief in the "traditional" family has been sustained, even in the context of widespread changes, because of the surface invisibility of many of the changes. This surface invisibility allows people to impose "traditionality" even where it does not exist (Nicholson: 1997, 37).

The imposing of traditionality creates a false binary between the traditional and the alternative whereby those living outside of this convention are considered deviant. Nicholson states that within this two-tier system "most of us are "deviants" (Nicholson: 1997, 40). If this were to be acknowledged as being the case then the "distinction between "traditional" and "alternative "families no longer has meaning" (Nicholson: 1997, 40). This would make different forms of living arrangements more acceptable and therefore permissible. The sociologists Francis McGlone, Alison Park and Roberts writing in 1999 observe that this is not a widely accepted view in the media of the time:

The family is seldom out of the news. Politicians, journalists, and interest groups all discuss in various ways, the structural changes that families are experiencing and the likely social consequences. Yet what is often missing from this debate is attention to wider kin. The 'family' most commonly under the microscope is the nuclear family, with its two parents (or, increasingly one parent) and dependent children (McGlone et al: 1990, 142).

The family that is 'seldom out of the news' or the political rhetoric of the Nineties is often a family that is prefixed with the word traditional, with other forms, that don't fit the model described by McGlone et al, becoming the 'alternative' family, but as Nicholson demonstrates above these terms 'no longer have meaning'.

The false distinction between "traditional" and "alternative" families, "encourages those who experience such clashes to think of them as the relatively isolated effects of living a slightly "deviant" life" (Nicholson: 1997, 40). In her critique of the traditional family structure Nicholson, highlights that one of the areas for concern is the size of the family unit. She points out that having just two adults as per the conventional Nineties model places:

heavy emotional and psychological burdens on its members. For children, it means that if one of both of their parents are emotionally or physically abusive, there is little recourse to other adults to mitigate the abuse (Nicholson: 1997, 39).

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996, The Gate London), represents a family structure and environment that is neither nurturing nor supportive. In my reading of this play Kane's characters cling to a nuclear family structure. In *Phaedra's Love* the audience is shown a family structure that is comprised of step parents, step siblings and a second marriage, and for the most part, an absent father. To the audience the characters appear to be a 'traditional' family unit, consisting of a mother, a father and their son and daughter. Thus drawing on Linda Nicholson's (1997) argument that they are an 'invisible' alternative family, in other words to the onlooker they appear to be traditional family units when they are constructed of step parents and siblings. Nicholson describes these as "invisible alternative families and their invisibility ensures the

perpetuating the myth of the traditional family. In *Phaedra's Love* the family at the centre of the action cling to this "traditionality" at considerable cost to their personal safety and therefore this play can be seen as a critique of this adherence to a mythical family ideal.

Aleks Sierz argues that Kane's *Phaedra's Love* has at its core, a "dysfunctional royal family" (Sierz: 2001, 107). This family's sexual scandal brings about the downfall of the dynasty. The parallels with the British Royal family of the Nineties have been widely noted (Greig: 2001, Sierz: 2001, Urban: 2001 and Singer: 2004). Regardless of their royalty, Kane presents us with a picture of a family in crisis. David Greig points out in his introduction to the *Sarah Kane Complete Plays* that her work scales down the violence in each of her plays. The first, *Blasted* (1996) dealing with civil war, the second *Phaedra's Love* looking at familial violence while the theme of her later works is a more intimate look at relationships and love:

Again, the world of the stage is dark and extreme but now the source of pain has narrowed down from civil war to war within the family (Greig: 2001, x-xi).

This play is the retelling of the Greek myth in which Phaedra falls in love with her step son. Unlike Euripides version of the myth *Hippolytus*, Kane's contemporary version sees Phaedra consummating her desire. However, this gives her little satisfaction and the play follows the originals tragic structure with death being the only option possible for all the leading characters.

In their text *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, Heidi Stephenson and Nastaha Langridge argue that *Phaedra's Love* "offers us a powerful warning, by showing the tragic but logical conclusion of humanity's escalating, destructive behaviour" (Stephenson and Langridge: 1997, 129). I would add that she is also giving us a 'powerful warning' of the dangers of adherence to the nuclear 'family structure. Kane presents us with a variety of family roles, mother, daughter, son, and absent father and through their interwoven sexual pairings we see a

family with few boundaries. In the course of its eight scenes we discover or witness a combination of incestuous relationships between mother and son, brother and sister, father and daughter, which lead to the violent destruction of the family.

The dialogue underlines Kane's debate about the family. As the Priest points out in scene six, "It's not an ordinary family". Hippolytus agrees with the Priest stating that: "No, none of us are related to each other" (Kane: 2011, 93). The characters may not be related to one another but their family roles mirror those of what Nicholson describes as the "traditional" nuclear family, with two parents, a father and a mother, and two children. Theatre scholar Ken Urban points out that this group of characters present the audience with an image of the "nostalgic and repressive ideal" of the *traditional* nuclear family (Urban: 2004, 368). In turn the family members test their roles within the family institution and test each other. In scene four Phaedra denies she is Hippolytus's mother both to her daughter and to Hippolytus, while in the same scene Hippolytus denies his father, by refusing to give him that title, later denies his mother her title and then in scene five declares Strophe is not his sister.

At the same time Kane presents the audience with characters who still cling to a family structure, both as an ideal and in practice. Phaedra wishes that Hippolytus would call Theseus father rather than his given name, even though she is about to attempt to seduce him. Hippolytus insists that Strophe did not need to declare her love for her mother because she was her mother and therefore "she knew, she knew, she loved you" (Kane: 2001, 89). It is Strophe herself who clings most securely to the nuclear family structure, during scene three of the play she attempts to use her mother's "paternal instincts" to turn her attention away from her step son and direct some attention to herself. Later she offers to die with Hippolytus for "The sake of the family" (Kane: 2001, 88). Hippolytus rejects her family ties no doubt referring to the lack of blood ties between the two of them but Strophe insists that to her it is the

same, such is the strength of this bond that she offers to, and in fact does, “die for this family” (Kane: 2001, 88).

Kane demonstrates that the family structure is so ingrained that although each character rallies against their prescribed roles there is no escaping them. There is an internal debate in the play, and when the doctor offers reasons for Hippolytus’s depression he ponders that “perhaps he’s missing his father...Perhaps he’s missing his real mother” (Kane: 2001, 68). This could be read as an argument that the family is under threat and, conservatively, those dysfunctional families lead to dysfunctional societies. I would rather suggest that the play offers a critique of family structure and the idealised image of the family of the late twentieth century presenting them as mythical. Kane’s dramatic style allows the audience to reflect on the familial images presented. Theatre scholar Howe Kritizer comments in her book *Political Theatre in post-Thatcher Britain*, that her style is indebted to absurdist comedy, and that this has the effect of distancing the audience from the dramatic situation in ways that invites critique. She claims that the “comic action of the play focuses on the interaction...of extremes and the resulting destruction of the family” (Howe Krititzer: 2008, 34). I believe that the destruction of this family is symbolic of the dangers that may be inherent in characters’ desire to cling to or remain fixed in roles prescribed by the ‘traditional’ family. Kane’s dramatic style stridently makes the audience aware of the theatricality of the events they are witnessing and so allows the reflexive pauses and distancing needed to critique these roles and the damage they inflict to this family.

One of these tactics is the dialogue of the characters. Theatre reviewers for the first run of the play commented on the nature of the dialogue. Kate Bassett of *The Times* observed that the “speech is terse, truncated” (Bassett: 1996). Aleks Sierz of *The Tribune* described it as being “emotional fraught” resulting in a “blistering dialogue” (Sierz: 1996). This style denies a sense of emotional attachment to the characters and results in the audiences’ cool appraisal of the actions and relationships

they witness. This was an aspect of the play that critics found disconcerting in the first performance run. Sierz continued to say that:

Kane's approach, however, with its wild machine-gunning of polite manners, relies too much on blistering dialogue and too little on plot. *Phaedra's Love* is risible where it should be tragic and appalling when it should be moving (Sierz: 1996).

While watching the play this brusque dialogue stopped me from forming an emotional attachment and encouraged me to consider and reflect on the notion of the family, by highlighting that these are dramatic representations of family roles.

Kane also used scenes of extreme violence throughout this play that unsettled the critics. Bassett tells us that the "violence does not reach us by word of mouth. It is in our faces, almost literally...The trouble is that the lashings of stage violence are not really shocking, just hard to believe" (Bassett: 1996). This is exactly the point; it was supposed to be too 'hard to believe'. To emphasise this still further the staging of the play and its gruesome events placed the audience literally in the midst of the violence. Paul Taylor of the *Independent* warned prospective audience members that the play "seats the audience in the thick of this, so it might be advisable not to wear your best frock" (Taylor: 1996). *The Guardian's* Michael Billington stated that action erupted in the midst of the spectators (Billington: 1996) and *What's On's* Samantha Marlowe claimed that throughout the production:

The boundaries between audience and actors are deliberately blurred – there is no single playing space, and the seating is dispersed so that involvement is unavoidable (Marlowe: 1996).

The result is a play "that challenges theatrical conventions in a witty, intelligent and mischievous fashion, both in terms of text and performance" (Marlowe: 1996). Charles Spencer observed in his review for *The Daily Telegraph* that the spectators had "previously taken for members of the audience transform themselves into a vindictive mob, howling for vengeance" and as the "blood spurts all over the place" (Spencer: 1996). These reviews highlight my own experience of being

drawn into the events as the theatricality of the event became a focal point. For my reading of the play this element of immediacy made the play inherently political. It is the destructive nature of all the characters presented from this deviant family that the audience is left to reflect on. It is possible to see that the family relationships themselves create the destruction of others and self within this play, and yet the characters constantly demonstrate that they are bound to this structure and compelled to remain within this unit. The clearest example of this is the character of Strophe who “dies for the ideal of the family, with a loyalty that is unswerving but arbitrary, since she is not related by blood or reciprocated affection” (Howe Krititzer: 2008, 35). That Kane gives us the character of Strophe who is prepared to die for this ideal demonstrates how ingrained the normative notion of the family has become. By demonstrating the ludicrous nature of this attachment at close quarters I believe Kane’s intention was to encourage a questioning of an adherence to a social structure that is so clearly destructive for some individuals bound to it and therefore question its validity for everyone.

*Phaedra’s Love* questions the foundations on which the concept of the family stands. Writing just after the first performances of this play David Morely outlined his approach to the idea of the family home in his book *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (2000) in which he stated that if it is to be a “community and not just a collection of individuals who happen to share the same household, it is above all dependent on a principle of sufficient solidarity to protect the common good” (Morely: 2000 18). In *Phaedra’s Love* there is no common good demonstrated in the family structure. Morely draws on Foucault in his argument that a family home and the common good it can provide its members relies on co-ordination and cooperation. A Foucauldian reading of the family represented in this play demonstrates how the normalising and rationalisation of this institution that functions as a regulating device in a “carceral society” (Foucault: 1977). In this system the family performs a role of panopticism and regulation, whereby what Morely describes as

the “requirement of common presence” makes the family unit the ideal model for the surveillance of moral and civil behaviour (Morely: 2000 18). The normalisation of nuclear family and the ensuing family ties can be seen to bind together the characters of this play, even when these ties cause their personal destruction. It is possible to see that the pressure of normalisation can create the desire for individuals to search out family structures and cling to them regardless of the damage they might inflict.

In Chapter Five I will examine this damage by considering plays that feature families and use characters of babies and infants as symbols of both social destruction and hope. I will suggest that these works question the naturalisation of the nuclear family and that some of them offer the concept of a neo-family as an alternative social structure. I shall specifically consider the position of the infant as a symbol for social unease in six plays that trouble the image of the family environment as being the ideal for nurturing children.

## Chapter Five: Nineties Stage Babies

***‘So what’s the price of a baby?  
And do babies get cheaper the less they cry?’  
(Listen to Your Parents: Zephaniah 2002)***

The previous chapter examined the concept of the family unit and suggested that the neo-family is new way of thinking about the family that allows for a more fluid structure that offers mutual support and responsibility while meeting the individual needs of its members. In this chapter I offer a reading of plays of this period that I believe question the naturalisation of the nuclear family. I suggest that the writers of these plays also create the distancing required for audience members to consider alternative or new social structures that embrace the concept of the neo-family. I will focus this chapter on images of babies as projections of adults’ desires looking at the theatrical gaps that invite the audience to read them as commodities, within a commodity culture. I then consider how the trope of the stage baby is conversely a symbol of optimism, as there is a sense of social responsibility that is needed in their care and upbringing.

My focus in this chapter is primarily on three plays, each of which contains a representation of a baby or infant, that are shown in a variety of states of suffering and death. Each is used as a mute symbol of vulnerability. I will read these stage babies as metaphors for child-parent relationships and family units rather than as characters in their own right. These representations of infants, therefore, reveal much about the society and, in particular, family relationships and the culture of the period in which they were written. This chapter examines how some of the theatrical babies of the late Nineties and early 2000s can be, as sociologist Christopher Jenks states, “regarded as indices of the contemporary state of the social structure” (Jenks: 1996, 59). In my reading of plays discussed in this chapter I examine how representations of babies on stage are tropes that effectively become ‘gaps’ onto which social meanings may be projected by audiences.

Firstly I will consider how both *Handbag* (1998) and *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001) by Mark Ravenhill display the ways in which personal aspirations fuse with societal ambition. This need creates a sense of possession or ownership over children that transforms them into commodities. In this section I ask if making commodities of babies and infants makes them more vulnerable to abuse. I will conclude by considering the optimism that may be found in the representations of dead babies in *Blasted* (Kane: 1995) and *At the Inland Sea* (Bond: 1995) to question how these plays also demonstrate elements of social optimism amidst devastation and catastrophe. In doing so I will be traversing a line between the pessimism presented in the plays of this period and the optimism to be found within them. I will also be starting to explore how the concept of the 'neo-family' arises from dysfunctional domestic normalcy.

### **The Need for Babies - Mother Clap's Molly House**

Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* and *Mother Clap's Molly House* both position the trope of the infant and the parental need for children in a central position within the play. Aleks Sierz, writing in *Modern British Playwriting in the Nineties*, argues that these plays provide an "exploration of alternative forms of parenting" (Sierz: 2012, 184). This need to have children inverts my discussion of the power that adults hold over their progeny as discussed in the last two chapters. In the works discussed here it can be seen that the desire to adhere to notions of domestic normalcy create a paradox whereby the dependent child holds a prerogative position that gives them a powerful controlling location within the family structure.

Ravenhill was not the only writer to theatrically portray the assumed need of people to reproduce, or the power that infants have over the adults that surround them. Howard Barker questions this authority of the contemporary infant in his play *13 Objects* (2003, Birmingham Rep). This

play, which is episodic in structure, presents the audience with 13 short scenes, or as it is subtitled, 13 *Studies in Servitude*. The fifth servitude, entitled *The Talk of a Toy: A Rattle*, portrays the figure of a child throwing its rattle to the floor and expectantly waiting for an adult to return it to her outstretched hand. The crux and focal point of the scene is the figure of the infant, who is represented by a Queen that has the authority to state that: “*Whoever fails to find my rattle dies*” (Barker: 2006, 278). The Queen demands full attendance as she repeatedly throws the rattle to the ground and makes demands on the two women, and a multitude of servants, in attendance.

The infant/Queen character distances and defamiliarises the audience from the very familiar notion of a baby continually throwing a rattle from its pram in a game where an attentive adult returns it each time. The distanciation invites the audience to reflect on the power, as represented by a Queen who has the power of life and death over her subjects that infants hold over contemporary society. The baby, therefore, becomes a gap in the narrative of the play. This effect is aided by the dialogue of the scene which is largely a monologue delivered in the style of a stream of consciousness given by the precocious infant. The audience observe the Queen as she uses the rattle to amuse herself at the expense of those who are depicted as having no choice but to react to her every whim. This scene illustrates the central position contemporary society has placed on children; the status of the child is demonstrated through the image of the queen as one of supreme power around whom the adults structure their existence. The figure of the infant in *13 Objects* invites a reflexive questioning and critique of the privileged position of the infant in both her direct family and the State. Here the infant must be amused, guarded, and nurtured with great care. I read this as being Foucauldian in that it reflects the notion of the privileged position of infants in society where “highly detailed rules serve to codify relations between adults and children....[and] a whole series of obligations imposed on parents and children alike: obligations of a physical kind” (Foucault: 1984, 279).

These rules and obligations as described by Foucault, directly affect the family of the infant:

It is to become a dense, saturated, permanent, continuous physical environment which envelops, maintains, and develops the child's body....it serves to produce – under the best possible conditions – a human being who will live to the state of adulthood (Foucault: 1984, 280).

More recently when writing about the social value of children, anthropologist Pamela Klassen offers a similar view:

In the act of bearing a child a woman gives a great gift to both her family and her society – but if the societal value of this gift is to be realised, then she must do her job right and produce a healthy baby. Though a child is the product of her parents, she is also a concern of the state (Klassen: 2004, 261).

This view, that the child is the concern of the state, chimes well with Foucault's view that, "the health of children becomes the family's most demanding objective" (Foucault: 1984, 280).

Edward Albee's *The Play About the Baby* (1998: Malvern Theatre) touches on this assumed desire or the need of people to reproduce or have children. This play features a young couple and their baby and an older couple who come to steal the child. The couple who come to steal the child explain:

What do we *want*. Well, I would imagine we want what almost everybody wants – eternal life, in great health, no older than we are when we want it; easy money...a bigger dick, a more muscular vagina: a baby, perhaps? (Albee: 2004, 32)

In these lines this play questions the child parent relationship and the perception that all adults want to have children, but it is Mark Ravenhill who explores the desire, or the need, for young adults to have children in this period most effectively. He uses this urge to reproduce as a key concern in two of his plays and in my reading of these plays he invites this imperative to reproduce to be questioned. In both plays Ravenhill presents the audience with characters who are parents and who appear to need to have children in order to complete their existence. Few of these characters prove able of taking adequate care of their off-spring

and most appear to view a child as an accessory that completes their lifestyle. As a result children are portrayed in these plays as being status symbols, commodities that provide evidence of either financial security or stable relationships. This can be seen in Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001).

In this play, the audience is told the story of Mrs Tull and her search for children within a consumer culture. Ravenhill signals the play's theme of consumerism in the opening lines when God tells the audience that:

Enterprise, shall make you human  
Getting, spending – spark divine  
This is my gift to you poor human:  
Purse celestial, coin divine (Ravenhill: 2001b, 5).

The play is set in the commercial 17<sup>th</sup> century world of prostitution, in the business premises of the Tulls who at the start of the play rent dresses to prostitutes. The use of this setting where humans sell themselves for profit highlights a commodity culture. The character Amy declares in scene one: "It's a grand day when a girl finds her body in't just eating and shitting, in't it? Day when a girl discovers she's a commodity" (Ravenhill: 2001b, 14).

The play derives its title from the changes Mrs Tull makes to the business on her husband's death. The new business venture is to hire dresses to the cross-dressing "mollies" of London. The 'molly house' is not a brothel, in that the customers do not pay for sex but, merely the hiring of the dresses they wear when staying there. It becomes a place in which sexual activity of any type is neither judged nor restricted and as such the house and business address also become a haven for its customers. It is often referred to as a family home with Mrs Tull being 'Mother', a role she desires becoming. When Orme, one of the characters of the play, tells Mrs Tull "Give 'em a home – let your molly be a family" Mrs Tull is persuaded by the seductive notion of making her business into a family (Ravenhill: 2001b, 31). This dual focus on a commodity culture and the 'family' invites the audience to compare the

two. In my reading of this play this invitation becomes focused on the character of Mrs Tull and her desire for a family and her 'need' to be a mother.

The character of Mrs Tull is a childless woman who wants children "more than all the world" (Ravenhill: 2001b, 16). During the course of the play the character is left widowed and childless having never being able to carry a child to full term:

Just my body never could...Heart said kid. Head said kid. Just  
Body never could hold on for more 'an a month (Ravenhill: 2001b,  
16).

The character's desire for children is in part abated by her maternal and matriarchal protection of Martin, the shop's apprentice boy, and later his partner, Thomas, as well as becoming more generally the 'mother' of the molly house. She offers parental guidance and care while dispensing the wisdom of a "mother's instincts" (Ravenhill 2001, 69). The character provides a safe environment of unconditional love where "all have names at Mother's" and where Mother "in't here to judge" (Ravenhill 2001b, 72).

In this matriarchal role the character of Mrs Tull presides over the marriage of Thomas and Martin as well as the "birth" of their child. The baby and its birth in Act Two, Scene Seven of the play create a distanciation. The gap created in which the audience is invited to critically reflect is centred on the wooden doll and, therefore, on the 'baby'. The scene makes no pretence at reality:

**Tull**

Come womb – the time is right  
Let waters break, our Susan's due  
Come precious child  
Ma waits, world waits, love waits for you.

*The molly musicians play a beautiful slow piece as **Martin's** labour progresses. Finally, silence as the baby – a wooden doll – is pulled out from **Martin's skirts**. **Tull lifts the baby up to the Heavens – then slaps the baby's bottom** (Ravenhill: 2001b, 75-6).*

The scene parodies the birthing process and it and the doll child are, in Edward Bond's terms, a theatre event that creates a reflexive pause in

the action inviting the audience to juxtapose the desire of Tull's character for a baby with that of people in the world outside the theatre. In performance, this scene is both humorous and troubling. The incongruity of the male character giving birth to a wooden doll surrounded by music and poetry gives the audience pause to think about what is happening in this scene at a distance from the narrative of the play. In my reading of this scene the birth and doll baby create a 'gap' in which the audience contemplates the privileged position of the family and the cult of the domestic in society that lead to the idealization of motherhood which can so clearly be seen in the character of Mrs Tull. The distancing here opens up Ricoeur's notions of 'speculative thought' and a critique of the current ideology (Ricoeur: 1977, 313). The 'child' in this case is only wanted by Tull herself:

Martin: Baby? Thass not what I want. Baby – thass you. Thass you're wanting. Can't make me into what you want to be. Cos that goes nowhere. I don't want this (Ravenhill 2001b, 77).

The "baby" is ultimately left behind when Tull shuts up shop and moves to the country. Ravenhill has himself linked this image to that of Bulger claiming that:

The baby. I guess the imprint of Venables, Thompson and Bulger – the video picture – are still there. But it's a game (Ravenhill:2004, 312).

The 'game' of having children and discarding them in *Mother Clap's Molly Houses* illustrates my point that in this play children fill a *need*; in this case the need for Mrs Tull to feel both motherly and purposeful as well as for Martin to feel that his relationship with Thomas has a future.

Ravenhill uses a number of theatre events that create this sense of distancing that works to provide a number of reflexive pauses in which the audience may critically reflect on the events of the play. The most effective of these is the structural device of the juxtaposing of scenes from contemporary London with scenes from 1726. By using these two time frames, Ravenhill encourages the audiences to find similarities between the eras and their uses and abuses of infants. In this they are

both structurally reflexive, the slips, or gaps in time allowing the audience to see the contemporary family and child rearing practices as strange, or in a new light when juxtaposed with older models. This expands the referential field of the audience and invites a critique of the present when presented alongside the past.

These techniques were also used by Caryl Churchill in *Cloud Nine* (1979) which features both a 'doll' child and time slippages between Victorian times and 1979. Theatre scholar Joseph Marohl discusses the view that Churchill deliberately sets up this 'confusion' in order to encourage the examination of social constructs that are presumed to be 'natural'. He claims that Churchill combines the past and the present:

in order to dramatise the cynical progress of political and social events in history. What the audience experiences during the performance, then, is defamiliarisation of the ordinary (alienation effect) and the subversion of positive ideologies about gender, social hierarchies, and chronology (Marohl: 1993, 378).

In *Mother Clap's Molly House* Ravenhill is also 'defamiliarising' the ordinary in order to invite a consideration of ideology. This is brought into sharp focus by the doubling up of actors in the roles from both time frames, so that in the 2001 scenes the actors are playing more contemporary versions of the same characters they play in the scenes from the 1700s. This highlights that the characters are each still dealing with the same issues in the twenty first century as they were in the eighteenth century. The character of Amy is doubled with that of Tina. Neither character wants to be a mother and in both the scenes from 1700 and 2000s pressure is exerted on her to become one. The characters in 2001 can all be seen to be still looking for a 'home' or a place to be comfortable, and in some sense this was more easily achieved in the 1700s than the 2000s. In the 1726 scenes the characters find a safe place in which to live in the manner they choose and there is a sense of euphoria that is missing from the house party of the scenes 2001. Characters are still looking for families and still dealing with the pressures of having, or not having children as can be seen in the

relationship between Tina, who does not want children and Charlie, her partner who does.

The play is framed by a chorus who speak in verse and the mythical characters of Eros and God. It also has a number of musical interludes and explicit sexual language and acts. Each of these devices functions to invite the audience to critically reflect on the events they are witnessing but in my reading of this play it is specifically the use of the doll figure and the juxtaposition of the treatment of childbirth, pregnancy and the ability to leave behind or remove children in the two time frames of this play that are particularly important. In these moments Ravenhill implies that children are easily replaced with dolls and as such they become mere possessions to complete the lives of the adults who desire them and can be adopted or discarded as if they were toys. The implication is persuasive in this play but no less effective in Ravenhill's earlier play *Handbag* (1998) where the child is not a doll but the representation of an actual baby called Jack.

### **Babies as Personal Aspirations and Commodities - *Handbag*.**

In *Handbag* Ravenhill more directly juxtaposes two time frames, this time by focusing on Victorian and contemporary family life. This involves the doubling of actors' roles and implies that the Victorian values of parenting held in esteem by Conservative politicians of the 1980s and 1990s, were no better than those of the period in which the play was written. In *Handbag*, Ravenhill uses the character of a baby to invite the audience to consider the way in which children are used by adults in order that they might adhere to normative conventions in regard to family life and that in doing so the children become competitive devices with which adults define their worth. This reduces the child to the state of a commodity to be traded for status. In Foucauldian terms adults assert their own aspirations and those of the state onto the child by giving it all the opportunities to succeed and thus transferring their ambitions onto their baby.

*Handbag* (1998: Lyric Hammersmith Studio, London) juxtaposes the pretext plot of *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895) with the story of three interlinked contemporary couples who are tied together through a baby that appears at the start to be the focus of its parents' lives. The first scene of *Handbag* focuses on three contemporary adult characters waiting for a fourth to produce the sperm that will hopefully impregnate Mauretta. The tension and anxiety conveyed by the short sharp dialogue replete with unfinished sentiments in this scene reflects the importance of the occasion and the need for these four characters to produce a baby "when it means so much...to all of us (Ravenhill: 2001, 145). This desire is in part fuelled by the character of Mauretta's own childhood, living outside the normalised family structure and on the margins of society.

The baby, for which she is 'ready now', will be parented by four adults, and so this could form a 'neo-family' of two mothers and two fathers. The child, it would appear, would be offered a secure environment, in which it will be "doubly blessed" due to the "positive glut of parents" ensuring that "if one decides to pack a bag and move on [it's] got plenty to be going on with" (Ravenhill: 2001, 147). This ensures that the child will not be marginalised or stigmatised due to a lack of parents. The character of Mauretta appears to believe that having four parents will prevent the repetition of her own troubled, fatherless childhood, where her father suddenly left. According to theatre scholar Caridad Svich "as they wait, it becomes clear through Ravenhill's dialogue that the act of having a child is more important to Mauretta and Suzanne as a social signify[er] than the act of parenting itself" (Svich: 2003, 87). The child becomes a trope of what sociologist Linda Nicholson describes as the 'mythic' normative family (Nicholson: 1997). For the character of Mauretta the family is the most acceptable model to aspire to. In scene one, Mauretta says:

When I was a kid my dad walked out...He was gone and we never mentioned him again. But people would look at you and they'd say: 'It's not right. A mum and a dad's best for a kid. A kid's gotta have a mum and a dad' (Ravenhill: 2001, 147).

This demonstrates sociologists Barrett and McIntosh's position that "the family is seen as naturally given and as socially and morally desirable" (1982, 26). The audience are informed that Mauretta's experience as being part of a single lone parent family was isolating. I argue that a Foucauldian reading of this implies that this isolation is a result of the character being kept removed from the 'privileged locus' of the nuclear family structure that polices the 'normal and abnormal' and locates Mauretta in an 'abnormal' family (Foucault: 1984, 206). The audience witnesses this rejection of the abnormal and search for the so called normal in Mauretta's desire to bring a child into the 'family home'. I argue that this demonstrates the overwhelming drive to conform to a nuclear family model becoming internalised. Her desperation for a child is clear:

Anything that works. Just wanting for the starter's orders now. My body's ready now, you know? All those little hormones rushing around screaming...come on, come on. We're up for it. Start the clock (Ravenhill: 2001, 147).

If they are parents then they cease to be the childless outsiders or "the other". Here, I argue, that Ravenhill presents the audience with characters who see a child as their route to acceptance. Each character is using the baby to fulfil their own desires. Mauretta wants to confirm to a family model from which she has been excluded while the character of Tom appears to want to have a child to prove something through fatherhood. Tom wants to be a better parent than those he sees waiting at the school gates to collect their children:

You see so many kids. At the end of school, the parents come and pick them up. And I watch them from the staffroom window, and they grab hold of the kid's hand and it's : 'shut up' – swipe – 'keep your fucking mouth shut'. I mean, how's a child supposed to grow, develop and grow, when there's so much anger and, and ...ugliness? And that's why I want ...We can do so much better than that. We can create something calm and positive. We can do that (Ravenhill: 2001, 149).

For Tom the child becomes a competitive device through which he can prove his caring abilities and superiority. Here the child can be seen as a product or commodity to be traded for status. For Tom this stems from his own competitiveness and desire to prove that he is a better parent

than others. In a Foucauldian reading of the characters of Tom and Mauretta they assert their own aspirations and those of the state onto the child.

This is also seen in their desire to give the child the opportunities to succeed financially and professionally in its adult life. The child becomes both the concern of the state and its parents with the parents becoming voracious consumers of all that will aid them in the quest to raise a child with aspirations of their own, and commodities themselves that fulfil the parents own desires. The characters expect the child to develop and make its own claims of status by fulfilling its potential as a self-supporting achieving individual who takes responsibility for himself and perpetuates the role of the family as an ideological state apparatus. The characters of Mauretta and Suzanne convey this to the audience, as they are parents who strive to ensure that their child will have a fulfilling and profitable career. Mauretta explains that she has a job in order to provide her child with an education:

so that he can have a future. He's got to have an education. He's not going to end up like ...He's not going to be a two pound an hour person (Ravenhill: 2001, 212).

This makes the characters of Mauretta and Suzanne examples of the perfect 'docile bodies' who attempt to use their child in what can be seen in Foucauldian terms, to their own aspirations and those of the state onto the child. This gives it all the opportunities to succeed and transfers their ambitions onto the baby.

For Foucault this favoured position of the child forms a "technology of population" which "will ensure not only their subjection but the constant increase of their utility" (Foucault: 1984, 279). Children, therefore, become a site of both emotional and economic investment that must be cared for and socialised in such a way that they become useful members of society. This view has been more recently described by anthropologist Ann Anagnost who states that such is the value and privilege placed on the child in contemporary society that, "the position of parent...has

become increasingly marked as a measure of value, self-worth, and citizenship” (Anagnost: 2004, 142). It is, therefore, a position that is generally assumed that all adults aspire to. The responsibility on adults to produce children is not in itself an end, having produced healthy children the institution of the family then has further responsibilities for the “preservation, upkeep, and conservation” of its children as a potential of the “labour force” (Foucault: 1984, 278). As I outlined in Chapter Four, such families can be seen as being responsible for instilling an ethos of self-improvement or self-realisation. An interest in the child’s future and education becomes crucial, making “the family become an avid consumer of everything that might help it to realise itself” (Donzelot: 1979, 224). In this way children contribute directly to the creation of a consumer culture.

The parents in *Handbag* are reminiscent of Bond’s parental figures in *At the Inland Sea* (1995) and *Tuesday* (1997). They are eager to ensure that their child reaches its full potential by having a career that is both stimulating and financially lucrative. In this way they condition their children to become productive citizens whose personal aspirations mirror the aspirations of the state. In the final scenes of *Handbag* the baby is kidnapped by Lorraine and Phil. They remove the baby from its home thus proving the inability of all four parents even aided by their CCTV system, to protect their family and its individuals from outsiders. The characters of Phil and Lorraine also *need* a child to make them complete, to make them the normalised family unit: “And so now there’s three of them. The mum the dad and the kid. And they’ve got a flat” (Ravenhill: 2001, 218). Phil asserts that now he has a partner and a child he is complete: “I took everything. So I could make myself into a person and now I am a person” (Ravenhill: 2001, 221). It is clear that the character of Phil can only become a complete person if he is part of a family with a child, and that he will go to any lengths to achieve this prized status.

The kidnapping results in the child being physically abused and eventually murdered by the characters of Lorraine and Phil. These two

characters are shown to be incapable of taking responsibility of, or caring for a child. Both Mauretta and Suzanne were concerned from the outset that someone would steal their child although initially they believed that the danger point was the hospital. The fact that the kidnapping occurs from the family home is especially ironic considering the fitting of CCTV cameras in the house. The combination of the CCTV camera and footage, reviewed by Suzanne and Mauretta, and the two child-like adults in the figures of Phil and Lorraine who are both orphaned and can barely take care of themselves, cannot help but evoke images of Thompson and Venables taking Bulger by the hand as they lead him to his death. Here Lorraine and Phil are the agents of the child death just as Thompson and Venables were the agents of James Bulger's death.

Throughout this play the baby is used and appropriated by a succession of adult characters to activate their own adulthood and normalcy. The baby is used to accredit social status and to improve the standing of the adults. Here the child becomes little more than a possession that is intended to be the route to social acceptance or a toy to be traded for status. The Tull baby in *Mother Clap's Molly House* is cast aside when the adults have no further use for it; the child is seen to be used and discarded. This is less problematic than the appropriation of the child in *Handbag* because here the 'child' is actually a possession – a doll. In *Handbag* the stage baby is neglected, used, stolen and ultimately abused and killed in a manner that highlights his status as a possession.

The notion of the commodity has been central to social theory since Marx first published *Das Kapital* in 1867. Here I question if society's use of the symbolism of the child has infected the strong desire to have children and has turned babies into commodities in their parents' search or desire for domestic normalcy. As such babies become commodities "capable of satisfying human wants" (Marx: 2000, 472). This is the result of the privileging of the family position within society. I would suggest that a neo-family offers an alternative structure that may reduce this pressure to be 'normal' which Ravenhill highlights in both *Handbag* and *Mother*

*Clapp's Molly House*. It is this desire to fit the 'normal' family mode that positions children as commodities.

Marx claimed that a commodity fulfilled human desire:

So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour (Marx: 2000, 472).

Marxist analysis of the commodity states that a commodity is a thing that has properties that are capable of satisfying human desires. The representations of infants in these plays by Ravenhill are attained in order to satisfy the "wants" or desires of the adult characters which in turn satisfies the states attempt to acquire competitiveness and economic security. Here it is possible to see a convergence between the Foucauldian technologies of domination and Althusser's ideological state apparatuses. Foucault's Governmentality, or decentred power relations do not automatically have an economic focus. However, the current dominant and normalised discourses are those of individualism, materialism and consumerism.

As discussed in Chapter Two the Nineties was an era of privatisation, deregulation and the dismantling of the Welfare State, a time when market relations were brought to bear on areas of society which were previous public spheres of responsibility and they became private areas of responsibility. Individual's management of their behaviour and their engagement with dominant economic discourse has a direct influence on personal ambitions and aspirations when discussing domestic normalcy and relationships. This economic responsibility is directly transferred to children who become both the continued means and the product of the economic systems in force.

At first it is difficult to consider a child or even a representation of a child as a commodity. Anthropologist Igor Kopytoff, claims that this is because

In contemporary Western thought, we take it more or less for granted that things – physical objects and rights to them – represent the natural universe of commodities. At the opposite pole we place people, who represent the natural universe of individualisation and singularization (Kopytoff: 1986, 64).

In the past, human beings have been both bought, and sold quite literally as commodities, as a part of the slave trade. For people to be placed as commodities the individualisation and singularization Kopytoff discusses above needs to be stripped away so that the ‘commodity’ is no longer viewed as a human being but an object.

Slavery begins with capture or sale, when the individual is stripped of his previous social identity and becomes a non-person, indeed an object and an actual or potential commodity (Kopytoff: 1986, 65).

He goes on to assert that this is not a fixed state but one of a series of successive phases in social transformation whereby the individual having been objectified then reconstructs a social identity compatible with their new status and surroundings again becoming an identifiable individual. Or the individual undergoes a process of “decommoditization with increased singularization a “gradual reincorporation into [the] host society” (Kopytoff: 1986, 65). The presentations of the infants in both *Handbag* and *Mother Clap’s Molly House* are shown as fulfilling a need in the adults who acquire them. They are seen as neither singular individuals nor as having personhood in their own right in the early stages of their life; they are merely objects that fill a gap in the lives of others. As they develop and grow it is assumed that they too will be “decommoditized” as they become incorporated into their host society and family.

It is possible to see that within these representations of families the commodification process strips away the notion that these children are human beings and enables the parents to ignore any sentimental models of kinship and transforms the infants into products. Both *Handbag* and *Mother Clap’s Molly House* contain representations of children who are traded as objects and by doing so Ravenhill appears to be questioning the nature of a society that thinks in terms of commodities rather than

people. If children become objects without personhood then they are expendable and can be disregarded as such. They can be neglected and abused as commodities or possessions. The neglect and abuse inflicted on the baby in *Handbag* was noted by several theatre critics. Kate Stratton, of the *Evening Standard*, points out in her review of *Handbag* that:

Ravenhill demonstrates in explicit detail how the prospects are bleak for babies whoever looks after them. Even characters who appear to love them – Mr Thomas Cardew, the ‘charitable old gentleman’ who raises Jack Worthing, and Phil, a bisexual junkie – aren’t entirely dependable. Cardew is hounded out of town as a paedophile; while the raddled Phil...mistakes his stolen baby for an astray (Stratton: 1998).

This review is correct in saying that the prospects are bleak for babies but it fails to identify that the picture was similarly bleak in the past or that it is the normalisation and privileging of the nuclear family unit that fosters this bleak outlook. These aspects are highlighted by Ravenhill in his use of a dual time frame.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century characters of *Handbag* strive to be the perfect parents asserting that: “It’s important...we all have to bond with him right from the beginning” (Ravenhill: 2001, 77). Throughout the play these characters are juxtaposed with the Victorian cast and subplot that follows the events that happened before the start of *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895). Anne Varty in her article entitled ‘The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Stage Baby’ (2005) comments on the use of representations of babies as inanimate objects in the 1880s and 1890s citing *The Importance of Being Ernest* as “the most famous farce in which a baby is treated like an inanimate object” (Varty: 2005, 221). Ravenhill uses the pretext of this play to intertwine contemporary couples with a Victorian family, who also treat the baby as an inanimate and voiceless object. The inanimate, silent babies in *Handbag* and the time slippages create a distancing and reflexivity that invites the audience to compare the attitudes to children in the Nineties with those of the 1890s in an era when a return to Victorian values was politically popularly.

The juxtapositioning of the two families presents the audience with an analysis of family life. In his review of the first production in the *Evening Standard*, Patrick Marmion commented that it is “at first mystifying how this oddball Victorian sub-plot relates to the ferociously contemporary main plot” (Marmion: 1998). I would argue that the oddball pairing of these two families placed side by side invites the audience to consider the question: what is a family? Throughout the Nineties, traditional family values had been lauded by a Conservative government, and in this play Ravenhill deftly demonstrates that Victorian values were little better than those of the Nineties families.

In the Victorian subplot Augusta declares to her sister, Constance, “I detest our mother” (Ravenhill: 2001, 201). Later she declares that “this modern mania for acknowledging one’s parents after birth seems to me to be quite senseless” (Ravenhill: 2001, 202). Constance believes her sister to be ‘cold’ and disapproves of the sentiment although admits to feeling nothing when picking up her own child. As the play draws to its climax she still feels nothing and shakes the child in an attempt to feel something declaring that:

It will come. Hold him long enough and it must come. Don’t want to look down and see – what? – little square bundle of feet and teeth and eyes. That is not it, is it? No. No. No. Should feel love. That’s quite the proper thing to see. So why? Feed him. Feed him. That will do it (Ravenhill: 2001, 223).

This scene invites the audience to compare this fictitious representation of Victorian motherhood with that of the representation of the contemporary mothers, Suzanne and Mauretta. All three ‘mothers’ presented to the audience are measured against the social institution of motherhood. Constance measures herself against the prevailing myth of maternal altruism whereby according to, Shari Thurer’s book *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*, “common sense has given way to an obsession with the mother-child-relationship” (Thurer: 1995). The three characters taken together draw attention to

the myth of motherhood being the ultimate goal that completes and fulfils every woman.

The shifting time frames creates a referential field in which the audience sees “two positions related to and influencing one another” (Iser: 1980, 112). The distancing from the plot, provided by the juxtapositioning of the 1890s and the Nineties allows the audience to concentrate on the images of motherhood from the two eras and in both cases it idealizes the state of parenthood, and particularly that of motherhood. The two time zones create a referential field where each perspective forms a backdrop for the next, each remaining in the peripheral sight of the view as they focus on the next. This juxtaposition, therefore, creates a reflexive moment in which the audience members may compare and contrast the examples of motherhood Ravenhill offers them and those from the real world.

The time slippages are particularly important in this play. Rather than juxtaposing the two time frames as in *Mother Clap's Molly House*, in *Handbag*, Ravenhill places characters from both time frames in the same scenes. This invites a direct consideration of the two sets of characters and their *uses* of children. This slippage of characters and time frames first happens in scene nine when Phil left alone and unable to take responsibly for himself, is ‘found’ by Cardew who has lost a boy in the Victorian scenes. Cardew is a philanthropist who runs the Belgrave Square Society for the Discovery and Betterment of Foundling Boys from the Lower Orders. He claims to “give [his] boys the father they never had”, and “maybe the father they never wanted” (Ravenhill: 2001, 168). Cardew has a paedophilic interest in the boys within his care, and this leads many of them to run away. In this scene Cardew takes care of Phil, and briefly fulfils the role of the father that Phil’s character was denied.

Here Cardew takes responsibly for Phil. Phil’s character regresses completely into a childlike state allowing the audience to see that he is completely incapable of looking after himself:

**Phil** So for now...I'm nothing. I've got no name.

**Cardew** For the present.

**Phil** I like that

No clothes. No name

*He makes baby noises*

**Cardew** Please. No.

**Phil** (*baby noise*) Dadda. Dadda.

**Cardew** This is undignified. Get in the tub.

**Phil** *gets in the tub.* **Cardew** *washes him* (Ravenhill: 2001, 193).

Cardew dries and re-clothes Phil in Victorian attire at the end of the scene. Scene ten is set in the Victorian setting which Cardew introduces Phil into. In this scene Phil interacts with the Victorian cast, telling them the story of his own five year old daughter who he 'sold' for sex to a drug dealer in exchange for drugs. This is followed by the exchange discussed above between Constance and Augusta about motherhood. Constance believes her sister to be 'cold' and disapproves of the sentiment although admits that when picking up her own child "I feel nothing" (Ravenhill: 2001, 202). The two parents, Constance and Phil from different centuries, both confess to a lack of parental feelings for their children and this highlights the lack of difference between the two eras with regard to children. Scene ten ends with Constance declaring: "Nothing. I feel nothing" (Ravenhill: 2001, 202). Constance's lack of feeling is linked to Phil's lack of feeling for his daughter who he sold as commodity for drugs and also the lack of feeling demonstrated by all four of the parents in scene one who use the baby to fulfil their own needs but show a lack of genuine feeling or ability to take responsibility for the child they jointly conceive. This declaration from Constance is an invitation for the audience to compare this mother's inability to feel with the inability of the four contemporary parents to feel and adequately care for their child. Constance's attempt to shake the child until she feels something is mirrored in the scenes set in 1998 particularly the final scene in which desperate Phil tries to make the baby react by stubbing out cigarettes on him.

During the closing stages of the play the audience is positioned to think that the mismatched couple of contemporary co-dependent 'orphans', Lorraine and Phil, may be able to redeem themselves by caring for the baby in the way that Phil failed to do with his own child. The 'yuppie' parents tied up with their work also fail to be there for the child and attempt to recapture lost moments of the infants life by "videoing it all...[then] coming home to watch eight hours of video just so we can feel like Mummy" (Ravenhill: 2001, 215). The final scene of the play opens with Phil carefully bathing the child while telling it a story – one with a happy ending where:

...finally the dealer comes for the kid and the dad says: 'I'm free of you. I've got no habit and I'm free of you and I never want to see you again.' And the dealer starts to shake, and then he turns red like a furnace and then smoke comes out of his ears and he burns up until there's just a pair of shoes lying there and they're full of ash and that's the end (Ravenhill: 2001, 218).

It is significant that the story Phil tells has a happy ending, but this optimism is short lived and quickly takes a sinister turn as the scene moves from one of the happy surrogate family to one where abuse happens. In an attempt to make the baby breathe Phil stubs out his cigarette "on the baby ...Again. Again, Again" until finally he "pushes the cigarette into the baby's eyes" (Ravenhill: 2001, 226). Caridad Svich claims that in this scene:

With more than a nod to Edward Bond's landmark play, *Saved*, Ravenhill ends his play with casual, unnerving scene of violence that lays bare what happens to children who come from a world of abuse and hunger (Svich: 2003, 88).

Svich is wrong. This child comes from a world of neither abuse nor hunger. The child in question comes from a home affluent enough to provide CCTV camera equipment and a live-in nanny. This is a significant mis-reading of the context of the events of the play and it appears that Svich cannot contemplate that abuse of this nature can occur in an affluent context. I argue that this scene demonstrates what happens to children who are treated as objects and traded or stolen to fulfil the needs of self-centred adults. The scene, however, does involve some of the elements from Bond's notorious 1965 Scene Six of *Saved*.

The slow and protracted series of events that lead to the death of a baby in both is equally difficult to witness, as once the violence has begun it only has one possible outcome, just as in Bond's *Olly's Prison* when Mike kills Shelia, as discussed in Chapter Nine. Ravenhill's 1998 scene, however, has an air of desperation about it that was chillingly absent from Bond's earlier scene. In *Handbag* the baby is killed in the last scene of the play and so it ends with none of the optimism of its predecessor. It offers instead a bleak view that contains repeated patterns of violence where the abused in turn becomes the abuser.

This cycle of abuse is emphasised by the counter positioning of the Victorian family and those of the Nineties. There is a slippage in timeframes in the final scene when the death of the baby is juxtaposed with the paedophile, Cardew, finding a baby in a handbag and declaring "My own one" (Ravenhill: 2001, 226). The audience, therefore, is presented with the end of one series of abuses and the beginning of another. It is also interesting to note that Cardew's exclamation of "My own one" unmistakably implies possession of the child as if it were an object. Just as Mauretta noticeably declares when the baby is stolen, "My baby. They took *my* baby" these comments underline the fact that to these characters infants are the property of the adults who care for them and as such may be disposed of in whatever manner those adults see as being fit. Here Victorian values are shown next to contemporary ones, and neither bodes well for babies or parents. Ravenhill's play exposes the myth of the ideal traditional family model suggesting instead that the definition of family has always been in a state of flux. It is also apparent from his representation of two family structures separated by a hundred years that neither is necessarily a safe space nor environment for a child and that in fact both spaces are very unsafe spaces for these infants.

The play is inherently political; the device of using two different time frames challenges the conventional acceptance that the nuclear family and home provides a space in which children thrive and challenges the political rhetoric of the Nineties about 'traditional' or 'Victorian' family

values. There is no hope for the babies in *Handbag* and this is underscored by the dual time frames of the play in which the audience is invited to consider this point at length. In Chapter Four I argue that an alternative structure that is healthier for family life may be found in a neo-family form. The parents in Ravenhill's *Handbag*, at first appear to be a neo-family structure. Mauretta, Suzanne, Tom and David, at first do appear to, in the words of sociologist Jeffrey Weeks although not a nuclear family, "embrace domestic patterns which include care for children or other dependents" (Weeks et al: 1999, 304). The characters do appear to provide a support network for each other and the baby. The sociologists Hill and Tisdall argue that the family network has now broadened to include a variety of forms:

For instance, family relationships may be established through cohabitation which does not involve marriage, whilst some children are brought up by adopters or following assisted reproduction so that one or both of their legal parents are not their biological parents. Divorce and remarriage also affect the boundaries and composition of the family network (Hill and Tisdall: 1997, 65-66).

Hill and Tisdall here imply an acceptance of the neo-family form although the notion of domestic normalcy has not changed. Ravenhill, through the character of David, accurately assesses the situation as an attempt by the four of them to conform to the stereotype of nuclear families:

So – up with the Wendy House. Up with the Wendy House and how did Mummy and Daddy do it and their mummy and daddy do it let's be like them. Yeah let's move to suburbia and bleach those nets (Ravenhill: 2001, 191).

David, Mauretta, Suzanne and Tom do not manage to form a neo-family as each of the character falls short of the offer of the mutual support and care that defines the neo-family structure. These characters I would argue attempted to create an extended version of the nuclear family or a blended family in order to attain their personal ambitions rather than creating an alternative family structure. As such Ravenhill invites the audience to consider alternative family structures.

### **The Neo-family and Optimism – *Blasted***

In the last section of this chapter I consider plays that take this invitation to reconsider a step further and do offer an example of a neo-family and therefore a utopic alternative to the nuclear family structure. Ravenhill develops a potential neo-family in his later work *Mother Clap's Molly House*. Amelia Howe Kritzer suggest as much when she states that:

Ravenhill's view of the pre-modern world of the molly house shows it as a place that fosters personal choice and change, even in the context of business. A sturdy and clearly bounded, if tawdry, institution, it provides a home, a livelihood and a place for sexual misfits in eighteenth-century London (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 138).

The molly house fails however to deliver a model for the neo-family as the central figure of Mother Clap moves out to live in the country with Princess and Martin, possibly taking Amy with them and leaving behind her family of Mollies. Writing more recently Aleks Sierz claims that: "the alternative family structures in *Mother Clap's Molly House* never seriously challenge the innate legitimacy of the traditional family" (Sierz: 2012, 184). The molly house may not challenge the legitimacy of the traditional family, but the new living arrangements for Mrs Tull at the end of the play do present the audience with the possibility of a neo-family structure. The play ends before the audience can see if this neo-family structure will support the individuals who opt into this alternative family structure but the idea of an alternative has been planted, giving the audience the space to imagine the results. It is not important that Ravenhill does not confirm whether this alternative structure is sustainable, what is important is that he allows the audience to contemplate the alternative and this renders the play political.

Howe Kritzer rejects both *Handbag* and *Mother Clap's* potential to deliver an alternative when she states that, "both plays show collective intent as difficult to maintain, and neither shows collective action as effective in achieving political goals (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 140-41). Both demonstrate that an alternative is thinkable with the later play ending on a more optimistic note than the first implying that it may even be achievable.

*Mother Clap's Molly House*, therefore, is utopic in that it stimulates the audiences' 'social imagination' and invites a critique of what exists and this leads to a questioning of what might replace the current status quo. Here Ravenhill reveals questions, challenging his audience to find solutions and recognising that change may be possible. In my reading of this play the audience, therefore, views the false consciousness of the normative family model and may produce "an imagining of something else" (Ricoeur: 1986, 266). This means that in line with the plays of Edward Bond that it is the work of the audience to find solutions to the problems presented. The structure of *Mother Clap's Molly House* is also a political tool because not only does the narrative not impose a solution but the structure of the play is inviting the audience to question the structure of the nuclear family as a norm.

The last play I consider in this chapter also presents the audience with problems and contains a baby that is a mute symbol of a bleak future. *Blasted* (1995: Royal Court, London) by Sarah Kane merges a fantasy world with a harshly realistic one in an attempt to portray an uninviting future for Kane's characters and ultimately the world of the audience. The audience is taken on a journey that leads them from the naturalistic opening to a more abstract setting as the characters discover that a war is taking place outside with the arrival of a soldier who breaks into the room. From here on the play literally blows apart its structure and the audience witnesses escalating levels of abuse and violence. Although it appears to be bleak Kane, like Bond, has gone on record as saying that her work is optimistic. Bond described *Saved* as being "irresponsibly optimistic", while Kane said of her own work in an interview with Aleks Sierz:

I don't find my plays depressing or lacking in hope...To create something beautiful about despair, or out of a feeling of despair, is for me the most hopeful life affirming thing a person can do (Sierz: 2001, 91).

The hope in *Blasted* is focused on/in the character of Cate and her attempts to care for herself, an orphaned baby and the dying Ian, and

although the baby dies in the last moments of the play, a glimmer of hope is witnessed by the audience. Cate makes an attempt to be responsible for not just herself, but others. This hope was not noted by the critics in their reviews of the first performances of *Blasted*. The responses from the press quickly made the production the most notorious of its decade, partly due to scenes involving the eating of the dead baby by one of the characters. The reviewers focused on the negative images represented in the play and neglected to see the social commentary offered by Kane. In my reading of this play the social commentary is focused on the nature of violent and abusive family relationships. Kane amplifies the area of investigation by considering violence on an international level as well as domestic level but her focus remains the same. Drawing on Cate's family situation and her developing relationship with Ian, the play explores the nature of domestic abuse and man's inhumanity on the domestic scale. It also invites the audience to consider how violence may be amplified when the personal is removed or even exaggerated in a war setting. In this way the assumed sexual violence that the character of Cate suffered at the hands of both her father and Ian is then magnified out from the domestic family relationships to an international form of the same abuse in a war that uses sex and violence as a means of control and domination. The implication being that if abuse of this nature occurs in family settings where all sense of taking responsibility for others is removed, then the same will be true on an international scale where the results will be catastrophic and lead to total destruction of civilisations. In *Blasted* family relationships can be seen as a microcosm of international relationships between states.

In *Blasted* the audience witnesses, through the characters of Ian and the Soldier, individuals who justify the violence in their own lives to such an extent that they become immune to its effects. Consequently, the hostility and brutality moves from the domestic sphere, into an international arena and the personal becomes political. As with *Saved* the most shocking element is perhaps the matter of fact, casual tone in which the violence

escalates and is not questioned. The violence continues to be shocking even after seeing the play numerous times. Since 2001 I have seen three revivals of the play, directed by James MacDonald at the Royal Court in 2001, Jenny Sealey for Graeae Theatre Company at the Soho Theatre in 2006, and Sean Holmes at the Lyric Hammersmith in 2010. Each time I have seen the play, it still has the power to provoke extreme moments of tension for me, and in each production I have witnessed, at least one member of the audience has walked out during the scene where Ian is abused by the soldier. This is a testament to the disturbing nature of the scene and the violence within it.

*Blasted* presents its audiences with a bleak portrayal of urban life, one that contains horrific acts of violence and projects this violence on to future generations as presented by the baby, just as *Saved* did previously and *Handbag* has done since. It has been argued by theatre scholars Peter Ansorge (1997) and Vera Gottlieb (1999) that as a result of this that there is no hope presented in this play, that in fact it murders the possibility of hope of a better future along with the babies. Howe Kritzer more recently describes the eating of the baby as:

an act of savage futility, he [Ian] eats the baby's corpse and thus destroys even the symbolic remains of future life (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 32).

To read this play as simply pessimistic is narrow sighted in the extreme. In fact, for both children and the neo-family, *Blasted* offers an optimistic end in the same manner that Bond offers his audience optimism in *Saved* (1965).

In scene two of *Blasted* the character of The Soldier enters the room and the audience watch in horror as his violence progresses from urinating on Ian to raping him, and to sucking out and eating his eye balls. During the early parts of this abuse there is a feeling that Ian deserves this treatment as a result of his physical and verbal abuse of Cate. Kane appears to be demonstrating that some violence is justifiable, and it is acceptable as Ian claims to kill those who are guilty of "planting bombs"

and murdering those who are “guilty of killing little kiddies” (Kane: 2001, 32). Having abused Cate, the audience then witnesses as Ian is both verbally and physically assaulted by the Soldier.

The implication here is that sometimes violence and abuse are justifiable, Edward Bond claims the message we are given politically is that violence is needed to control violence: “the ruling class has a conscious, though false, rationale for its violence; it calls this the maintenance of law and order” (Bond: 1997a, 15). This view is also explored in David Rudkin’s *Red Sun* (2003). *Red Sun* is set in a mythical land where, using the Golem myth, a creator breathes life into a being with the purpose of protecting the people from a violent and oppressive regime. The creator teaches the infant that violence used to protect humankind is good. However, the creature becomes intoxicated with its power and ends up killing a baby and drinking its blood. The creature is unable to distinguish ‘good’ violence from ‘bad’ violence and a child is sacrificed. There is a parallel here with the character of Ian, who defends the state killing of child murders and terrorists and even claims to have taken direct action himself as he has: “Stood at stations, listening to conversations and given the nod...driving jobs. Picking people up, disposing of bodies, the lot” (Kane: 2001, 30). To Ian these acts are justified because they defend the country, keeping it safe from wrong doers and he “loves this land” (Kane: 2001, 30). In committing these acts he believes he was defending his country, protecting its citizens and therefore, his violence is sanctioned by the authorities and is justifiable just like the ‘good’ violence of Rudkin’s Golem. This is a position also explored by Bond in *Tuesday* (1993) and *11 Vests* (1997) which I discuss in detail in Chapter Nine. In *Blasted*, Ian becomes so used to the violence in his life he is immune to its effects and feels no compunction when assaulting Cate. Violence becomes the norm for Ian and he ceases to distinguish between that sanctioned as being for the good of the country and that being driven by his selfish desires for sex or food. The question with political implications that Kane asks her audiences through *Blasted* is where will this end?

In the play Kane's end depicts the room literally being blown apart and Cate, who was Ian's victim, returning to look after him, or take responsibility for him. The character of Cate attempts to feed Ian, in doing so she goes out into a war-torn Leeds to forage for food and returns with another theatrical mute symbol of vulnerability; a baby that had been handed to Cate by a despairing mother. The end of Kane's *Blasted* has the character of Cate being left to fend for herself and more or less alone. Up until this point Cate has been a childlike character dependant on others. After the bomb blast tears through the room leaving the Soldier dead and Ian nearly so Cate returns to the room, she "enters through the bathroom door, soaking wet and carrying a baby" (Kane: 2001, 51). In the final scenes of the play Cate reaches adulthood as she attempts to care for herself, the baby and the dying Ian. The baby dies in these last moments of the play but there is a glimmer of optimism witnessed by the audience because Cate makes an attempt to be responsible for not just herself but for others as well.

Cate is forced to forage for food rejecting her previous sexual abstinence, teetotalism and vegetarianism in order to survive.

*Cate enters carrying some bread, a large sausage and a bottle of gin. There is blood seeping from between her legs...*

*She pulls a sheet off the bed and wraps it around her.*

*She sits next to Ian's head.*

*She eats her fill of the sausage and bread, then washes it down with gin (Kane: 2001, 60-61).*

The audience watch as Cate puts herself first – taking responsibility first for her survival and then considering Ian:

*Ian listens*

*She feeds Ian with the remaining food.*

*As she pours gin in Ian's mouth*

*She finished feeding Ian and sits apart from him, huddled for warmth.*

*She drinks the gin.*

*She sucks her thumb*

*Silence.*

*It rains*

*Ian Thank you  
Blackout (Kane: 2001, 60-61).*

This play then traverses a thin line between pessimism and optimism, the use of the representation of a baby epitomizes this sense of hope in the way in which it suggests an alternative family dynamic is paradoxically possible as a result of the dysfunctional images that are presented as being naturalised. I view this baby as a symbol of hope in a devastated world. An abused woman is willing to care for both her abuser and a child, with whom she has no connection; the audience is shown a character that is prepared to take responsibility for others. Cate creates a neo-family in which individuals with no traditional family relationships take responsibility for one another where compassion and support are offered, in a world in which horrible things happen, but where a support network exists in which help is given. This is all the more poignant as Cate has suffered abuse at the hands of her own father and Ian, her replacement father figure and sexual partner. The audience is offered an alternative or neo-family structure; albeit one that imitates the naturalised family unit. The confidence placed in Cate, and therefore humankind to do the right thing, or take responsibility for each other, created by this image is destroyed when the baby dies. Hope for a more caring future is removed with the death of the infant and confirmed by Ian's cannibalism. Kane shows the audience a society which is prepared to use the child for food; Ian, who is starving and blind, attempts to eat the corpse of the child in an attempt to save himself:

*Ian tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor and lifts the baby's body out.*

*He eats the baby.*

*He puts the remains back in the baby's blanket and puts the bundle back in the hole (Kane: 2001, 60).*

This is a bleak scene but, it holds an implicit internal optimism in the form of alternative choices, the possibility of utopianism for the audience. The optimism in *Saved*, *Blasted* and many of the other plays discussed here lies with the characters that witness or survive the abuse, violence and

inhumane words and actions of other characters and take responsibility for others, even if they do so passively. In *Blasted* Cate has tried to save a baby and failed. However, she survives and although her future in a war torn Leeds is bleak, she does have a chance of survival. Theatre scholar Ken Urban claims that:

Kane reminds us that change is possible, but not as the end point of some utopic political narrative. Rather, change occurs in those moments where comfortable designations break down...and everything must be rethought...To Kane the good is not a moral imperative imposed from on high but rather good is continually, emerging from specific moments (Urban: 2001, 46).

Cate will survive and has demonstrated her ability to do so throughout the play. Amelia Howe Kritzer discusses Cate's survival instincts citing neglect of vegetarian principles as one example but goes on to say that this "offers very little hope for the mobilization of those moral qualities to create a better future" (Howe Kritzer: 2008, 33). In contrast to this view, I interpret the closing lines of the play as propitious, in that they demonstrate a character that has first learnt to take responsibility for her own life and having done that, then takes responsibility for the life of another. Still a child herself, as witnessed by her thumb sucking, the audience can be in no doubt that Cate will continue to survive, and to care for Ian and any others she finds. Failing with one child does not detract from the fact that Kane has presented us with a resilient character who will take responsibilities for others. In this, to use Urban's expression, 'specific moment' the audience is offered some optimism for the future, but this glimmer as it is in Bond's *At the Inland Sea*, is contingent on individuals learning to take responsibility for first themselves and then their contemporaries.

In *At the Inland Sea* the 'specific moment' also occurs in the last sentences of the play when a Boy offers his Mother a cup of tea. Bond uses this image in order to enable the audience to reflect on the humanity of both those responsible for issuing orders for genocide and of those responsible for the act itself and then to consider the relevance of these events to contemporary society. Here Bond uses the metaphor of

the family in order for the audience to consider the wider implications of taking responsibility for people just as Kane does in *Blasted*.

In this play a theatre event and distancing are created when the hotel room explodes and also in the moments of extreme violence, these moments create gaps in the narrative in which the audience is invited to critically engage with the conditions and social structures that allowed these events to take place in the stage world. It is through the figure of the baby, a mute symbol of the world of destruction and of social unease, that the 'gap' is created in which the audience is invited to fill in the future with possibilities of a different life. The audience is invited to imagine the possibilities where a young traumatised woman can find the strength to create a new way of existing, taking responsibility for herself and for the others she may meet along the way. It is unlikely that she will remake the past but the way is left open to create a better society. The image of Cate alone at the end of *Blasted* is similar to the image of Joe alone at the end of Edward Bond's *The Children*, when he says "I've got everything. I'm the last person in the world. I must find someone" (Bond: 2000b, 52). Both characters have lost everything and need to start again and this makes the plays optimistic and utopic in tone. In each play the writer has found, in Bond's words, "a way of integrating the individual dilemma with the social problem" (Bond in Billington: 2008, 23). The writers do this by enabling the audience to identify with a central character who represents a wider social concern, each critiquing the social structures that these characters cling to and destroying them, leaving the way open for the audience to imagine new structures or ways of life.

Many of the damaged babies and infants staged in the period from 1993 to 2001 assert a similar "irresponsible optimism" as many of the plays end with characters, alone, facing a bleak future but one with the faint glimmer of optimism. In each case the optimism can be seen to be generated paradoxically, out of the dysfunctional family relationships, each character having survived to seek alternatives that are rooted in a

taking responsibility for others. For many of the characters Mark, as for Cate, The Boy in *At the Inland Sea*, Joe in *The Children*, Lily in *Skriker* and Alana at the end of Sarah Daniels' *Taking Breath* (1999, National Shell Connections) "the most courageous thing to do is to keep breathing" (Daniels: 1999, 601). With this courage comes the optimism for the central character; in these plays they all survive in a hostile world and survive as characters able to take responsibility for themselves and potentially to take responsibility for others. The imagery of damaged babies and those at risk in these plays prioritize this optimism and asks the question that I opened this chapter with.

In Benjamin Zephaniah's *Listen to Your Parents* (2002, Theatre Centre, London) the writer asks: 'What is the price of a baby? / A baby that will live long' (Zephaniah: 2003, 36). For the playwrights discussed in this chapter the price of a baby appears to be self-sacrifice in order to learn to undertake responsibility for others and this price will result in:

A baby that will shine each day / Come what may. / It need not have a perfect father, / It need not have the perfect mother, / It need not be the son of a prince, / Or the daughter of a chosen one, / All it needs is the sweet smell of love / And a place that is sane and sheltered. / A beautiful smile once told me that / Babies need / But its not about greed, / And I am so sure that smile would not lie. / So what's the price of a baby? / And do babies get cheaper the less they cry? (Zephaniah: 2003, 36-7).

In Zephaniah's play, the price of a crying baby is the murder of its father, and if the child hadn't cried so much maybe the death could have been avoided. In the final lines of the play when the audience is told that:

It's like this, right – me dad didn't care about us, he didn't care about me Mom ... That's why me Mom ... killed Me dad (Zephaniah: 2003, 51).

It is a strident and abrupt end to the play, but one that still offers an 'irresistible optimism' to Mark and his baby brother as characters within the play can now live without fear of abuse. This optimism is denied in Ravenhill's *Handbag*, but it and *Mother Clap's Molly House*, both contain potential neo families in the molly house and the four parent family model respectively, but the utopian alternative is not achieved because the

characters in these plays fail to take responsibility for themselves or others. As such the characters fail to take an oppositional position to the normalised and dominate discourses on the family. The following chapter will examine the technologies of domination at play in representations young adolescents and consider how they are initiated into an adult world that normalises family structures and yet paradoxically enables oppositional positions and neo-family structures to exist.

## Chapter Six: Adolescents and Their Place in the World

***'See, I'm the kind of person who can stand in the middle of an earthquake and I'm just like 'whoa', neat earthquake.'  
And I wonder what made me that way.'***

***(Faust (Faust is Dead): Ravenhill 2001)***

During this period it is not just images of infants and their families that were prolific in new dramatic writing, plays that featured adolescents and teenagers in families and neo-families were also prevalent. This chapter examines some of these characters from plays produced between 1993 and 2001. One of the significant aspects of the plays discussed in this chapter is that they all feature personal or global calamity and catastrophe. I argue that the young people represented in these plays demonstrate Foucault's notion of 'technologies of domination' and 'technologies of the self', and that during the course of the plays they become self-regulating, 'docile bodies'. In this section I consider how the representation of young people explores the 'mechanisms of subjection' which educate them and the adults who care for them. I argue that as they are educated into the world of adults through nuclear and blended family structures they become disconnected from their feelings. I will suggest that this disconnection taught on the domestic level by family members, is directly linked to the global catastrophes that feature in each of the play's leads. In this chapter I will argue that narrative and structural devices centred on the family together work to enable the audience to reflexively engage with the works. In doing so they may link representation of personal or domestic situations directly to the deployment of ideology and state power in a society where the national-state is no longer seen as the unquestioned authority.

My reading of these dramatisations of young people in families and neo-families draws on the sociological paradigm of childhood constructed by anthropologists Allison James and Alan Prout (1990) who argue that childhood is worthy of study in its own right and not just in respect to its social construction by adults. As a result this chapter considers the

characters of the children represented in the plays as characters in their own right and not just as the precursors to the adults they might become nor are they being considered as representations of the child-parent relationship as I did in the previous chapter. I will consider how the child characters discussed in the first sections of this chapter demonstrate ways in which children are portrayed as wise and knowledgeable. Here I examine the child characters as symbols of moral integrity, drawing on playwright Edward Bond's notion of 'radical innocence'. I argue that characters in the child's family seek to eradicate this integrity or 'radical innocence' as part of the course of their education into the adult world. English theatre and literature academic Ljiljana Sedlar has argued a similar point claiming that childhood characters are dehumanised as they develop. She argues that:

[they] start out equipped with moral and emotional intelligence and end up deprived of it, disordered, diminished, dehumanized (Sedlar: 2004, 70).

In my reading of Caryl Churchill's play *Far Away* (2000, Royal Court Theatre, London) I argue that this 'dehumanising' process is the result of the family who teach the young character of Joan to ignore her feelings of compassion. I also consider the global implications of this lack of integrity by asking if the development of a lack of compassion in the developing adolescents leads to a lack of feeling for oneself and if this then leads to the death of humanity on a wider scale by briefly looking at Mark Ravenhill's *Faust (Faust is Dead)* (1997, Lyric Hammersmith Studio). Each of these plays presents audiences with young characters who have yet to reach adolescence. Both young character demonstrates an almost innate moral integrity that is superior to the adult characters depicted. In both plays, the characters undergo a process of education through their families that trains them to be adults by disconnecting them from their integrity. In the process they become disconnected from feelings of compassion for others and, ultimately, from their own ability to feel.

The final two sections in this chapter return to the plays of Caryl Churchill, firstly with a reading of *This is a Chair*, in which I argue that Churchill is using the family as a microcosm of the state in an increasingly globalised world. Secondly I look at the elements of optimism that may be found in *Far Away*. In her plays of the Nineties Churchill placed families at the centre of both her narratives and structures. Taken as a body of work, although often focused on the domestic in this period, her plays feature domestic situations within a global context. I argue that in drawing attention to the structure of the plays themselves she is inviting the audience to reflect on the structures of the family units she presents. When set within a global context she therefore invites a reflection on world structures. In this her plays form not so much State-of-the-Nations but State-of-the-Globe plays which question the role and place of social responsibility and ethics.

### **The Disconnection of Integrity - *Far Away***

Churchill positioned young people at the centre of much of her work written both before and after 1993 and in her play, *Far Away* she uses the trope of the adolescent particularly pertinently. *Far Away* (2000) takes place over three scenes, each of which show us brief glimpses into the life of the central character, Joan. According to Beth Watkins's review of the first performance run in the *Theatre Journal* it offered a 'terrifying vision, where cultural and social norms slid[e] headlong into war' (Watkins: 2001, 481). Here it is useful because of Churchill's representation of family relationships and their role to facilitate a slide into war.

Churchill presents a dystopic vision of a world at war with itself and a vision which, as the play's title implies is all too close. This is a cautionary tale of what will result if young people are taught to ignore their social responsibilities. In this I am drawing on Edward Bond's view that children first need to learn to be responsible for themselves and then for others. In Churchill's *Far Away*, we are offered the antithesis of this



I mostly wiped it off.

Harper                    That's where the dog got run over this afternoon.

Joan                        Wouldn't it have dried up?

Harper                    Not if the ground was muddy.

Joan                        What sort of dog? (Churchill: 2000, 9-10)

In this scene Joan appears to have an uncanny knowledge of when Harper is lying and pushes for details about the dog, asking its name, how long they have had it and its colour. When she receives answers to these questions the persistent Joan changes tack and asks: "Why were the children in the shed?" (Churchill: 2000, 11). In performance the character of Joan, played by a child holding a teddy bear and wearing night clothes displays an unswerving determination to find the truth as she confronts the adult figure of Harper. The childhood figure of Joan is disarming and Harper's frustration at being questioned is evident. She is undisturbed by the actual events that Joan has witnessed, but is rather more disturbed that Joan has witnessed them:

Harper                    There might be things that are not your business when you're a visitor in someone's house.

Joan                        Yes, I'd rather not have seen. I'm sorry.  
(Churchill: 2000, 9)

The adult, Harper, is manipulating the child by referring to code of behaviour by drawing on the expected behaviour of a visitor this coercive technique appears to have little effect on Joan at this point in the play. The young Joan may have wished that she had not seen these disturbing events, but she does not turn her back on them and return to bed. Instead she creeps to the window of the shed for a better look, and having seen her uncle "hitting a man [and child] with a stick" (Churchill: 2000, 13), she now keeps questioning until she finds the meaning of the events she has witnessed. Joan's questioning appears to be finally

quelled by her Aunt's insistence that she is being trusted with the truth and that her Uncle is working on the side of 'good' and by doing so he is putting his life in danger (Churchill: 2000, 12). Initially Joan, again, seems to accept this explanation but she soon follows this with yet another unanswerable question: "Why was uncle hitting them?" (Churchill: 2000, 13). The child is now captivated by the idea of a secret and asks "Why did you have me to stay if you've got this secret going on?" (2000, 13). Harper completes the story with the information that Joan has been initiated into a principled society working morally and ethically claiming that the violence "had to be done to save the others" (2000, 14). In doing this Harper appeals to the child's natural integrity which has been stirred by witnessing an act she perceives to be wrong. Harper convinces the child not to question the actions she has witnessed by initiating her into a secret movement that is working to improve lives:

HARPER      Of course. I'm not surprised you can't sleep, what an upsetting thing to see. But now you understand, it's not so bad. You're part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky.

JOAN            Can't I help?

HARPER        You can help me clean up in the morning. Will you do that?

JOAN            Yes.

HARPER        So you'd better get some sleep  
(Churchill: 2000, 14-15).

Here the adult Harper initiates Joan into a life where it is best not to ask too many questions.

In this scene Joan is introduced to the adult world through a trusted family member who trains and teaches Joan not follow her instincts but to accept what she is told and not to dwell on the incidents she has witnessed in the night. Drawing on Foucault's notion of governmentality

here a child is being trained to be a 'good citizen' who "without exception obey[s] the laws...and respects[s] the established order" (Foucault: 2000, 210). In this case the established order is that of the extended biological family and Harper encourages Joan to obey family authority without question. To do this she appeals to Joan's sense of justice; she uses what Foucault might describe as "coercive technologies of behaviour" (Foucault: 1977, 293). In this scene then the character of Aunt Harper becomes a "technician of behaviour" or an engineer of conduct, orthopaedists of individuality, whose "task [is] to produce bodies that [are] docile and capable (Foucault: 1977, 294). Joan is initiated into this adult world through Harper's coercive techniques; she is taught not to question, merely to do as she is told and her innate curiosity is eventually stifled. In the opening scene Joan and Harper provide an example of how the family can work as an agent of socialisation. Harper demonstrates that adult behaviour is socially conditioned as she conditions her niece into the adult world. Here the audience witness Joan trying to reject the family's values and question the illicit and troublesome violence she has witnessed but ultimately in the face of adult family authority she capitulates and accepts her aunt's version of events. In this scene it is evident that the family as represented by the character of Aunt Harper a means of education and, is a means of mediation between the state and the individual. In a Foucauldian reading and drawing on sociologist Nikolas Rose's interpretations, Harper and the family of the family, can be seen to be the "locus of inculcation of morality into children" (Rose: 1989, 156). The startling image of the adult and child in a tense exchange of dialogue where the child clearly takes the moral high ground as the adult lies her way out of difficult situation, invites the audience to question the morality of Harper's responses and therefore of the family's authority. By extension the play questions the manner in which children are educated within the family.

Act Two demonstrates how well Joan has learnt the lessons of Scene 1. The adult Joan is now free of troubling and unsettling questions and can work diligently in a hat factory designing and manufacturing extravagant

hats that are worn by men women and children in a “procession of ragged beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution” (Churchill: 2000, 24). As she works she engages in flirtatious banter with her co-worker Todd and she confesses that she doesn’t “like staying in the evenings and watching the trials” (Churchill: 2000, 20). She no longer queries the events that happen in the night, but turns a blind eye to them, as Harper taught her to do in Act One. This detachment enables her to lament the waste of hats and creative energy in the execution fires: “It seems so bad to burn them with the bodies” (Churchill: 2000, 25). She does not lament the waste of human life that would have kept the young Joan awake at night. The scale of the murders is hinted at throughout the act but most poignantly by Todd when he claims that:

Out of three hundred hats I’ve made here I’ve only had three win and go in the museum. But that’s never bothered me. You make beauty and it disappears, I love that (Churchill: 2000, 25).

The audience also discover at the end of the act that “there’s other parades” (Churchill: 2000, 27). Todd is the more principled of the two working for better conditions and bemoaning the corrupt nature of the parades in general and specifically the hat parade. But he rails against the injustice for the workers and the distribution of contracts, not the loss of life. He tries to interest a journalist in the story and this hints at the nonchalant attitude throughout this future society where no-one will question the imprisonment and loss of life that is taking place on a grand scale. Joan is impressed with Todd believing him to be “the only person in this place who’s got any principles” (Churchill: 2000, 21). She claims that he has opened her eyes to the corruption:

JOAN            You make me think in different ways. Like I’d never have thought about how this place is run and now I see how important it is (Churchill: 2000, 26).

This adult Joan who has not considered how the factory is run is very different to the questioning child Joan of scene one. The sharp difference in styles between these two scenes creates a sense of distancing allowing for the ‘reflexive pause’ as I discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. The difference between the realism of scene one and the more

expressionistic setting of scene two invites the audience to question what else has changed and this adult Joan can be compared with the child Joan of the previous scene. When viewing the play this contrast encouraged me to consider what questions the child Joan would ask about a State which has death parades and where hats are treasured in the museum while human bodies are burnt and tossed aside. Had it not been for the guidance of her family, the adult Joan might indeed have asked different questions.

Una Chaudhuri observed, in her review of the production that the ease with which a child can be educated into not asking questions is disturbing:

It is chilling to see how easily moral and political concerns can be deflected, how easily the habit of not seeing what one sees can be cultivated...The girl, now a young woman, learns fast how to not even ask questions, how to keep on doggedly talking about the wrong thing (Chaudhuri: 2003, 133).

It is particularly “chilling” when the child Joan “doggedly” asked the *right* questions, before her family trained her not to ask questions and turn a blind eye to oppression and violence. The family unit, symbolised by Aunt Harper, has prepared the young Joan for a world where nightly mass executions are ignored by the population. Harper has trained Joan not to ask questions in a society where asking the wrong question could be dangerous. Harper deflects the child from learning the truth and very skilfully manipulates her. Joan learns this lesson of not to ask questions as a survival mechanism. My reading of the play’s politics is informed by Foucault, who argues that the mechanisms of discipline at play in society are “effacing what may be violent in one and arbitrary in the other, attenuating the effects of revolt that they may arouse in both” (Foucault: 1977, 303). Joan’s non-violent but inquisitive nature is ‘effaced’ and she compliantly accepts a power that punishes or tolerates; a power that punishes others, and an abdication of personal responsibility for what happens to those who transgress.

Theatre scholar Philip Roberts claims that Joan “is damaged” (Roberts: 2008, 148) by Aunt Harper, and the following two acts of *Far Away*, demonstrate the full extent of the damage created by such training. A Foucauldian reading of Joan in Act One is that she had been indoctrinated by her family into accepting a ‘regime of truth’ which validates particular moral values and codes. Foucault claimed that a regime of acceptable truth is established through training:

Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault: 1977, 118).

Throughout Act One Harper, as the family representative, states what is true and eventually Joan accepts this ‘truth’. Acts Two and Three demonstrate the consequences of this family training its members to protect only themselves at the expense of others as the setting of the play becomes one of a global war. Joan having learnt to be compliant in Act Three, accepts and fights in a catastrophic war in which “all of creation has joined the fray – animals, plants, rivers and even the weather is part of the new reality of total enmity” (Chaudhuri: 2003, 133). In this play the family, in educating Joan in the ways of the adult world by disconnecting the adolescent from feelings of integrity, paves the way for this “total enmity” and catastrophe on a world scale. The war of Act Three encompasses all life forms and Todd, in his role within the war, declares that he has:

...shot cattle and children in Ethiopia...gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs...torn starlings apart with...[his] bare hands. And ...liked doing it (Churchill: 2000, 35).

This is an unmitigated war in which the Moroccans and the ants are in league as are the “engineers, the chefs, the children under five, the musicians” (Churchill: 2000, 30). It is a war in which you do not know whose side the river is on (Churchill: 2000, 38). While Harper, Todd and Joan all bemoan the situation, none of them question the validity of a war

that harnesses nature to fight. Elaine Aston argues that this war is the end product of training and education:

Education and labour systems...teach and train young women (and men) to make beautiful objects, but fail to instruct in the politics of their learning or their labours are dangerous (Aston: 2003, 36).

Aston uses this point in her argument that "Churchill's feminism is arguing the need to close the gap between the personal and the political" (Aston: 2003, 36). I argue that in this play it is the *family* training of children that is brought into question. Therefore this play demonstrates the logical conclusion of a family and education system that teaches the compassion out of children. Joan's family has trained her not to take responsibility for herself or others and taken to an extreme, as Churchill does in the final act, the result of this training is catastrophe. The absurdist nature of the war in Act Three is almost incomprehensible inviting the audience to question how the escalation of the lack of integrity and compassion and consider where it stemmed from. The three short and powerful scenes each with glimpses of Joan's life leave me with little doubt that the war stems from Aunt Harper's early teaching. Just as in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, the logical progression of domestic violence is shown to be the starting point for full-scale world war. Here the logical progression of not asking the big questions and not taking responsibly for actions witnessed, leads to full scale global conflict. The absurdity of the war poignantly questions the absurdity disconnecting the young Joan's integrity. Watkins argues that the play has an incomplete air to it due to the absurd nature of this war and Churchill's characterisation:

the satirical tone of the final two scenes...and the undeveloped character relationships, however, made the production feel unfinished. The absurdity of the world at war was left unresolved, perhaps rightly, but Churchill's dystopic vision brilliantly realized in the first scene, sputtered to a close (Watkins: 2001, 481).

Watkins' analysis neglects the careful plotting that leads the audience to witness the transition of the probing; questioning child Joan, to the constrained and guarded adolescent Joan, to finally a complicit

embattled adult Joan. In this play the three scenes work together to demonstrate the way in which children are trained by the family to ignore the impulse to interrogate the world in which they live, and to take less responsibility for others. This play then becomes a warning about the need for change and the realisation that in the words of Edward Bond, change is necessary:

People need to become responsible for change, to understand and evaluate it and when possible to initiate it by anticipating necessity. Children must be helped to make change more human. To become competent members of a critical culture (Bond: 1997a, 86).

This makes the play inherently political as it invites a questioning of social structures.

On a worldwide scale, the moral individualism and lack of compassion or responsibility taught to Joan by Harper is shown to lead to a disaster is a view shared by Aston. She argues that this play “suggests that an absence of social and political responsibility will lead to global catastrophe” (Aston: 1997, 116). The work adeptly demonstrates that self-regulation, when taken to an extreme, leads to a breakdown of world order and has catastrophic consequences. This self-regulation is modelled by adults who teach it to young people, and the family unit can be seen as the instrument through which children are initiated into an adult world. By extension, this compliance leads to global catastrophe or a self-perpetuating situation where young people are taught not to take responsibility for themselves or one another and where atrocities can be explained away.

Act Two presents a society where characters focus on the minutia of their lives and turn a blind eye to catastrophic events literally being paraded in front of them. Act Three demonstrates the logical results of this inhumanity, albeit it in abstract, a world at war where nobody and nothing can be trusted. Implicitly this portrayal asks the audience to consider who is to blame for such devastation. Joan, the unseen authority figures running the trials of Act Two, or the guardian aunt of a

small child? Act Three's insane dividing of the world into sides of a battle that can only result in total destruction asks where such dehumanising will lead. This world conflict conceptualises Foucault's theory that war is the logical result of "precise controls and comprehensive regulations" for the whole of society:

[War is] waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed. And through a turn that closes the circle, as the technology of wars has caused them to tend increasingly toward all-out destruction, the decision that initiates them and the one that terminates them are in fact increasingly informed by the naked question of survival (Foucault: 1984, 259-60).

Relating Foucault's theories to Act Three of the play, suggests that Joan, Harper and Todd along with the cats, rivers and the whole of creation are drawn into a battle to the death to defend their existence because "power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race and the large-scale phenomena of population" (Foucault: 1984, 260).

The last lines offer a telling river metaphor focusing on the unpredictability of education "when you first step in you can't tell what will happen" – Joan's mistake was to step into her Aunt's world in the first place. As a child she was unable to withstand the coercion provided by her aunt and is indoctrinated into a world made by adults and perpetuated by trusted family members. It suggests that Churchill is inviting the audience to question how a state of dystopia can be averted? I would suggest that it is at the point where Joan's family provides her with the example of how to survive the adult world that is the point at which a different future could be envisioned. The 'corruption' of Joan's integrity and sense of responsibility by her family members started a chain of events that maintaining her childhood self may have averted. In this I disagree with Amelia Howe Kritzer who describes the young Joan as representing idealism:

This play traces the breakdown of idealism and the subsequent deterioration of human society to the point where the world is governed only by the fight for survival (Howe Kritzer: 2007, 73).

It is not idealism that is corrupted in this play, but a child's integrity. This integrity might have engendered a sense of responsibility and humanity and it has been corrupted and then people are 'governed by a fight for survival'. In my reading of this play it is the family relationship of Joan and Harper that allow for this corruption. Churchill's Joan demonstrates that moral disintegration appears to be a prerequisite for life as an adult in the contemporary world. Joan accepts a disregard for individuals and abdicates her childhood tendency towards a responsibility for others. This Foucauldian interpretation of the play emphasises the discipline and self-regulation that is implicitly part of their development under the supervision of adults. In Foucault's words they submit to a discipline that:

Increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility - and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short it dissociates power from the body: on one hand, it turns it into an "aptitude", a "capacity", which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection (Foucault: 1984, 182).

In *Far Away* I argue that it is the family that is central to an abdication of social responsibility and the irradiation of what Edward Bond might describe as 'radical innocence'. Mark Ravenhill's *Faust is Dead*, (1997, Actor's Touring Company) also presents an adolescent character who is taught not to care.

*Faust (Faust is Dead)* opens with another child who, like Joan from *Far Away*, can't sleep at night. This nameless child could be a sibling of Joan's, and his narration forms the Chorus's opening to the play. In this first scene the child expresses his concern and compassion for fellow human beings:

See, a few years ago I couldn't sleep. I'd go to bed and then I got thinking about all this stuff in the world – about the riots and the fighting and all the angry people and all – and I just couldn't sleep. And sometimes I'd cry – partly because I really wanted to sleep

but partly because all of those bad things going on...I'm crying for the world, because the world is such a bad place (Ravenhill: 2001, 97).

This sets the tone for the rest of play, during which the audience witnesses some of those “bad things going on” and their consequences. This child, like Joan, appears to have the ‘radical innocence’ Bond describes, where the child wants justice in the world which he is to inhabit. This child is troubled by the inequality he knows to exist to such an extent that he does not need to hear the shrieking and witness the lorry arriving as Joan did; the character imagines the suffering of the world and it stops him from sleeping. Just as Harper comforts Joan, this child is reassured by his mother, who assures him that:

I know poops. It's bad now but we're getting better. It's gonna get a whole lot better. We're going to live in a better world (Ravenhill: 2001, 97).

This bland promise of a ‘better world’ is comparable to the lies told by Harper, and it has a similar effect. In starting the play with this dialogue, Ravenhill, positions family relationship as being central to the narrative and fixes the notion of family in the forefront of the audiences’ minds.

This child stops questioning the world in which it lives, although here, as in *Far Away*, this change happens over the course of the play. In *Faust (Faust is Dead)* the first stage of this is that the child does not cease to be troubled, but he teaches himself “to cry in a special way that meant she wouldn't hear” him ever again (Ravenhill: 2001, 97). The audience see the character of a nameless child hiding his true emotions from his mother and rejecting her words of comfort. The character of the mother effectively silences her child's concerns and questions about the environment. Here the child is horrified and moved to tears by the world, but teaches himself to conceal this reaction and to hide his impulses of empathy and responsibility.

The penultimate scene contains the last speech from the chorus, and it is during this scene that the protagonist thinks back to those sleepless nights of childhood:

I used to cry at night not because the world was such a bad place. Well okay, not just because the world was such a bad place. But also because I wanted the world to come to an end...But the world hasn't ended. It's going on and on. And I keep looking for signs that it's getting better like Momma told me. But I can't see them. So it hasn't ended and it's not getting better. It's just going on, on and on and on.

And I wonder if I should feel something about that.

But – you want the truth? I don't feel a thing.

See, I'm the kind of person who can stand in the middle of an earthquake and I'm just like 'whoa', neat earthquake.'

And I wonder what made me that way (Ravenhill: 2001, 137).

What 'made me that way', as the play eloquently portrays, is the example shown by the family members and other adults. Writing about the play in 2004, Ljiljana Sedlar suggests that "the only way to survive in the world...is to kill the emotions" (Sedlar: 2004, 70). This results in the death of empathy and compassion for others and a complete lack of feeling.

Both Joan from *Far Away* and the chorus of *Faust* are characters who are taught not to care on a domestic scale. Both plays are examples of reflexive theatre that invite the audience to question the social structures that are perpetuated by current dominant ideologies and invite audiences to imagine alternative and utopian futures where responsibility for humanity can be fostered rather than discouraged. In the following section I develop this position further by considering how Churchill invites the audience to consider global events through domestic family settings.

### **The Family as a Microcosm of the Globe - *This is A Chair***

In this section I that demonstrates that in *This is a Chair* (1997, Royal Court Theatre, London) the nuclear family is used as a microcosm of the globe. Aston describes this as an "elliptical-political play" (Aston: 2009, 158). It is comprised of seven short scenes; the focus of each is a small

domestic or personal narrative. The narrative is juxtaposed with a scene title which “must be clearly displayed or announced” that reflects a contemporary global or political issue (Churchill: 1999, 6). In the context of this thesis it is the domestic scene of a family mealtime and the reflexive pause created in this scene that interests me. Churchill’s use of subtitles is drawing a parallel between the domestic relations in the play and international relations in a similar manner to Sarah Kane in *Blasted* (1995). Both *This is a Chair* and *Blasted* look at the logical escalation of domestic repression and abuse into international acts of colonisation, war or refusal to communicate. Both plays can be taken as powerful warnings, in the words of Kane herself, “about the tragic but logical conclusion of humanities escalating destructive behaviour” (Sierz: 2001, 104).

The family mealtime scene is the only scene in *This is a Chair* that is repeated, and this repetition marks it as a pivotal scene in the play. It appears each time under the guise of a different title, firstly, “Pornography and Censorship” and secondly “The Northern Ireland Peace Process” (Churchill: 1999, 11/28). The script is identical in both scenes, and is succinct enough to repeat here in its entirety:

FATHER  
Is Muriel going to eat her dinner?

MOTHER  
Yes, eat up, Muriel.

FATHER  
Have a special bite of daddy’s.

MOTHER  
Yes, eat, up, Muriel.

FATHER  
Muriel, if you don’t eat your dinner you know what’s going to happen to you.

MOTHER  
Yes, eat up, Muriel (Churchill: 1999, 11/28).

By using the scene titles, the audience is given the opportunity to consider how these systems of control are used as mechanisms of power on a global scale. The tenets of governmentality are laid bare for examination in this short scene and this means that it is possible to witness the mechanisms of power as internalised through the family unit. Specifically, in this scene we see the family unit as an instrument of self-regulation. The Father establishes his position of power as the head of the family through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination. This scene demonstrates that each individual family member is socialised by other family members into regulating their own behaviour, and the Father, assisted by Mother, trains Muriel to be a docile body and to do their bidding. In *This is a Chair* the short dinner time scene demonstrates this in just six lines of dialogue.

The Father is clearly the head of the family, teaching the silent Muriel to obey his rules and do what is expected – in this case to eat her dinner. The audience witness the character of the father trying a variety of methods to get his daughter to obey the rules; at first the character is “encouraging, then menacing; [and then] persuasion is followed by threat” (Aston: 2001, 113). Churchill’s father figure demonstrates effectively the power of hierarchical observation, as discussed in Chapter Four, whereby a hierarchical figure threatens the individuals under his supervision into self-regularisation. In the repeated family scene of *This is a Chair* the characters are seen to live in an isolated familial unit under the constant surveillance of a Father figure. The threat “you know what’s going to happen to you” clearly implying that the child knows from past experience what the consequences of her actions will be. It is also clear that the mother has already learnt to follow the rules and now reinforces them. As Aston observes she “does not object, rather she falls in with her ‘supporting’ role” (Aston: 2001, 113). What is not clear from the short scene is what form the reprisals will take.

In this short scene Churchill gives the audience a representation of a nuclear family unit, and consistent with my interpretation of the plays in this period, this family are operating within a Foucauldian system of discipline and control. Here we offered a father figure who has the power to punish his subjects. The character uses disciplinary methods to exert control of his family, modelling his daughter into being a docile body. This disciplinary technique Foucault claims is "centred on the body [it] produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (Foucault: 2003, 249). In my reading of the play the father's fixation on the child eating a meal under his watchful gaze and the veiled threat of sexual abuse draw attention to the techniques of power. In Foucault's words these are techniques "that where essentially centred on the body, on the individual body" (Foucault: 2003, 242). Foucault elaborates on this disciplinary concept by describing their various techniques:

They included all devices that were used to ensure the spatial distribution of individual bodies (their separation, their alignment, their serialization and their surveillance) and the organising, around those individuals of a whole field of visibility. They were also techniques that could be used to take control over bodies. Attempts were made to increase their productivity force through exercise, drill and so on. They were also techniques for rationalising and strict economizing on a power that had to be used in the least costly way possible (Foucault: 2003, 242).

As discussed in Chapter Four, the family is instrumental in this process, with the head of each family keeping its members under control in a system of governmentality, or government through the family.

In society at large self-regulation through the perceived threat of surveillance leads to a naturalisation or 'normalisation' of society's values. This in turn produces complicit 'docile bodies' whereby the notions of power have become internalised removing the need for external control, and policing. In this scene, therefore, Donzelot's application of Foucault's analysis of power to the family unit is laid bare for the audience to witness. The individual is educated, normalised and socialised by their family members into regulating their own behaviour.

By representing this system on the domestic scale under the title heading and by using dramatic distancing devices, Churchill is defamiliarising the family unit and is inviting the audience to see the family in a new light. In this play these reflexives devices include the placing of the audience on the stage and the actors in the auditorium. In “Pornography and Censorship” the title implicates the ‘normalised’ family unit as being a site of repression and sexual gratification. Both Muriel and the Mother have their behaviour censored and there is the distinctly sexual insinuation in one of the father’s coercive tactics where he offers his daughter food, as “a special bite of daddy’s” (Churchill: 1997, 11/28). Without a heading this might be taken as an innocent reference to merely his own dinner, however, with a title that introduces the idea of pornography into the scene the audience is led to a more sinister reading of the scene. This opens the way for the audience to consider the family unit as a potential place of danger rather than safety; in this case the danger is experienced by predominately women and children who are here subjected to techniques of discipline and control that remove their self-will through the veiled implication of sexual abuse.

In the scene subtitled “The Northern Ireland Peace Process” the connection that is drawn is one of similarity between the government of families and that of nations. Here the implication is that the family unit has a role to play in the State. According to Foucault, the family represents this model as a microcosm of the state:

...the head of the family will know how to look after his family, his goods and his patrimony, which means that individuals will, in turn behave as they should. Obey laws and do what is expected!  
(Foucault: 2000, 207)

Here the family represents the state, whereby the figures of Mother, Father and, the silent, Muriel stand in for political leaders threatening and supporting one another. Theatre academic Janelle Reinelt has said of this scene that:

This time we might be seeing the US as the father, Tony Blair as the mum, and Northern Ireland as Muriel, in the feminized position

of the child/fledging/emergent entity. These readings are too literal of course – that is why the same scene is repeated twice with different titles: to make it clear how loose the associational links are while still making them (Reinelt: 2009, 33).

Reinelt states that this reading is “too literal”, and argues that the audience will draw its own inferences from the referential field offered by Churchill. Churchill does not lead the audience to a specific reading but questions the nature of the influence that national, or global, political issues have on the everyday lives of the audience. The play encourages them to make their own connections and find their own answers. It is possible to see in these two scenes that the domestic issues of power, control, compliance, submission and silence are a microcosm of the larger events that take place in conflict zones.

Foucault’s theories of discipline technologies and the docile body working for the protection of the state fall short here. In “The Northern Ireland Peace Process,” Churchill presents her audience with the international political landscape and we move beyond Foucault’s concept of governmentality into “biopolitics”. Foucault explains that there is a second non-disciplinary power at work which is “applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like man-as-species” (Foucault: 2003, 242). This is a regulatory power as opposed to a disciplinary power that works on the populations.

Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem...You can see they are a collective phenomena which will have their economic and political effects and that they become pertinent only at the mass level (Foucault: 2003, 246).

Foucault continues to explain that these two technologies, the disciplinary and the regulatory technologies do not function on the same level so they are not mutually exclusive and that they can be articulated with each. In *This is a Chair* with two separate headings, Churchill first displays the disciplinary model working at the domestic level in “Pornography and Censorship” and then reveals the regulatory model working at the national, or mass level, in “The Peace Process in Northern Ireland”.

Foucault uses the example of a housing estate working at both levels firstly with its “very layout, of the estate articulated, in a sort of perpendicular way, disciplinary mechanisms that controlled the body, or bodies by localising families (one to a house) and individuals (one to a room)” (Foucault: 2003, 251). He then explains that the housing estate also works using regulatory mechanisms which “encourage patterns of saving related to housing, to the renting of accommodation and in some cases their purchase. Health-insurance systems, old age pensions; rules of hygiene that guarantee the optimal, longevity of the population” (Foucault: 2003, 251). I would argue that the institution that sits in the centre of the disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms is that of the family. Churchill’s positioning of global events and a domestic mealtime allow the audience to see and question the mechanisms of family life that have become so normalised that they are rarely queried in a new light.

Scene titles draw attention to the political in this play and juxtapose them with the trivial and domestic content of many of the scenes. Aston has commented on the effect of this juxtaposition of the global and the inconsequential. She argues that this presents:

a view of our contemporary world as increasingly de-politicized, inwardly looking, self-absorbed: one in which people think only of themselves and fail to act in the interests of others (Aston: 2001, 104).

This ‘de-politicized inwardly looking’ self-absorption has also been noted by Christopher Innes in his account of the play in *Modern British Drama* where he states that “...political events exist only as an irrelevant distraction to personal lives” (Innes: 2002, 524). The juxtaposition of global subtitles and domestic scenes invites the audience to make connections between the two events. As Iser observes ‘readers’ actively search for a meaning or connection between the two seemingly unconnected scenarios “stimulating the process of ideation” (Iser: 1980, 112). In this play the audience actively searches for a connection between the subtitle and dramatic content of each scene. In *This is a*

*Chair* this “disjunction” in content is accompanied by a spatial disorientation for the audience that further encourages the search for meaning. At The Royal Court Theatre performance of the play in 1997 the audience were seated on the stage, while the performers were placed on a ramp in the stalls. This reversal of conventional patterns of staging enhanced the distancing effect created by the series of seemingly unconnected scenes presented to the audience. Placing the audience on stage and the actors in the auditorium directs the attention of the audience to itself. As I took my seat on the stage I was intensely conscious of being on a raised platform where the actors would usually perform and acutely aware that this was usually the space looked at which encouraged me to look at and reflect on how other audience members were dealing with the unique seating arrangements. This hypersensitivity to the audience around me was especially poignant during the final moments of performance when the cast applauded the audience. The effect of this reversal further distances the audiences from the events on stage, jolting them into awareness that they are an audience member in a visceral way.

The importance of these political and world events signalled in the newspaper style headlines of each scene, which are reminiscent of Brecht’s political plays, and their stark contrast with the trifling content of the scenes was underscored by the titles accompanying sound effects. Jeremy Kingston described the effect in his review for *The Times* as being a “thundering sound from an unseen orchestra of massed synthesizers, imposing enough to announce the discovery of 2001 black slabs in every corner of the globe” (Kingston: 1997). This “thundering” soundtrack, together with the imposing scene titles, leads to a bewildering anti-climax for the already, physically displaced audience when they are then presented with domestic scenes. The realism of the scenes themselves in contrast with the non-realism of the staging and soundtrack create a disruption and a reflexive positioning in which the audience is invited to consider their own perspective through these theatrical devices.

The global headings and the intimate domestic scenes invite this reflexive positioning to centre on the idea of the family and the nation in a period where the sense of a secure nation was being eroded in an increasingly global world. In this thesis I consider Churchill's *Blue Heart*, *A Number, Far Away*, and *This is a Chair*. My reading sees them in dialogue with each other and with the issues of the fragmentation of society and family on a world stage. In each the outside world breaks into the domestic world of the characters and changes family relationships. In the following section I shall consider these national and global commentaries in more detail by returning briefly to *Far Away*.

### **A State-of-the-Globe Play - *Far Away***

Earlier in this chapter I argued that *Far Away* (2000) implicitly critiques the family and its training of young people to be docile citizens capable of taking part in a global war. The nature of the war in which all countries, animals and the elements are taking sides clearly takes the play from the domestic issues in the first scene, to national level in the second scenes where Joan and Todd work in docility in the hat factory. In 2001 Aleks Sierz argued that this play is a state-of-the-nation play:

A state-of-the-nation play, as evidenced by its curtain, which was painted with an idyllic picture of the olde English countryside, this was a fifty-minute account of a young woman who grows up witnessing the brutalisation of asylum seekers, the genocide of nameless victims and finally the war of every nature against every other (Sierz: 2001, 75).

The final scenes of the “war of every nature against every other” escalate this conflict to that which is beyond nation versus nation, to one where all elements of the globe against all others.

In his consideration of globalization and the state-of-the-nation-play, Rebellato argues that the idea of a nation state holds the public and the private together; the state being the political organisation's public side of life while nation, or national identity becomes the private side of the equation. He states that “the personal is the means of experiencing the

conceptual while the conceptual structure is the way of understanding the personal” (Rebellato: 2008, 249). Therefore the state-of-the-nation play could examine the public through the private. The world of *Far Away* is one in which there are no boundaries just all-out war. In this play we see Rebellato’s unbundling of state and nation taken to an extreme. Rebellato argues that in state-of-the-nation-plays the domestic is used to shed light on the nation. In my Foucauldian reading of *Far Away*, Churchill uses the family to shed light on the global. This can be seen as the intersection between governmentality and biopolitics, or between the technologies of discipline and regulation. The family operates both at the domestic level, national level and ensuring the biopolitics of regulation are instilled in its individual members. The family becomes the unit of control both individually and socially:

This technology of power, this biopolitics will introduce mechanisms with a certain number of functions that are very different from the functions of disciplinary mechanism. The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts statistical elements and overall measures. And their purpose is not to modify any given phenomena as such, or to modify the individual insofar as he is individual but essentially to intervene at the level at which these general phenomena are determined, to intervene at the level of their generality (Foucault: 2003, 246).

In *Far Away* this creation of docility at the domestic, national and global level can be seen as the play moves from the domestic family scene of Joan and Harper, to the national level of Todd and Joan making hats for those condemned by the nation to death, to the total warlike state of the final sections when countries, animals, weather conditions and the landscape itself are all taking sides in a truly global war. Family is implicitly implicated in this catastrophe as it was with her family that Joan learnt to ignore her innate integrity and this leads to the bleak final scenes of the play.

In these bleak final moments of the play, Churchill introduces a note of optimism that suggests an alternative is possible. Joan’s final act in *Far Away* implies that the child of Act One is still present within the adult.

She risks her life and that of Harper and Todd to visit the two of them.

This causes Harper to question:

What are you going to say when you go back, you ran off to spend a day with your husband? ...Are you not going back at all because if you're not you might as well shoot me now...Don't you care? Maybe you don't know right from wrong yourself, what do I know about you after two years, I'd like to be glad to see you but how can I? (Churchill: 2000, 37).

Here she questions if her indoctrination has slipped and this leads the audience to hope that the child Joan has reasserted herself and the adult does indeed know right from wrong. Other traces of this optimism can be read into the relationship between Todd and Joan, their creativity and their lack of competitiveness over the hats. But the strongest sign of this hope for a better future is seen in Joan's journey to find Todd to seek "one day" with people she cares for. This hope is rebuffed by her final monologue; the final words of the play:

There was a camp of Chilean soldiers upstream but they hadn't seen me and fourteen black and white cows downstream having a drink so I knew I'd have to go straight across. But I didn't know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the water was brown, I didn't know if that meant anything. I stood on the bank a long time. But I knew it was my only way of getting here so at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen. The water laps round you ankles in any case (Churchill: 2000, 38).

This adult Joan does eventually take the risk, that the child of Act One would not have been afraid to do and the adult Joan like the young Joan, eventually trusts herself to make the right choices, ask the right questions, and do the right thing. Amelia Howe Kritzer also sees this as hopeful and draws connections with Kane's *Blasted* in stating that:

Churchill allies her viewpoint with Sarah Kane in suggesting that loving another creature creates the basis for meaning even in the extremes of chaos and threat (Howe Kritzer: 2007, 75).

This is a simplification of the ending of both plays. The characters of Cate, in *Blasted*, Joan in *Far Away*, can all be seen to have rejected their nuclear families and to have learnt to 'be on their own' like Joe in Bond's

*The Children*. Each of these characters moves into the next of Bond's stages and having mastered being alone, learns and in doing so takes responsibility not just for their actions and then to take responsibility for others. In Bond's words, they find the meaning in their lives in the meaning derived from being in a community with others (Stuart: 1998, 22). Admittedly the communities in these plays are only of two people, but in this I would argue that they are neo-families in a neonate state. In relation to the neo-family these characters reject their nuclear families which are seen to be oppressive and dehumanizing and remake a new family structure or supportive network that will enable them to retain their new found sense of social responsibility or their humanity. The optimistic and utopic notes that these plays end on is that when these individuals rejoin society they will do so with this sense of reclaimed responsibility and new 'humanness'.

In this chapter I have argued that each of the plays discussed demonstrate in different ways how the 'disciplinary technologies' that are intended to model behaviour will create obedient subjects or 'docile bodies'. The plays show the ambiguity of this process, and my reading suggests that this means that the characters have the potential to be useful citizens or, when taken to an extreme, the disciplinary structures of society, symbolised by the traditional family unit, will train individuals to accept authority without question, and reduce the subject's ability to respond emotionally on a personal level and how in turn this has global implications. I have argued that these plays therefore ask the audience to question consequences of creating a society founded on the principles of constructing compliant 'docile' bodies at the expense of the individual. In the following chapter I explore how this reduction in emotional response is demonstrated to remove empathic feeling for others to such an extent that violence appears to be an acceptable phenomena. I suggest that the disciplinary technologies instilled at family level provide social guidance through self-government and ultimately may lead to vicious cycles of abuse on a personal scale.

## Chapter Seven: Danger in the Home

***'After a while I stop howling. No one ever comes.'***  
**(*Five Kinds of Silence*: Stephenson 2000)**

In this chapter I argue that, when taken to the extreme, self-regulation results in the loss of feeling for both the self and others and that this loss may lead directly to violence. In the plays discussed here, this absence of feeling results in a passive acceptance of violence that grants permission for both mental and physical abuse. This chapter considers the idea that the home space is not automatically a safe space and that for some it may become as space of danger. I argue that the 'family home' may fail to protect those within its walls from dangers both from inside the home and from outsiders. The chapter ends on a consideration of elements of these plays suggests that neo-family structures created by young people may offer a utopian alternative to the dystopic futures presented in the plays discussed in the previous chapter.

In Chapter Two I discussed the Conservative government's attempt to reinvest allegiance to the moral and political magnitude of the family when it made the call for a return to "family values". The type of family legitimised in the political rhetoric of the period was that of the nuclear family. In this chapter I consider the ways in which playwrights represented this traditional nuclear family structure and how their work exposed the myth of this family structure as a place of security and safety. I also discuss how far the terms 'family' and 'home' are synonymous and the consequences of the perception of this interconnectedness. I outline the ways in which aspiring and adhering to this structure is potentially dangerous to individual people, especially the children living within such family arrangements. In section one of this chapter I explore the circles of abuse is represented in Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000), Rebecca Prichard's *Fair Game* (1997) and Judy Upton's *Bruises* (1995). The following section discusses two plays, Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*

(1996) and Judy Upton's *Sliding with Suzanne* (2001) both with protagonists who plan to 'escape' from their home spaces and families and dream of a different future. The chapter concludes with a consideration of Sarah Daniel's *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994), in which characters attempt to escape from the restrictions of their nuclear family as they search for alternative living arrangements and spaces. I argue that the neo-family presented in the final scenes of this play presents a utopic alternative to the traditional family structure that encourages a lack of both integrity and compassion, or in Bondian terms 'humanness'.

This thesis demonstrates that the playwrights of the period examined and questioned the idealisation of the family that was prevalent at the time by representing families in conventional nuclear structures that are destructive. In so doing a critique is provided that distances the audiences and enables them to contemplate alternatives. This section now considers the ideological space that the family occupies and raises questions about the relationship between the idea of the family and the 'home'.

Feminist socialist Ann Oakley outlined the way in which the words family and home have become synonymous in her 1976 study of 'housewives':

[S]ociety has grown more 'family-orientated', the family itself has identified more and more squarely with its physical location, the home. 'Home' and 'family' are now virtually interchangeable terms (Oakley: 1976, 65).

This interweaving of the terms family and home was still prevalent in the Nineties as can be seen by its extensive portrayal in the theatre of the period. The concept that the family home is both a benign and safe environment is a well-established trope. Dramatically that perception renders the world outside the home as 'other' - an uncontrollable arena fraught with possible or likely conflict and danger. In this section I consider representations of family homes which are far from benign for the individuals who live within them. In each of the three plays in the first

section there is a clear pattern of abuse whereby the abused becomes the abuser or the victim turns victimiser. Each play emphasises a different aspect of the abuse cycle, but each depicts young central characters that have learnt a passivity that results in a lack of feeling that has been instilled by family members. To consider these abusive patterns I draw on the writings of Alice Miller, a child psychologist specialising in circles of abuse.

### **Circles of Abuse - *Five Kinds of Silence*, *Fair Game* and *Bruises***

In this section I bring together debates about abuse as learned behaviour by focusing on three plays by women playwrights. I examine how Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000), Judy Upton's *Bruises* (1995), and Rebecca Prichard's *Fair Game* (1997) demonstrate how their central characters have learnt abusive behaviour from parental figures and convert themselves from positions of victims to that of victimizers. This approach differs from that of Anna Harpin in her 2013 article, 'Unremarkable Violence: Staging Child Sexual Abuse in Recent British Theatre, in which she focuses on male playwrights and "interrogates the pervasive denial of sexual abuse" (Harpin: 2013, 166). Here I consider the female playwrights who openly represent sexual abuse and in doing so invite a consideration of its proliferation within the family home. In this I shall build on the reading of Foucault that has informed my previous analyses of familial adult-child relationships, and introduce theories of child psychology. By analysing the plays through this optic, I hope to draw attention to the ways in which the dramatisation of children as abuser and abused in these plays imply wider social problems.

In *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000, Lyric Hammersmith, London) Stephenson presents her audience with three women who live in fear of their husband or father. After years of prolonged sexual and physical abuse the women murder their abuser. Here a sympathetic legal system cannot

comprehend the lack of emotions and anger the women feel; one of the daughters, Susan, tries to explain:

This getting angry, this feeling this and feeling that. It's not for us. It's not really our sort of thing. It's too late now. You think you can understand it but you can't see the size of it. If you had to live inside our heads for five minutes you'd go mad and die. Best we deal with it ourselves (Stephenson: 2003, 114-115).

The character of the wife and mother, Mary, is shown to have been neglected after the death of her mother, ignored and left alone by a grieving father. Her first reaction is to "howl" and then,

After a while I stop howling. No one ever comes. I think perhaps I have died, like my mother, and so I cut my arm, a big slice, with the carving knife and the pain is a good thing because it's real, a sharp true thing that skitters the stone away from my tomb (Stephenson: 2003,120).

Moving from one abusive relationship to another Mary learns that you "Don't fight", that you "Keep going. You survive" (Stephenson: 2003, 124). The way she learns to survive is to cut off any sense of feeling and this is the lesson that she teaches her daughters. Mary has learnt from the example set by her father and in turn her children learn to repress emotions and feelings as a survival mechanism. As a result of Mary's example, Susan chooses murder as her survival mechanism, opting to kill the father who abuses and terrorises the women. His death makes for a dramatic opening scene, after which the audience must piece together the events that lead to this action.

Throughout this play the character of Billy appears to the audience after his death, and through this dramatic device he is able to narrate stories from his past. These stories contain the details of his own abuse at the hands of his mother:

Washing day. Steam, wet sheets hanging, cold slapping against my face. I'm hiding. Suddenly someone's here. Big white arms. Big bony hands that do things I don't like. Punch me. Other stuff... Crack goes the bone of my head. Stars float...(Stephenson: 2000, 101).

The narrative telling the stories of Billy's, Susan's and Janet and Mary's childhoods all of which contain neglect, physical or sexual abuse

together suggest that in this case the nuclear family home is not a safe space for its children. I would argue that Stephenson is demonstrating that the nuclear family is unable to protect its young from those inside the family home structure. This would support the view of sociologists Barrett and McIntosh who argued that the family excludes outsiders, but that this privacy may become imprisonment:

The exclusion of outsiders and turning in to the little family group may seem attractive when it works well and when the family group does satisfy its members' needs. But the little enclosed group can also become a trap, a prison whose walls and bars are constructed of ideas of domestic privacy and autonomy (Barrett and McIntosh: 1982, 56).

They continue to observe that one quarter of reported violent crime is wife assault. *Five Kinds of Silence* portrays a series of family homes that become 'prisons' for the occupants and where wife, and husband, assault are the result.

Stephenson draws attention to the dangers from within the nuclear family home, and the prison it may become, in the sections of Billy's narration. In these sections she breaks the dramatic narrative, allowing the audience moments of reflection to consider the family structure and the circumstances that lead to murder. The first moment when Billy uses direct address, quoted above, occurs shortly after the girls have shot their father and before they call the police. Billy breaks the dramatic tension by telling the audience about his own abuse.

During the course of the play we discover that he witnessed his parents "biting and tearing and heads banged off walls, teeth fly blood spurts" (Stephenson: 2000, 103). We also hear that he was locked in cupboards and was regularly subjected to a variety of vicious and brutal torments at the hands of his mother. These descriptions do not engender sympathy for the character as they are juxtaposed with his violent physical and sexual assaults on his own family; they do however, go some ways to explaining the character's actions. The appearance of the 'dead' Billy marks a moment of distancing that changes the audience's focus from

the narrative to a meaning beyond the storyline, creating a reflexive moment in which problems are exposed. Mid-way through the play one of the daughters, Janet, is explaining to her lawyer that she loved Billy, because he was her father. At this point the ghost of Billy interrupts the scene with a direct audience address, talking in detail about the abuse he received from his mother:

I don't remember pain, I don't remember pleasure. I was born aged six with teeth and a black, black heart...She's pulling, dragging me upstairs, I'm fighting back, bloody get off me...No don't shut me up in the dark, it's black in there...She says get in the cupboard, you'll have no light, you don't deserve it (Stephenson: 2003, 112-3).

This interruption from Billy, invites reflection on the traditional family structure that enables the repeated pattern of abuse to continue. The play is drawing attention to the circle of abuse in which psychologists claim that children who were abused themselves in turn become abusers. Child psychologist Alice Miller has argued that:

When children are trained, they learn how to train others in turn. Children who are lectured to, learn how to lecture; if they are admonished, they learn how to admonish; if scolded, they learn how to scold; if ridiculed, they learn how to ridicule; if humiliated, they learn how to humiliate; if their psyche is killed, they will learn how to kill – the only question is who will be killed: oneself, others, or both (Miller: 1987, 98).

In Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000) the character of Billy, the abusive husband and father is killed by his wife and children who have *learned* or trained to kill from his example.

The play's violence and reported violence is harrowing to experience, but perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the play are in the last few lines. The women are exonerated for killing Billy as the judge asserts they have "suffered enough" (Stephenson: 2000, 134). The women set up a new life together free of their tormentor.

Janet: We've got a maisonette.

Mary: We plan to have pink carpets.

Susan: And a dog.

Janet: We've got four bedrooms.

Mary: One for each of us.

Susan: And one for spare items.

Janet: We've already bought the shelving

(Stephenson: 2000, 134).

The implication here is that they are rebuilding the shelving system that was part of Billy's controlling mechanism. They are free of the tyrant who ruled their lives, but not the training he instilled into them. This is symbolised by the shelving that will be used to continue the obsessive, compulsive hoarding of household items for "emergency supplies...just in case...to cover all eventualities" (Stephenson: 2000, 121). Disturbingly these Foucauldian 'docile bodies' continue to operate as if they were under his watchful eye even after his death.

Billy's presence pervades the play in a manner that *Daily Telegraph* theatre critic Kate Bassett described in her review of the first production as, "eerily serene". She continues to say that the "pernicious power that Billy exerts from beyond his grave" is "startling" (Bassett: 2000). Billy's continued presence on stage is a physical reminder to the audience of his continued presence and influence in their lives. Bassett writing for the right wing *Daily Telegraph* focuses on the violence and similarities between this play and those of *Kane* and *Ravenhill*. The review continues to say the performance creates an image of "resilient sisterhood", but this is narrow-sighted and Bassett neglects to note or reference the social commentary offered by the play. Nor does she comment on the lack of resilience that 'sisterhood' offer the women in the final moments of the play. The closing lines of the play assert for the audience the fact that Billy's influence will not be so easily removed from the women's lives as the man himself. The implied invitation to the audience is to consider how the cycle of physical abuse and the legacy of its training can be broken. In this play the audience is not offered an optimistic or utopic vision for a different way of life for these characters. The play suggests that children learn to become violent and abusers, rather than just being victims while living within a family where sexual

abuse is an everyday occurrence, and that abuse can be learnt or transmitted as learnt behaviour through the parents in a nuclear family structure.

The second play I consider in this section is Rebecca Prichard's *Fair Game* (1997, Royal Court Young People's Theatre, London). The play focuses on a blended nuclear family structure and the characters of Alex and Debbie, step-brother and sister, and Alex's three friends. The boys are returning from a football match and throughout the script, life is compared to the 'fair game'. Alex complains early on in the play that: "I'm a spectator. I never get to play" (Prichard: 1997, 7). At first it appears that he is never allowed to play football with his friends, but as the play takes a more sinister turn, it emerges that Alex's father is sexually abusing Debbie., The innocent comment takes on a more significant implication that invites the audience to question exactly what it is that Alex is a spectator to and that he too would like to "get to play". Soon after his friend, Gigs, tells Alex that "life is a game one must play according to the rules" (Prichard: 1997, 9).

In Alex and Debbie's lives the rules are that Debbie is given money for allowing her stepfather to abuse her. When Alex questions her about the money she has, Debbie declares that:

I don't steal that money off him. He gives me that money. He gives it to me...because he's a pervert...Your Dad's a pervert. I could put him inside! (Prichard: 1997, 49)

The audience is given no indication that Alex himself has been abused, however, he has learned to adopt an aspect of his father's behaviour and Debbie is quick to point out that he is like his Dad; Alex denies this:

Debbie: You're like your Dad, you are. You are a fucking pervert.  
Alex: I'm not like him. I'm not like him. I'm not.  
Debbie: You're fucking pathetic (Prichard: 1997, 51).

This denial has a hollow ring to it and the play's disturbing climax sees Alex first rape, and then allows his friends to rape, Debbie. This scene has a cold and predictable eventuality about it that is, again, reminiscent

of scene six of Bond's *Saved* (1965). Here, as in the earlier play, a group of youths abuse and torment a defenceless victim in a park because they have nothing better to do:

Alex (matter of factly) I'm gonna hurt you now.

*He pulls down her knickers and opens his trousers.*

Debbie: No Alex, don't, don't.

Gigs: He's gonna fuck her.

Simon: Shit (*realising it may be his turn next*) Go man, go.

Gigs (*laughing, shocked, fascinated*) He's fucking his sister!  
(*feeling turned on*) Shit.

*Alex has intercourse with her.*

Alex: Slag slut fuck whore shits bastards cunts.

*Alex finishes and steps back from her. He looks at her dumbly.  
Debbie is now completely passive.*

Gigs (*stroking Debbie's hair*) I'm going to do it with you too, Ok?

Debbie: I'm tired (Prichard: 1997, 52).

Both Gigs and Simon rape Debbie while Alex "stands to one side in a daze...Debbie is totally passive" (Prichard: 1997, 53).

The characters of the siblings have learnt these behaviours from their father. Early in the play Debbie says that she does not "give a shit what he does to me" (Prichard: 1997, 17). Debbie has learnt to respond passively just as the characters of Joan in Churchill's *Far Away* (2000), and Donny in Ravenhill's *Faust (Faust is Dead)* (1997) have done; while Alex has learnt to have no empathy for the suffering of his sister. In *Fair Game* Debbie's claim of passivity and not caring foreshadow her trance like state when she is raped by her brother and his friends. To draw on Foucault, the "pupils", Alex and Debbie "will have learnt the code of the signals and [will] respond automatically to them" (Foucault: 1977, 166). For Alex the "signal" that triggers him to respond automatically is the mental feeling of impotency engendered by Debbie's taunting insults combined with the physical position of power he is in when forced on top of Debbie by his friends; the two together result in the automatic response of sexual abuse. This is learnt from watching his father's

position of impotency resulting from his unemployed status and the physical vulnerability of Debbie, that lead him to abuse his step-daughter. For Debbie the “signal” of unwanted sexual advance triggers the “code”, or behaviour pattern of passivity. Here the audience witnesses the family as an agent of socialisation, and the means for the transmission of behaviour and roles to the next generation, whereby the individual accepts the values of his or her parents which in some cases is harmful to those individuals.

The characters in Prichard’s play are passive and this is psychologically plausible. Miller claims that childhood abuse educates children to be passive and removes the ability to empathise with others as a result:

Such lack of empathy for the suffering of one’s own childhood can result in an astonishing lack of sensitivity to other children’s suffering...the suffering caused by the way you were mistreated will remain unconscious and will later prevent you from empathizing with others. This is why battered children will grow up to be mothers and fathers who beat their own offspring; from their ranks are recruited the most reliable executioners, concentration-camp supervisors, prison guards, and torturers (Miller: 1987, 115).

I would argue that this is the image of the ‘docile body’ taken to an extreme. The image of an individual trained to respond without “sensitivity” to abuse will accept that abuse with docility and will be capable of inflicting suffering with equal docility. Foucault states that discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault: 1977, 170). When the ‘discipline’ takes the form of abuse the individuals are both the objects of that abuse and the instruments of that abuse. When the abuse or discipline occurs within the family structure which is taken to be the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ unit in which to socialise all children, the children learn that abuse is normal and Miller’s “battered children” that “grow up to be mothers and fathers who beat their own offspring” demonstrates them to be ‘docile bodies’ who will perpetuate the cycle of abuse.

Prichard does not show us an adult Debbie, but leaves the audience to contemplate what the effects of this abuse will have on her. In *Bruises* by Judy Upton (1995, Royal Court Theatre, London), audiences see at first hand the effects a violent childhood has on the developing adult. The play focuses on the characters of a father and son, Dave and Jay, and their relationships with Phoebe and Kate. Dave's cruelty and violence to his son and Phoebe are mirrored by Jay's brutality to Kate in what Upton presents as the victim-victimiser personified. Theatre academic Hildegard Klein describes the play in the following terms:

Men beat up each other and their women, causing serious emotional and physical bruises. Upton shows a world of mental and verbal impoverishment, where people suffer from isolation and emotional deprivation, where language is reduced to bodily violence (Klein: 2005, 156).

She goes on to say that Upton:

wants the spectator to understand the social causes that produce bruising and bruised human beings. It is a haunting play about our violent society that raises important questions about victims and perpetrators, about victimhood and aggression... (Klein: 2005, 156).

Klein's position here is correct but Upton is also raising specific questions about learnt abusive behaviour within family settings. Upton, like Prichard, explicitly makes the links between abusive parents and children who in turn become abusers. In these plays the family is firmly in the frame as the locus for establishing a pattern of violence and creating the environment in which the victim becomes first docile in both accepting violence and then active in perpetrating it. For example, Jay tells Kate early in their relationship that Dave was a violent father:

Jay: They're not scratches. That's where my dad used to hit me. There and lower (Upton: 1996, 13).

The audience is unsurprised when the now adult Jay defends himself from these assaults:

*Dave hits Jay knocks him back. Jay retaliates; they exchange a series of quick blows* (Upton: 1996, 25).

Nevertheless when "*Kate catches hold of Jay, tries to turn him to look at her, catches his face. He lashes out, hits her across the face, sends her*

*staggering*” both she and potentially the audience look at Jay with “*horror*” (Upton: 1996, 22). When the violence escalates there is no surprise about the attack just the severity of the onslaught inflicted on Kate:

Jay: You’re an evil bitch. Someone’s got to teach you a lesson. *He thumps her back hard against the cooker, and again, until she sinks to the floor. He kicks her as she curls into a foetal position to protect herself. He kicks her again...* (Upton: 1996, 35).

Each attack on the character of Kate is reiterated by an attack on Jay’s character by that of Dave:

*Jay looks up, wary. Dave tilts Jay’s chin up, gently caressingly, so he is looking into his eyes.*

Dave: Look at me, that’s right, look at me.

*Dave smashes his other fist into Jay’s face. Jay sinks down. Dave kicks him, walks off* (Upton: 1996, 36-7).

As the play develops the audience learns that Jay has taken his father’s philosophies to heart.

Kate I don’t want to hear you talk like this. It’s killing us, Jay. It makes me scared of you.

Jay You ought to be a little bit scared, that’s what makes a relationship. Mum was always terrified of dad. That’s what made her respect and love him. She never looked at another man once during their marriage.

Kate But eventually she left him?

Jay She died. Brain haemorrhage. I discovered her lying at the bottom of the stairs where she’d fallen. I was fourteen...She must’ve got up in the night and tripped (Upton: 1996, 42).

The last scene of the play is a bleak one, in which the audience discovers that Dave killed his first wife by pushing her down the stairs. Although this knowledge sickens Jay it is hard to believe that a similar fate is not in store for Kate. Even though Jay is seen to recognise that his own violence is an inherited trait, and one that the character appears to fight against, his confession does nothing to reassure the audience of Kate’s safety:

I’ve already given up drinking, but it doesn’t seem to stop my rages. I just heat up as if I’ve got some kind of fire in my head.

Then it's like it's not me. I go so far and then I lose control. I'm not making the decisions any more. You know it is when you are doing something stupid – usually you can rely on a little voice in your head saying 'this is crazy, stop this now'? Well, when I get angry I don't have that little voice there. There's nothing to check me, nothing to stop it. It's scary, scary for me too. I lose everyone I love. One day I'll lose everything, lose my grip on life (Upton: 1996, 57).

It is clear that Kate's character is also aware that her fate will be sealed and she attempts to leave, but fails:

Jay    You won't leave me? I can see you. It's alright now. Thank you, Kate.

*He goes to Kate and kisses her.*

We'll be alright, won't we baby?

*Kate looks over his shoulder, her face exhausted, haunted* (Upton: 1996, 58).

Critics of the first production of *Bruises* focused on the harrowing nature of the portrayal of physical violence on stage again neglecting the social commentary offered by the play. Michael Coveney of the *Observer* noted that the audience was "enclosed in an atmosphere of violence" (Coveney: 1995), while *The Telegraph's* Charles Spencer claimed that Upton "suggests a world of mental and verbal impoverishment" (Spencer: 2000). This atmosphere was evoked through the sparse dialogue and disturbingly violent scenes which together created a disturbing spectacle that was relentless in its progression towards the predictably bleak ending. The characters of Jay and Kate are held in the circle of violence and abuse that neither understands nor wants to, but that both are compelled to maintain. What the critics do not acknowledge is that here the audience is confronted with the questions that the Upton's characters ask each other and themselves "How can you love me and treat me like a punch bag?" (Upton: 1995, 57). The final scene ends with Kate compliantly staying with Jay, locked into the destructive pattern, staring out at the audience as if a direct challenge to find an alternative or means of breaking the cycle with "her face exhausted, haunted" (Upton: 1995, 58). This, like the endings to both

*Fair Game* and *Five Kinds of Silence*, is a bleak note on which to end the play.

Stephenson, Prichard and Upton have all exposed some problems within the nuclear family structures. My reading of each is that they implicitly display a family model that conceals and perpetuates violence. This violence is seen as the outcome of an extreme version of the training of 'docile bodies' by parental figures and is the conclusion of a commodity society that educates children to be disconnected from the empathy of others and their own feelings. This makes them unable to be responsible for themselves, let alone others in the manner Bond is looking for in his work. The bleak final scenes both invite the audience to question how these endings could be avoided and yet offer no alternatives. They leave a gap to be filled by the imagination of the audience. The endings invite the audience to consider the conception of the family home as a safe haven. In this these plays are utopic in that allow for a critique of the ideology of the family and therefore alternatives to be imagined.

### **Finding Hope**

In his *The Principle of Hope* (1986) Bloch describes people as being 'unfinished', or living in a state animated by dreams or desires of a better life, or utopian longings for another way of being. He describes this longing as "anticipatory consciousness" and argues that it may move beyond the abstract fantasy or dream which is nothing but an "idle bed of contemplation" (Bloch: 1986, 158). But may become a concrete utopia which "opens up, on truly attained summits, the ideologically unobstructed view of human hope" (Bloch: 1986, 158). Drawing on Bloch, urban geographer David Pinder claims that:

utopia is understood as an expression of a desire for a better way of being and living. It is a desire that moves beyond the limitations of aspects of the present, seeking spaces and worlds that are qualitatively different from what exists (Pinder: 2005, 18).

Pinder also claimed in his 2005 book *Visions of the City* that "a talisman of the Thatcher government", which has: "become depressingly well

ingrained into contemporary consciousness... is that there is no alternative to present social order (Pinder: 2005, 14-15). Here I wish to suggest that much of the new writing of the period is utopian precisely because it critiques the social order, and that this critique creates the possibility for alternatives to be conceived. The plays are instilled with a utopian spirit in that they “function as a social and political criticism raising questions about the present” (Pinder: 2005, 17). They can be seen to disrupt dominant assumptions and this opens the way for other possibilities to be imagined.

To debate this position I am also drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s definition of utopia as outlined in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986):

[T]he result of reading a utopia is that it puts into question what precisely exists; it makes the actual world seem strange. Usually we are tempted to say that we cannot live in a different way from the way we presently do. The utopia though, introduces a sense of doubt that shatters the obvious (Ricoeur: 1986, 299-300).

Ricoeur lists three levels of utopia; the first is where utopia “is fancy – the completely unrealizable” (Ricoeur: 1986, 310). The second is where utopia can be seen to construct an “alternative to the present power” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). This second level is one in which a *better* power replaces the one that exists. In the third level “utopia is the exploration of the possible” (Ricoeur: 1986, 310). It is at this level that real change becomes possible and this definition is the most pertinent in this thesis. Ricoeur sees third level utopia as being about the possibilities of “living without hierarchical structure and instead with maturity” (Ricoeur: 1986, 310). Ricoeur describes the problem of looking out from within an ideology as being “caught in a kind of tornado, we are literally engulfed in a process which is self-defeating, which seems only to allow ideological judgement” (Ricoeur: 1986, 172). In other words ideology forms a circle around us from within which we view the world. It was his conviction that “the only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it and judge it an ideology on this basis” (Ricoeur: 1968, 172). At this point it is possible to be within the ‘ideological circle’ but not entirely conditioned by it, it is here that change

becomes possible and the circle becomes a “spiral”, which allows for reflection and alternatives to be conceived. The spiral stretches the ideology circle so that it is possible to be within it but reflect on the circle itself. It is utopia that cause the circle to stretch out into a spiral or a circle with space, or ‘gaps’ in which the reflection takes place.

Ricoeur claims that: “the thrust of utopia is to change reality” (Ricoeur: 1986, 289). A utopian theatre then is a theatre that confronts the challenge of creating a better future by exploring what could be, by questioning social reality, and challenging the assumption that there are no alternatives. It is a theatre that reflects what is, but in doing so paves the way for what is not *yet*. A utopian theatre reflects Ricoeur’s view that a utopia is “fundamentally realizable” and it is “only when it starts shattering order that it is a utopia. A utopia is always in the process of being realised (Ricoeur: 1986, 273). I suggest that the thrust of the theatre is also to change reality, or at least to create an environment that invites the kind of reflection in which change is both desirable and conceivable.

To create a reflexive environment that is at the centre of this utopian endeavour, the first step is to question what currently exists, and this is only possible in the theatre if the audience can see the current systems and institutions at a critical distance. One of the central premises in Ricoeur’s thesis is that critiquing ideological constructions is only possible from within that ideology, as it is all consuming; it forms a circle or “tornado” around us. In other words it is impossible to observe the ideological constructs that surround us objectively because we view them from within those constructs, making all observations part of that ideology we are attempting to critique. For a utopic vision therefore, the viewer must place themselves at a distance from that which they are observing, or create a spiral in which to view the circle itself. Ricoeur draws on “Mannheim’s paradox” to explain this problem:

The paradox is the applicability of the concept of ideology itself. In other words, if everything we say is bias, if everything we say

represents interest that we do not know, how can we have a theory of ideology which is not itself ideological? The reflexivity of the concept of ideology on itself provides the paradox (Ricoeur: 1986, 8).

In order to explain how this critical distance is possible Ricoeur draws on the original meaning of utopia as being “no-where” as described by Thomas Moore: “a place which exists in no real place, a ghost city; a river with no water” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). Taking utopia as being no-where: “this nowhere puts the cultural systems at a distance; we see our cultural systems from the outside precisely thanks to this nowhere (Ricoeur: 1986, 17). From this distance it becomes possible to see things from a different perspective, the circle becomes a spiral, and therefore it is the “the function of utopia to expose the credibility gap wherein all systems of authority exceed...our confidence in them and our belief in their legitimacy (Ricoeur: 1986, 17). Ricoeur suggests:

that we start from the kernel idea of the nowhere, implied by the word utopia itself. From this “no-place” an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. The field of the possible is now open beyond that of the actual; it is a field, therefore, for alternative ways of living (Ricoeur: 1986, 16).

From a distance or position of no-where the observer can cease to take for granted the present reality. So ‘no-where’, becomes a reflexive space in which we can look at ourselves and our society.

The new perspective allows for a position from which to view the existing, social construct or, in Ricoeur’s words, “the constituted”, and also allows for a imagining of, “constituting of”, an alternative. The utopic quality of the imagination moves us from accepting the constituted to a position of constituting an alternative. Ricoeur asks, “may we not say then that imagination itself – through its utopian function – has a constitutive role in helping us rethink that nature of our social life”, and so “utopia introduces imaginative variations on the topics of society, power, government, family religion” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). It is the imagination that makes exploration of alternatives possible, for Ricoeur this is the role of

the 'social imagination'. Ricoeur describes the social imagination as an imagination 'constituting' alternatives, in that it confirms and contests the present and then opens the way for alternatives:

Social imagination is constructive of social reality. So the presupposition here is precisely that of a social imagination, of a cultural imagination, operating in both constructive and destructive ways, as both confirmation and contestation of the present situation (Ricoeur: 1986, 3).

The role of the social imagination, activated by utopian endeavour is to "impassionate society... to move and motivate it (Ricoeur: 1986, 296). As a result of this motivation it may be possible to deinstitutionalise human relations. For Ricoeur this deinstitutionalising of human relationships is the "kernel of all utopias" (Ricoeur: 1986, 299). It is also the kernel of my thinking in this thesis. The following section discusses three plays in which protagonists dare to imagine an alternative having reconsidered their family relationships.

### **Utopian Longings - The Beauty Queen of Leenane**

Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996 Town Hall Theatre, Galway) is centred on the utopian longings of Maureen as she plots a new life for herself. It is the first of three plays that have subsequently become known as the Leenane Trilogy (the second two being *A Skull in Connemara* and *The Lonesome West*, both first performed the following year and all three being published as a collection in 1999). In the first play of the trilogy audiences are presented with a protagonist who longs to break free of her family home. Maureen wishes to escape from the family home which she shares with her demanding mother Mag, and the claustrophobic community of which their home is a part. This need for a change of home is representative of the character's search for a different and better life. I argue that in this they are searching for a utopia.

*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* focuses on characters that are 'seeking spaces and worlds that are qualitatively different from what exists' for them in the present and therefore are looking towards a utopia. For

Ricoeur this search for what is different is inherently political in that implying another way of living is possible is to “always imply alternative ways of using power, whether in family, political, economic, or religious life, and in that way they call established systems of power into question” (Ricoeur: 1991, 312). Taking Thomas Moore’s description of Utopia as being ‘nowhere’, Ricoeur examines the social function of standing at the point of ‘nowhere’ and critically examining what can be seen from this point:

From this ‘no place’, an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. The field of the possible is now opened beyond that of the actual, a field for alternative ways of living. The question therefore is whether imagination could have any constitutive role without this leap outside. Utopia is the way in which we radically rethink what is family, consumption, government, religion, and so on (Ricoeur: 1991, 312).

In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* the character of Maureen Folan considers ‘alternative ways of living’ and ‘radically rethinks what is family’. The action of the play takes place in the Folan family home in the “living-room/kitchen of a rural cottage in the west of Ireland” (McDonagh: 1999, 2). The plot examines the claustrophobic mother/daughter relationship of Mag and Maureen, both of whom appear trapped by their location and familial link. During the course of the play Maureen questions the given nature of the family structure that she is trapped within. Within my reading of the play this makes it utopian because it invites a questioning of the norm of the family:

Ultimately what is at stake in utopia is the apparent givenness of every system of authority (Ricoeur: 1991, 312).

In other words the character of Maureen questions the “givenness” of the family’s system of authority.

From early in scene one it becomes apparent that Maureen longs for the escape from the family responsibilities and the childhood home that her siblings have managed to leave while she has not.

**Maureen** (quietly) Feck... (Irritated.) I’ll get your Complian so if it’s such a big job! From now and ‘til doomsday! The one thing I ask you to do. Do you see Annette or Margo coming pouring your

Complan or buying you oul cod in butter sauce for the week?  
(McDonagh: 1998, 2)

This first scene establishes for the audience that Mag has control over her daughter's life and this is seen in her domination of the opening scenes as she demands various tasks from the put upon Maureen. Her constant stream of demands includes calls for: "me porridge, Maureen, I haven't had, will you be getting? To, "will we have the radio on for ourselves?", and "is the radio a biteen loud there, Maureen?", and on to "me mug of tea you forgot! (McDonagh: 1999, 3-6). These commands ensure that when Maureen tells her mother that she would like to bring home someone who enjoys murdering old women that the audience is in sympathy with her:

**Maureen** Sure, that sounds exactly the type of fella I would like to meet, and then bring him home to meet you, if he likes murdering oul women ...If he clobbered you with a big axe or something and took your oul head off and spat in your neck...I'd enjoy it, I would (McDonagh: 1999, 6).

During the course of the play Mag manipulates and lies to her daughter and thwarts her chances of escape. Maureen is invited to a party held by the Dooley family. Maureen brings Pato Dooley home with her after the party; he spends the night in the Folan household and later returns to England. Pato presents Maureen with the chance for escape, both from her virginity and the family home when he invites Maureen to live with him in England. The invitation to live with Pato in England is the catalyst for Maureen's dreams of escape to become utopian longings. Until this point Maureen's escape plans represent Ricoeur's first level of utopia, "the completely unrealizable" (Ricoeur: 1986, 310). With Pato's invitation, Maureen moves into a second phase of utopic longing where she constructs "an alternative to the present power" (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). Effectively swapping Mag for Pato, where a better power replaces the one that exists.

The invite comes in the form of a letter that Mag steals and burns. It is clear that Mag does this out of a fear of being left alone and throughout the early scenes the audience witnesses Mag's dependence on Maureen

and her devious attempts to ensure she stays in the family home. First she attempts to hide the fact of the initial party invite, then she attempts to destroy the burgeoning relationship by cruelly revealing details about Maureen's mental health problems; she then reads and burns the letter depicted in a calculating and malicious scene.

*Mag listens to his footsteps fading away, then gets up, picks up the envelope and opens it, goes back to the range and lifts off the lid so that the flames are visible, and stands there reading the letter. She drops the first short page onto the flames as she finishes it, then starts reading the second. Slow fade-out (McDonagh: 1999, 42).*

In the words of Irish theatre academic Nicholas Grene, the audience watches "the crafty mother using her weakness as strength against the impotently raging daughter" (Grene: 2005, 301).

Maureen, however is not impotent and from the opening scenes she is portrayed as a spirited woman who is not afraid to assert her position within the household. The seemingly light-hearted banter between the two women in the opening scenes establishes the routine of the characters, with Mag demanding attention and Maureen complaining but eventually capitulating to her mother's demands. The two are engaged in a circular and combative pattern that is at first humorous. The rapport between the two characters is a source of much amusement as Maureen threatens her mother with either murderous strangers or lumpy Complan as she catches her mid lie:

The lies of you. The whole of that Complan you'll drink now, and suck the lumps down too, and whatever's left you haven't drank, it is over your head I will be emptying it, and you know well enough I mean it! (McDonagh: 1999, 14).

Grene comments that for "much of the play, the snarling combat of Mag and Maureen is the stuff of sitcom, a sort of latter-day Irish Steptoe and Son" (Grene: 2005, 301). McDonagh cuts through the comedy and "toys with audience expectations" (Sierz: 2001, 221) as slowly the audience starts to realise that the threats are less good natured than they first appear. The audience becomes unsettled watching the relationship

unfold but their sympathy remains with Maureen who appears to be the victim:

**Maureen:** Arsing me around, eh? Interfering with my life again? Isn't it enough I've had to be on beck and call for you every day for the past twenty year? Is it the one evening out you begrudge me? (McDonagh: 1996, 15)

In scenes two and three the comic dialogue includes banter about Mag's death; "I suppose now you'll never be dying. You'll be hanging on forever, just to spite me", and paltry acts of revenge such as those exhibited by Maureen's shopping habits: "I hate Kimberley's. I only get them to torment me mother". In these scenes the audiences' empathy remain with the put upon, and trapped Maureen. These feelings are intensified by the particularly spiteful revelations Mag makes to Pato in an attempt to put him off her daughter when she tells him that: "*She's one that scoulded me hand! I'll tell you that, now...Held it down on the range she did! Poured chip-pan fat o'er it!*" (McDonagh: 1996, 28). This revelation may be dismissed by the audience as a vindictive fantasy. When this disclosure does not achieve the desired effect of driving Pato away, she then resorts to revealing that Maureen spent time in Difford Hall:

It's a nut-house! An oul nut-house in England I did have to sign her out of and promise to keep her in me care (McDonagh: 1999, 30).

Maureen confesses that she was in Difford Hall and gives Pato, and the audience, her version of the chip-pan incident, explaining that Mag was:

Trying to cook chips on her own, she was. We'd argue, and I'd left her on her own an hour, and chips she up and decided she wanted. She must have tipped the pan over...Only because of Difford Hall, she thinks any accusation she throws at me I won't be any the wiser (McDonagh: 1999, 32).

The audience is probably unsure which version to believe by this point and may remain undecided until the end of scene eight. Discovering that her mother knows that her relationship with Pato was unconsummated, as Maureen has previously implied enables Maureen to deduce that Pato has privileged information At this point the audience witness Maureen's cruelty:

*Stares at her in dumb shock and hate, then walks to the kitchen, dazed, puts a chip-pan on the stove, turns it on high and pours a half-bottle of cooking oil into it, takes down the rubber gloves that are hanging on the back-wall and puts them on. **Mag** puts her hands on the arms of the rocking-chair to drag herself up, but **Maureen** shoves a foot against her stomach and groin, pushing her back. **Mag** leans back into the chair, frightened, staring at **Maureen** (McDonagh: 1999, 46-47).*

At this point the scene takes a predictable and violent turn as Maureen tortures Mag for information:

*Pause. The oil has started boiling. **Maureen** rises, turns the radio up, stares at **Mag** as she passes her, takes the pan off the boil and turns the gas off, and returns to **Mag** with it.*

*(terrified) A letter he did send you I read!*

***Maureen** slowly and deliberately takes her mother's shrivelled hand, holds it down on the burning range, and starts slowly pouring some of the hot oil over it, as **Mag** screams in pain and terror (McDonagh: 1999, 47).*

The end of this scene reveals the priorities for both characters. Mag's priority is to remain with Maureen, even after being tortured as she would rather than be with her daughter than be left alone:

**Mag** Help me, Maureen.

**Maureen** (brushing her hair) Help you, is it? After what you've done? Help you, she says. No, I won't help you, and I'll tell you another thing. If you've made me miss Pato before he goes, then you'll really be for it, so you will, and no messing this time...

**Mag** But who'll look after me, so? (McDonagh: 1999, 49)

Maureen's priority is to escape to America with Pato. This desire to escape is an utopian longing for an alternative life. In *From Text to Action* Ricoeur states that for alternatives to be found the 'field of the possible' has to be opened:

The field of the possible is now opened beyond that of the actual, a field for alternative ways of living. ..Utopia is the way in which we radically rethink what is family, consumption, government, religion, and so on (Ricoeur: 1991, 312).

Pato presents Maureen with a 'field of possibilities' and now she is able to radically rethink what family is for her. Maureen's utopic longing is sited on the character of Pato and an escape to Boston. But this longing is escapist fantasy or what Bloch might describe as an abstract utopia rather than a concrete Utopia (Bloch: 1986). For Ricoeur it is merely the first phase of utopia or "fancy – the completely unrealizable (Ricoeur: 1986, 310). In other words Maureen's sense of the future is based on a desire or wishful thinking, but it is an unobtainable desire for Maureen as escape is not possible for her and she is trapped in the relationship with her mother.

Once the sinister nature of this relationship is revealed to the audience it is clear that the threat of violence has never been far from the surface. From this point the play rapidly reaches its conclusion in which Maureen beats Mag to death with a poker and plans to leave for Boston to catch up with Pato, only to be delayed by the police investigation into her mother's death. In the final scene of the play, Pato's nephew reveals his uncle's engagement and the play ends with Maureen trapped in the family home and as Pato's nephew, Ray, observes she has become the:

The exact fucking image of your mother you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting me name! (McDonagh: 1999, 60)

Maureen does not move past the first two phases of Ricoeur's utopia when she constructs an alternative to the controlling power that rules her life. She does not move on to explore the possible alternatives of living without a hierarchical structure. For Bloch Maureen dream is an abstract utopia. In her examination of Bloch's *Principles of Hope* utopian scholar Ruth Levitas argues: "abstract utopia is fantastic and compensatory. It is wishful thinking, but the wish is not accompanied by a will to change anything" (Levitas: 1997, 67). She continues to say it is a wish not to change the world just the person in it. Here it is possible to see that Maureen wishes to change herself and her living arrangements but the world in which she lives.

The play is deeply unsettling. Maureen's character demonstrates a 'soft' fantasy of utopia without the drive to make the changes necessary. "There is never anything soft about conscious-know hope, but a will within it insists: it should be so, it must become so" (Bloch: 1986, 147). In other words her abstract utopia expresses merely a desire and is not a concrete utopia which can manifest actual change. Theatre scholar Laura Eldred describes it as a play in which, "the audience expects a comedy and gets a murder" (Eldred: 2007, 124). The progression from comedy to the violent murder creates the distancing that invites a space/gap for reflection and social criticism. Theatre historian Heath Diehl claims the murder goes unpunished and in his 2001 article he discusses the narrative structure and audience experience stating that:

McDonagh refuses in the second act to supply his reader/spectator with a moral normative, Maureen is not punished for the murder of Mag on either side of the footlights. In McDonagh's stage world, Maureen emerges from a month-long police investigation unscathed. Moreover, because she already has missed Pato's departure for America by the time she bludgeons Mag with a poker, her failed "love connection" cannot be read as retribution for her acts of criminality (Diehl: 2001, 101).

She may evade prosecution and may have already 'missed' Pato's departure, but the final scene of the play certainly sees Maureen alone and imprisoned in a home condemned to live the life her mother feared, being left alone, so I would argue that she is 'punished' for her acts.

Diehl is persuasive in saying that the audience is not supplied with a 'moral normative'. This play opposes that normative by presenting the audience with characters and circumstances that encourage them to question the normative family structure that creates and sustains a relationship described accurately by theatre scholar Marion Castleberry as one where "Mother and daughter respond to each other's hatred and disgust" (Castleberry: 2007, 48). Castleberry goes on to say that at the end the audience asks, "Who is the real monster Mag or Maureen?" (Castleberry: 2007, 53). Both Castleberry and Diehl question the sense of realism in the play; Diehl focuses on the fractured narrative structure

and unsatisfying moral conclusion to the play, while Castleberry considers the characters to be unfinished:

crudely drawn and they do not seem to live in a realistic emotional landscape that is immediately recognized by an audience. Their emotional interactions are reduced to the lowest common denominator – suffering caused by psychological and physical violence (Castleberry: 2007, 43).

The 'rupture in narrative structure' and the 'crudely drawn characters' that Castleberry and Diehl describe along with the humour ensure that the audience undergoes 'distanciation' and therefore provide their own reading of these events. Having initially identified with the character of Maureen, the audience is horrified by her cruel and deliberate maiming and then murdering of Mag. This early identification with Maureen prompts the question, 'how far would I go to escape?' Maureen's vision is actively dangerous to her mother, but ultimately is an unachievable abstract because she is still dependant on another, Pato, and she is incapable of taking responsibility for herself, and for finding an alternative space to the family home.

These moments of distanciation created through the play's form and content invite contemplation beyond the play so a potential critique of ideology could take place, or, an opening up of a vision the "field of the possible" (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). Both Bloch and Ricoeur argue that the thrust of utopia is to change in this play McDonagh gives his audience in Maureen a character who cannot change because she is incapable of imagining a different world view and so fails to escape. The audience is invited to consider the wider implications of the plot and the social structures at play that enable a vicious co-dependency to develop between family members that keeps each tied to the other and the 'home'. In my reading of the play this therefore makes the play utopic inviting the audience to reflect on what is and therefore can pave the way for what is not yet.

In the next section I discuss Judy Upton's *Sliding with Suzanne* (2001), in which the protagonist moves beyond Ricoeur's first two phases of

Utopia and undertakes a utopian search for an alternative space in which to live.

### **Dreaming of Utopia - *Sliding with Suzanne***

In Judy Upton's *Sliding with Suzanne* (2001, Royal Court Upstairs, London) the dream of utopia that sustains the protagonist, Suzanne, is dancing in fields. In this play the audience witness the protagonist, Suzanne, "sliding" into squalor and self-loathing. Upton's character is single foster mother, who is expecting the baby of her fourteen-year-old foster son. The character of Suzanne is represented as negligent and the type of single mother that was vilified by the right wing press of the Nineties. In a review of the play that reads as a condemnation of single motherhood, John Gross of *The Sunday Telegraph* describes the character as: "feckless, foul-tempered, awash with self-pity" (Gross: 2001). The fact that Suzanne's foster son, Luka demonstrates that he is the more responsible of the two does not contradict Gross' assessment.

Suzanne's parenting skills, according to Luka, include "getting pissed and bringing home psychopaths who want to drink, beat her up and get her kids put in care" (Upton: 2001, 34). In Act One, Scene Four the audience witness Suzanne slapping Luka and then considering hitting him over the head with his skateboard as well as drinking more and smoking "more dope" than his biological mother does (Upton: 2001, 34-5). They live in a London council flat although the play is set in the Brighton of Suzanne's childhood. Together they picture a future where they live in Brighton in a caravan park where you "don't share walls with nobody – so you could play the Chilli Peppers all night. Leave the door open and dance in the fields" (Upton: 2001, 51). This utopic longing for "dancing in fields" becomes a touchstone for Suzanne. It is an idyllic fantasy that is far removed from the squalid flat in which they live and it becomes one on which they build an image of their future together. As such it is a level one Utopia on Paul Ricoeur's three phased approach, in other words, it appears to be an unrealisable fancy.

*Sliding with Suzanne* gives the audience five examples of nuclear family units; each is represented as being dysfunctional or at least problematic. The five sets of family are Suzanne's childhood home with mother Theresa and nameless father, secondly, Luka and Suzanne, the foster mother and her 'son'. The audience discovers that, Luka is just one of a line of children for whom she has cared; thirdly, Luka and his biological mother; fourthly, local teenage siblings Sophie and Josh, who live with their, drunken and overweight father; and lastly, Theresa's boyfriend, Ned's family. The first of these, the childhood family of Suzanne, is seen through the fraught present day mother/daughter relationship of Theresa and Suzanne. Throughout their dialogue Suzanne is seen as being impatient, rude and abusive towards the figure of her mother, while Theresa is represented as being the long-suffering caring parent whom the child takes for granted:

**Theresa** I've had enough. I don't hear a word, not a word for three months, you don't phone, you don't answer the phone... You don't worry about me do you? Don't give me a thought. I might as well be dead – (Upton: 2001, 8).

Through their dialogue the audiences glimpses a less than idyllic childhood:

**Suzanne** I'm picky. Shame you weren't a bit more picky yourself.

**Theresa** If you mean your father...we weren't so badly suited...we made the best of what we had till the last few years.

**Suzanne** Even if that wasn't very much.

**Theresa** If he hadn't had that crash, and hit his head...if that hadn't changed him...

**Suzanne** Well thank fuck for black ice (Upton: 2001, 41).

Although we are not given details it is clear from this exchange that Theresa and her 'nameless' partner were 'making do' rather than being happy and that Suzanne sees the change brought on by car crash as a positive thing. The audience is left to speculate on the nature of this relationship and the roots of Suzanne's resentment. Alastair Macaulay's review in *The Financial Times* states that this lack of information is frustrating, claiming that: "There are things we'd like to know about

Suzanne and Theresa that we never discover” (Macaulay: 2001). Michael Billington picks up the same theme when he says in his *Guardian* review that Upton, “never fully explains why Suzanne is so screwed up.” (Billington: 2001). I argue that Upton’s characters give the audience all the information they need in the following, earlier, exchange:

**Suzanne** If I’m Fucked up, it’s how you made me. You and Dad.

**Theresa** We stayed together for your sake.

**Suzanne** And made us all fucking miserable (Upton: 2001, 38).

Susan’s problems include an eating disorder, drinking too much, drugs, and there are references to a breakdown (Upton: 2001, 66). It is possible to see that the urge to stay together for the good of the family, adhering to the normative family structure caused more harm than good to this family unit.

Two of the other family units in this play involve single lone parent family structures which prove not to be a better option for the characters concerned. Luka puts himself into the hands of Social Services, or the tutelage complex and therefore Suzanne in an attempt to avoid his biological mother, and Sophie and Josh are left to fend for themselves in the care of their “fat” and “drunken” father whom they are both scared of disturbing. Theresa’s idea of Ned’s family as being idyllic is shattered when he reveals that while it was less damaging to the individual family members it was also not without its problems. He confesses that his children all opted for different lifestyles and hobbies that did not fit in with his own ideas of how to spend free time when he tells Theresa that, “the girls’d rather go to a holiday camp” and his son “was never an outdoor type” (Upton: 2001, 54). Each of the characters in these family structures remains tied to the concept of family even when it is destructive to do so. The play demonstrates this adherence to the nuclear family structure when Suzanne returns to the place of her childhood. The character of Theresa claims that all her children, when in trouble “come running back to their mum” (Upton: 2001, 16). The idea of ‘home’ is so ingrained in Suzanne that she instinctively returns to

Brighton and fantasises about moving back. The audience is left to question why this is the case when it offers no peace or sense of well-being for her. Their questions are voiced by Luka:

It's not good just like moving somewhere else and thinking things be different. I mean you move from your shitty little flat into a shitty little flat down here...so what? What's gonna change? How're things suddenly gonna be like wonderful? I don't get it (Upton: 2001, 51).

Luka provides Suzanne with her utopic caravan vision where they "don't have to share walls with nobody" and where they can "go outside when we were getting on each others tits, instead of screaming the place down. We could dance in the fields" (Upton: 2001, 70). Luka sees this vision for what it is, "a dream".

For Suzanne's character this idyllic vision of setting up a caravan home with Luka and the baby becomes a goal to focus on: "You're all I think about. Living with you and dancing in the fields" (Upton: 2001, 79). This utopia is not based on the current conditions and does not present a realistic option as far as Luka's character is concerned. The scene in which this vision is conjured up takes place during a picnic at Beachy Head. The vision of an different future is only conceivable outside in the open, away from the constraints of the urban structures which surround Suzanne's everyday life, the Cricklewood council estate and the Brighton family home. Here both Beachy Head and the caravan park being outside spaces present a place where an alternative is possible. The audience sees the character of Suzanne having failed to change the course of her life by returning to her family home and predicts that the caravan will not offer a better chance of survival. The outside and countryside in this play are represented as being idyllic, however both Beachy Head and the countryside on Ned's maps and of his family holidays prove to be nothing but a fantasy, and a fantasy which stops people moving on and finding a genuine alternative.

The last scene of the play was according to critic Nicholas de Jongh an "emotionally rousing roller coaster" (de Jongh: 2001). The fast paced

plotting and emotional wrought scenes lead Sierz to describe of the play as being “a stonking piece of in-yer-face theatre” (Sierz: 2001b). In the final scene, a manic Suzanne admits she is “on the fucking slide” and is “no good for anybody” (Upton: 2001, 77). The character is witnessed facing her future for the first time and seeing that she needs “to be strong”. Here the audience observes Suzanne’s realisation that the cycle of escapism and destruction needs to be broken:

If I stay, there’s the baby Luka...he’ll end up just like me – he won’t get to college, or if he does, the noise, the baby – he won’t be able to do his homework, he’ll have to get a job to buy all the things the baby needs...I am taking his chance away (Upton: 2001, 78).

This is followed by a confrontation between Suzanne, Luka, Sophie and Josh that results in a knife being drawn. Luka threatens to cut the unborn baby from Suzanne and Suzanne is cut, eventually a peace ensues. In the lull it is clear that Suzanne having stolen the money has found a way forward. She announces that now she will “find a caravan by the sea”:

*The Stage transforms into **Suzanne’s** caravan. **Suzanne** and **Luka** are dancing to the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The others join them.*

*Music cuts out and everyone leaves. Sound of the wind over the cliffs.*

**Suzanne** is left facing the future (Upton: 2001, 82).

*The Financial Time’s* Alastair Macaulay argued that this “ending arriving out of nowhere, doesn’t ring true” (2001). I would argue that this ending does not arrive from nowhere and that it has been carefully plotted and structured so that for one last moment Suzanne allows herself a glimpse of her utopic dream future, before she is left alone facing her future. This future is where a utopia becomes possible. The audience is left to imagine what that future might look like but knows that Suzanne is leaving behind the imaginary comforts of a dysfunctional family support network, the image of an idyllic home life and the true fantasy of the caravan in the countryside. The future she will carve out for herself and

the baby will be based in knowledge of the present and the material conditions in which we live and will therefore be achievable. She still has the dream vision of the caravan, but for the first time she is alone and actually “facing the future”, just as Joe stands alone at the end of *The Children* (Bond 2000b). Both are ready to take responsibility for themselves and others. Therefore the optimism can be seen in Suzanne’s attempt to “do the best” she can as she promises in her last lines of the play. This is underpinned by the last lines of dialogue which go to Ned and Theresa.

**Ned**            You should be proud of her.

**Theresa**        Yes...I suppose I am ...in some ways. She’s just different (Upton: 2001, 82).

These two characters have not witnessed the traumatic last scene in the shop, but the audience has the juxtaposition of these lines and Suzanne’s promise to take care of the baby which allow the audience to imagine a Suzanne who can live up to this assurance. The play’s lack of confirmed resolution puts the character of Suzanne and the audience in what Ricoeur would describe as a “no place” from where it becomes possible to cast a “glance” at reality from a new position and so the “field of the possible is now open beyond that of the actual; it is a field, therefore of alternative living” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). Therefore the ending becomes one where a possible utopia or change for the better can be imagined. As the “no place or no where” “puts the cultural system at a distance; we see our cultural systems from the outside precisely thanks to this nowhere” (Ricoeur: 1986, 17). The audience during the course of the play has been witness to five family structures that all prove dysfunctional at best and abusive at worst and the distancing created by the open ended and reflexive nature of the final scene allows the audience to question what social structures and spaces might enable Suzanne to “do better” for herself and this unborn child.

### **The Neo-family – The Madness of Esme and Shaz**

The final section in this chapter considers representations of characters that start to create the space and neo-family relationships that Upton's characters can only dream of and in doing so expose the audience to a concrete utopia. This section considers Sarah Daniels's *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994, Royal Court Upstairs, London), in which the central characters demonstrate an alternative to the family abuse circle in what I argue is a more utopic play and one that offers the possibility of a neo-family structure. In this play we are presented with two women, Esme, who is in her 60s, and her niece, whom she has never met, Shaz, who is 33, both of whom were sexually abused as children. The storyline of the play brings these two strangers, who are also family, together. At first they appear to have nothing in common but each provides the other with what has been missing in their lives and sets them off on a chaotic and reckless path. Shaz has spent most of her late teens and adult years in a "Regional Secure Unit":

An establishment for those with, umm, challenging mental who have, err, have come off worse in a confrontation with the penal system (Daniels: 1994, 271).

After her mother's death, Shaz is placed in a care home and at this point the character claims that "a feeling of hope went" (Daniels: 1994, 271). At sixteen state care is withdrawn, and she is on her own and self-harming:

I was -. Oh. I don't know. My behaviour was rather strange. I used to cut myself. No one ever knew. They told me I was very good at my job. They had no idea. I was – it was like I was cut off (Daniels: 1994, 297).

The adult world in this play has left Shaz so "cut off" and numb that pain is the only thing she is capable of feeling. Although Shaz's character has the scars that provide evidence of her quest to feel something, her aunt Esme, has no visible scars but she too has closed herself off to her emotions. Shaz rightly assesses the situation for both of them when she exclaims:

We've got nothing to crow about, you and I. We're pathetic, slashed to bits. Don't bloody glory in our destruction (Daniels: 1994, 302).

The audience is told that the character of Esme left her family as soon as she was able and has never looked back. She states that: "I don't want to know anything about them. I made up my mind about that when I left" (Daniels: 1994, 301). She lives a quiet and unremarkable life of timidity and solitude until she is reawakened by Shaz. Together the two women find solace and friendship and re-establish their connection to the world through each other; Esme taking strength from Shaz's outspoken plucky outlook and Shaz learning to forgive herself and to "see the difference between doing something out of distress and doing something for pleasure?" (Daniels: 1994, 305) Together these characters find the strength to "heal" their respective scars.

Although outwardly they exhibit their lack of feelings very differently, Esme being introverted and reticent, while Shaz is uncompromising and belligerent. Both women were conditioned into these behaviour patterns as a result of sexually abusive parents:

My father, your grandfather was a -. As a Christian I don't have the words to describe him. He was one of those men. When...when we were children, your father and I, he wouldn't leave us alone. You know to what I'm referring?...And I suspect, I expect that my brother repeated the same pattern of behaviour when you were a child (Daniels: 1994, 301).

While Esme turned her back on her family in an attempt to put as much distance between them and her and her emotions and her, Shaz went in search of her father having discovered that he had fathered a girl child.

I decided to look for and found my Father. He was pleased enough to be reunited. I baby-sat for them. They gave me a key to the house. Sometimes when I knew they were out I would let myself in and write stuff with her lip stick over the mirror. Tip her perfume over the bed. Smear body lotion into the carpet (Daniels: 1994, 297).

Until:

One evening I was babysitting I murdered the baby. Girl. I picked her up from her crib thing and held her. Squeezed her. Until she

stopped breathing. When I knew she was dead, I sat down, turned the telly up and waited for them to come home (Daniels: 1994, 297).

The play demonstrates a clear family cycle of abuse whereby the abused and victimized Shaz becomes the victimiser. Unlike the other plays discussed in this section, this play ends with an optimistic and potential utopic ending whereby the characters of Esme and Shaz have learnt to take responsibility for one another and in whom the beginnings of a neo-family can be seen. In the final scenes of the play Esme commits herself to taking care of Shaz. In order to do this the audience witness a complete character transformation as the straight-laced, law abiding Christian woman buys replica guns, threatens a psychiatrist, kidnaps Shaz, drives a stolen car without a driving licence, and lies to the staff of the hospital and the police. She sells her flat and keeps the money in a plastic bag and plots that the two women will live out the rest of their lives on a Greek island. The audience witness the transformation of a woman who has never stood up for herself nor anything she believes in, fight to take responsibility for her niece. When she first produces the gun from her handbag to threaten the hospital staff she exclaims: "I didn't want to do this" and then ask God "So? How else am I expected to save my entire household?" (Daniels: 2991, 317). From this moment on the character is an unstoppable whirlwind of action and defiance.

At first the character of Shaz is resistant to Esme's plans and declares that she will only leave with her if Esme loves her. Esme's response is to say, "If love is longing for the half of ourselves we have lost, then all right" (Daniels: 1994, 324). It is here that the two demonstrate their ability to form a neo-family that offers mutual and unconditional support. Both characters throughout the play learn to take responsibility first for themselves and then each other. The final scene has an air of fantasy in which the characters are on "the deck of a cruiseliner" sailing to the Greek islands, to run a pizza shop. While the notion of the two characters living happy ever after is not quite believable, the last lines of the play have Esme encouraging Shaz to let her scarred arms see then

sun with the words “How will they heal otherwise?” Shaz obliges with the final words, “Come on then, let’s go mad”. The two characters appear to be anything but mad and in this moment they are free and there is an irresponsibly optimistic feel to the end of the play. This optimism and the lack of conclusion in the play creates a reflexive gap in which the audience is invited to think about the lengths the characters had to go to in order to find an alternative lifestyle in which both could be accepted and start afresh.

The *What’s On* theatre critic Neil Smith claimed that the play was a “fairytale really, typified by a ludicrous second act” he continues to say that “apart from taking the first cruiser to Lesbos Daniels doesn’t have any solutions: Esme and Shaz live happily ever after, but at the cost of leaving reality far behind” (Smith: 1994b). I argue that in ‘leaving reality behind Daniels is inviting the audience to consider what realistic options these characters might have had. The fantasy feeling invites a response that is unbelievable. When watching the final moments of this play the clash between the euphoria emotions and the shattering of the suspicion of disbelief created a gap in the narrative. In this gap I found myself contemplating the changes needed to be made in social structures that would have enabled these characters to live happier lives. I would argue that here in the ‘ludicrous second act’ that the gap in which audience’s social imagination is activated occurs and invites a consideration of alternatives outside the theatre performance. In the next chapter of this thesis I present a reading of five plays written between 1993 and 2001 that suggest some alternatives to family homes and structures in the form of neo-family structures that provide spaces in which characters are seen to take responsibility for first themselves and then others.

## Chapter Eight: Safe Spaces and Neo-Families

***'the roof is not your private property'***  
(*Sparkelshark*: Ridley 1998)

In this chapter I consider the way in which playwrights represented the boundaries of the family home and the use of family spaces. I analyse how, in the new writing for stage produced between 1993 and 2001, the characters' attempts to escape from home represents a utopianism. This chapter consider characters who choose to remain within the family 'home' but find the space to evade its disciplinary structures and control; those who wish to flee the constraints of the family home, but remain within its boundaries; those who are forced to move outside the walls of the family home and those who choose to find an alternative social structure that represents their vision of utopia.

In this chapter I also address the questions posed by David Morley in his book *Home Territories: Media Mobility and Identity* when he asks, "why (and with what degrees of freedom) particular people stay at home in a world of flux,[when] forms of collective dwelling are sustained and reinvented" (Morley: 2000, 13). Morley's questions are particularly pertinent to my argument because the plays I consider in this section present characters that "reinvent" social structures and forms of collective living in various ways. I am drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's use of the concept of the third space as an 'in-between' space. Bhabha outlined this concept in *The Location of Culture* (1994) arguing that the third space is one of:

Invention and transformational encounters, a dynamic inbetween space that is imbued with traces, relays ambivalence, ambiguities, with the feelings and practices of both sites, to fashion something different, unexpected (Bhabha: 1994,1).

In this case a space that is in between the formal and informal spaces that regulate young people's lives in which they are watched and monitored, such as the home and the school. I argue that these 'third

spaces' allow 'something different' in the conception of neo-families in which individuals take responsibility for each other and allow for alternative family forms to develop. I specifically consider the nature of the teenage gang and its elements of optimism in the form of a gang based neo-family that resists the nuclear family structure.

David Edgar commented that during the nineties images of gangs were rife in the theatre:

In the '90s, British drama was suddenly awash with predominantly male gangshows, from gay-feel-glad plays like Jonathon Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* and gay-feel-sad plays like Kevin Elyot's *My Night with Reg*, via boys bonding plays like Tim Firth's *Neville's Island* and Patrick Marber's *Dealer's Choice*, to girl-in-a-boys-gang plays like Rebecca Prichard's *Fair Game* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (not to mention the subgenre of girls-in-an-out-of-a-boys'-bonding play, of which genre Terry Johnson's *Dead Funny* remains the market leader (Edgar: 2009, 85).

I develop Edgar's analysis of 'male gangshows' by considering the girl gang found in Philip Ridley's *Ghosts from a Perfect Place* (1994). This chapter then considers the third spaces created by the characters in Philip Ridley's *Sparkleshark* (1997) and Rebecca Prichard's *Yard Gal* (1998). The characters in these plays also find security in the concept of a gang culture. In the final section of the chapter I look at the all boy gang of Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1995) and the friendship grouping in Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996). In looking at these plays I consider how each play provides an example of a 'gang' that develops the concept of the neo-family as an alternative structure, considering the neo-family relationship as 'concrete utopias' (Bloch: 1986, 157).

This debate brings into question how the space of home is produced, and what meanings are applied to it. To address this question, I shall draw on the work of Henri Lefebvre. In *The Production of Space* (translated into English 1991) Lefebvre argues that all spaces are constructed through social practices. He categorises the following three ways that space is envisaged: "representations of space", "representational space", and as "spatial practices". This "perceived –

conceived – lived triad” is interconnected allowing for movement between them (Lefebvre: 1991, 40). Representation of space, or conceived spaces, impose order, they are constructed as ways of ordering spaces and, therefore, they show the power structures of society’s housing estates, recreational spaces, intuitional buildings all belong to this category of space. Lefebvre states that: “they are tied to relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose” (Lefebvre: 1991, 33). This means that they are tied to knowledges and codes. Conceived spaces, therefore, sometimes produce hegemonic processes. In this chapter I suggest that the family home could be described as a conceived space, which is produced in ways that conform to dominant social values and also appear to be natural and benign. I also argue that third spaces created by teenage gangs are potentially utopic although the first of the plays discussed here demonstrates that not all gangs have the potential to offer a utopia.

### **The Myth of the Home-space as a Safe Place - *Ghosts From a Perfect Place***

In Philip Ridley’s *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1994, Hampstead Theatre, London) the family home at first appears to be a safe place and removed from both the dangers and the commercialism of the outside world. In this play the audience is shown the home of the Sparks family, a place that proves to be far from safe for anyone who lives there or visits. When Travis Flood, an ageing and self-deluding gangster, returns to the East End of London to relive his ‘heydays’, he calls on the Sparks’ residence expecting to find Rio. Instead he is greeted by Torchie, Rio’s grandmother in a state of undress. It is clear that the house is in need of much repair as “there has been a fire sometime in the past: the walls, floor and woodwork are all badly scorched” (Ridley: 1997, 223). Later we discover that the fire has permanently injured the ageing Torchie and was lit by Rio. At this point in the play Torchie keeps Travis waiting at the door telling him “I’ll call when it’s safe”, and moments later when she is fully clothed, she gives him the all clear, “Safe now!” (Ridley: 1997,

224). This is an ironic statement as far from being a *safe* house this becomes a house of pain and torture for Travis. It quickly becomes evident that the house was not a safe place for Rio's dead mother Donna, as she was beaten by her father for getting pregnant at 14 and refusing to give the name of the baby's father. Donna later dies in childbirth in the same house, and years later it is no safer for Rio, who is tormented by the rats that keep her awake at night. In a plot that moves backwards and forwards in time, the audience witnesses that in the past Donna's parents were paying Travis Flood as part of his gang's extortion racket for protection from local thugs.

In the present Torchie remembers Travis as being "there to protect us" (Ridley: 1997, 261). The old gangster almost appears as a father figure protecting the East End from 'other' villains, but Travis is the 'villain of the piece' and, far from protecting her, Donna's family expose the fourteen year old to the danger represented by Flood. It is the child, Donna, who protects her family, first by allowing herself to be raped by Travis in order to stop her parents being beaten and then from the awful truth of her bravery. She also protects the man who rapes her by refusing to name him. Aleks Sierz describes the moment where Travis confesses to Rio as dramatically significant. He states that when Rio makes the "imaginative leap" and tells her mother's side of the story, dramatically this becomes "the most riveting moment" as "the idea of (her mother's) self-sacrifice becomes powerfully moving" (Sierz: 2001, 46).

Through the story of Donna's self-sacrifice the family home is seen to be incapable of keeping outsiders away from its inhabitants; this home space is unable to protect those within from strangers or the other family members trapped inside. A reading of the work of the political scientist Michael Shapiro is instructive when considering this play. Shapiro argues that the "family, far from being a reassuring unit of collective solidarity and protection, becomes instead a conflictual and susceptible collective" where the members may prove a threat to each other or that "amplifies the...manipulations of economic, political and bureaucratic agencies"

(Shapiro: 2001, 19). The Sparks family are a 'conflictual' collective with open hostility and violence between Donna and her father as a result of the pregnancy. This violence stems from the economic manipulations of the local crime boss, Travis. In this representation of a family home it is therefore possible to see that Shapiro is accurate in saying that the family may be a 'susceptible collective'. Yet the Sparks family remain in the family home remembering the 'good old days' that were not good for any of them, and Torchie and Rio remain in the family home despite it being a dangerous space for them, and eventually Flood when he is tortured by Rio.

Rio while remaining in the family home is the leader of a girl gang.

Ridley' stage directions describe the gang in some detail:

*Miss Sulphur is eighteen; Miss Kerosene is twelve. Like Rio, they have their hair in pony-tails and are wearing gold-sequinned mini-skirts, etc. Also, like Rio, they are possessed of a languid barbarity.*

*Collectively, Rio, Miss Sulphur and Miss Kerosene are known as the Cheerleaders...*

**Cheerleaders** (*softly, hauntingly*)

Cheer girls, sneer girls,

Wrapped in golden gear girls.

Leer girls, queer girls,

The spread a little fear girls (Ridley: 1997, 268).

The "Cheerleaders" initially appear to be a neo-family, supporting one another. They have a dress code and routines and rituals that bind them together. They celebrate this united position in their choral singing throughout their cooperative torture of Travis:

**Cheerleaders**

Glam girls, wham girls

The just don't give a damn girls.

Sleek girls, freak girls,

The totally unique girls...

C-H-E-E-R-L-E-A-D-E-R-S! Cheerleaders! (Ridley: 1997, 268-9)

They are bound together by a vision of their past and the rituals they have developed to honour a bygone heroine:

**Rio** Chapter four. Rio can't sleep. Every night, in the dark, she imagines a rat coming to kill her. Large mummy rat. To avenge her dead lumps of pink jelly. Rio screams in the dark. Torchie tries to comfort her. She tells me stories about my mum.

**Miss Kerosene** Saint Donna!

**Miss Sulphur** Saint Donna!

**Rio** You see, Travis. How these girls understand me? (Ridley: 1997, 275)

For much of the disturbing final act of the play, the Cheerleaders work together to torment and torture Travis as they follow their rules of always wearing make-up, being blonde, having pony tails, partaking of chemicals, wearing gold, "to piss on men", to dominate and to "celebrate the ruins" (Ridley 1997, 281-2). Their dress codes and commandments are humorous right up to the point where they take it in turns to burn Travis with a cigar. This move from wild laughter to torture is the means through which the audience can objectively consider what it is being represented here and are invited to make direct comparison to society outside the theatre. The female gang appear to provide support and solace for one another. In *Ghosts from a Perfect Place*, however, the support mechanism the gang provides proves to be an illusion. As the scene develops, it becomes clear that the younger members are only interested in the violence and not the truth that Rio, or "Miss Sparks", is looking for. They become disillusioned and fail to support their leader. As Rio realises that they fail to offer her the real support she needs, she abruptly dismisses them claiming that "I'll deal with him. Alone" (Ridley: 1997, 287). The gang members leave the scene with the warning that one day she'll "push it too far" and they won't be there to support her. This gang therefore offers little in the way of utopia or optimism as they do not take responsibility for each other.

The small glimmer of optimism in the ending of this play is found in Rio's refusal to maim or kill Travis. Knowing the truth of what he did to her mother, Rio simply lets him leave. Their parting words are a simple goodbye:

**Travis** Goodbye, Miss Sparks

**Rio** Goodbye, Mr Flood (Ridley: 1997, 291).

Rio can now say goodbye to her obsession with the past and unsupportive family as well as the obstructive “cheerleaders” to face a new future where she is able to search for alternative means of living having rejected the past and its ghosts. She can begin the search for an unspecified utopia having “shattered the existing order” (Ricoeur: 1986, 273). In this, the character of Rio has much in common with Joe from Bond’s *The Children* (2000), and Cate in Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) as each is alone and ready to start a new way of life. In *Sparkleshark*, discussed in the following section, the characters forge a new support network in a new space and offer the audience the chance to see a neo-family that works to protect and take responsibility for its members. The key to this positive vision is found in the new space, a space that resists the normative space of the family home where alternatives become possible.

### **Geographies of Resistance - *Sparkleshark***

Philip Ridley’s *Sparkleshark* (1997, Royal National Theatre, London) is set in such a space of resistance. In this play the audience witnesses a group of young people who attempt to “reinvent” a space in which to live collectively. The action for this play, written for young people, is set on the “*rooftop of a tower block in the East End of London*”. This rooftop containing “*many TV aerials and satellite dishes, a large puddle, discarded household furniture, piles of rubbish and various scattered detritus*” (Ridley: 1998, 71) becomes the site of refuge for a group of school children as they create an imaginary world that is resistant to the power structures of their daily routines.

Here I draw on Lefebvre’s argument that the social meanings of space are constructed through their social practices and that spaces impose an order. Lefebvre argues that spaces are, “tied to relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose” (Lefebvre: 1991, 33). In other words they are tied to knowledges and codes and as such conceal their own vulnerabilities with an apolitical and an historical positioning.

Conceived spaces therefore conform to hegemonic processes. In this sense, family homes could be described as a representation of space. The homes within the block of flats in this play present a perceived space, defined by the routines or social production and reproduction by the characters daily lives. In Lefebvre words “defined by what people are doing in them. Spatial practices are those practices which “embrace production and reproduction” (Lefebvre: 1991, 33). They are practices in which people passively accept the signs and symbols that have been placed on specific places while also allowing for the resisting of social regulations as they are used and adapted by those frequenting them.

Outside of the flats, the rooftop becomes an example of “representational spaces, or lived space, are spaces that are defined by their “users” (Lefebvre: 1991, 39). As such the space obtains its significance through the uses that people attribute to it. This makes the rooftop a “dominated and hence passively experienced space which the imagination seeks to change” (Lefebvre: 1991, 39). This makes the space “alive...quantitative, fluid and dynamic” (Lefebvre: 1991, 42). In other words spaces can be changed. Individuals inscribe their meaning rather than the technologies of power, or in spite of the hegemonic forces at play in society. This allows spaces the possibility to become counter-hegemonic or to be spaces or geographies of resistance, whereby spatial practices of a specific location may be altered. The rooftop in *Sparkleshark* is such a space. Jake’s character ‘inscribes’ it with a new meaning, one of safety, in an otherwise dangerous world.

The plot of *Sparkleshark* focuses on Jake, the archetypal “geek” at a new school, who hides during the school day behind the bins and on the rooftop after classes. He is joined in his hideout by a collection of other misfits. Alastair Macaulay’s review of the play in the 1999 revival staged by the National Theatre describes the gang as including:

a gorgeous bully and his two loyal sidekicks; a retard and his feisty, outspoken sister; a tough girl and her quiet, mature ex-boyfriend; a loudmouth tarty girl with a heart like butter (Macaulay: 1999).

In an attempt to stop Jake being physically abused by the bully and his “sidekicks”, Polly, (the outspoken sister) starts a Scheherazade storytelling game in which together the characters enact a ‘modern’ fairy-tale.

The rooftop set consists of “*some metal steps lead from the main larger area of roof up to a tiny platform. There’s a doorway here, leading to the emergency stairs. This is the only entrance to the roof*” (Ridley: 1998, 71). The roof, therefore, provides a safe haven for the character of Jake who can easily monitor the entry point for potential threats. This makes the rooftop a ‘representational space’ as Jake inscribes this unregulated and outside space as one of safety partly because he able to exert some control on its access. The opening moments of the play establish the security provided for the protagonist in these surroundings:

*Jake makes his way down to the main area of roof and sits in an old armchair. He is familiar and comfortable with these surroundings. It’s a place he’s been many times before – his secret hideaway* (Ridley: 1998, 71).

The rooftop is a space where Jake can be seen to avoid the bounded areas proscribed for young people, the home, the school, the after school club, and offers him a ‘sanctuary’ from authority, discipline and surveillance. On the roof he can evade the dangers of his everyday life. In fact from here he can cast himself the observer who watches his peers from a hierarchical and elevated position. Here he is the sovereign figure of all he surveys; he rules his kingdom of one and imagines the landscape:

You see the tower blocks? Over there! I imagine they’re mountains! And other blocks – like this one – they can be castles. Or mountains. Depending on the story. And ..those television aerals. They’re a forest (Ridley: 1998, 78).

The character of Jake is in Lefebvre’s words, a ‘user’ of the disguardred space he has created, an area that is represents safety and security, the roof becomes his territory and as such he inscribes it with a personal meaning of safety.

Just as the audience begins to appreciate that Jake's character is "at home" on the roof, the scene is interrupted with the arrival of Polly and we become aware of the importance this space holds for him when he challenges the newcomer; "What you doing here anyway? This is *my* place! Go away!" (Ridley: 1998, 72). Polly's character has arrived on the roof space to mend the satellite dish; she conceives this space as being part of the dominant societal structures that designate it as functional and off limits to some people. She asserts her right to use the space in this way:

I've only got three things to say to you. One: what I'm doing up here is none of your business. Two: the roof is not your private property – unless, of course, you have a special clause in your rent book, which I doubt. And three: I find it strange that someone who can write such magical words has a spiteful tongue in his head...Now I've got something I need to do, then I'll be gone. In the interim, I'd be grateful if you don't speak to me again (Ridley: 1998, 72-3).

As the play develops other characters arrive on the roof to Jake's dismay and the audience discovers that each of them needs refuge from the world below and from family homes.

During the course of the first scene Polly, like Jake, starts to see the roof as a 'representational space' which she can change the function of by making it a haven, away from her own family home. Polly needs a refuge from a father who, grieving for his wife, is an overbearing and dominating authoritarian and permits, "no dancing. No singing. No flowers. Nothing pretty or frivolous at all" not even a hair clip (Ridley: 1998, 96). For the audience, it is implied that each of these minor infractions results in physical abuse. When she offers Jake sympathy for being bullied at the hands of Russell the 'turbo-dreamboat', she says, "It's like my Mum said about Dad, 'Sometimes the worst presents come in the nicest wrapping paper'" (Ridley: 1998, 76). Polly's character is in turn consoled by Natasha who has her own problems at home as the following extract explains:

Jake What's wrong with your dad?

...

Natasha Just doesn't. . .like me anymore, I guess. If I walk in the room he looks right through me. Or worse – like I've got a dog turd smeared across my forehead. Oh, I know what he's thinking. What he thinks of me – You know, I was in hospital last term. Just before the summer holidays. A whole week, Guess how many times Dad visited...

*Slight pause.*

Spilt milk. Been there. Seen it. Boo-hooed that! (Ridley: 1998, 82-3)

Others arrive, invading the space and the moment of bonding that the rooftop retreat allows, bringing with them the dominant attitudes of the 'real' world below. First Carol, a "wannabe" Natasha, then the boys, Russell, the bully, accompanied by his side kicks, the indistinguishable Buzz and Speed, the pack leader Shane "the Brooding. Shane the Cool. Shane the Let's-Paint-My-Bedroom-Black. Shane the Let's-Stick-A-Compass-in-My-Palm-Whenever-I'm-Fed-Up" (Ridley: 1998, 85). The final character to arrive is Polly's brother Finn, who is labelled "the monster" due to his size and learning difficulties, but who the audience is told "cries easily, if you must know" (Ridley: 1998, 74).

Once they are all assembled violence ensues as the boys continue their tormenting of Jake, by dangling him over the edge of the tower-block. He is saved by Polly, instigating a storytelling game that eventually has them all devising and improvising a fairy-tale – where each adolescent works through some of the problems they face in their lives "off the roof". In his review Macaulay claims that:

The story is "just" a fairy story, about a princess in a forest, the king her father who rejected her, a prince who falls in love with her, a witch, a wizard, a frog, and a giant. But, very unpretentiously, *Sparkleshark* is about the making of art and about its transforming power (Macaulay: 1999).

It is a play for young people about the "transforming power" of art, but it is also a play that raises questions about unrestricted places available to the young and the radicalisation of "outlawed spaces". Jake's imagination, and the group's cohesive storytelling, enables the space to

become in Lefebvre's words: "alive...quantitative, fluid and dynamic" (Lefebvre: 1991, 42). The groups 'lived' experience of the rooftop allows them to inscribe their meaning on the space and so the rooftop becomes a space of resistance. The audience witnesses the characters work together and in doing so defy their socially prescribed roles:

Jake But a Dragon we must fight! And it's a fight we will win! We'll win because we'll fight it together. Individually – we don't stand a chance. But together – oh, look at us! We are invincible! Are we together?

All Yes!

Jake (*louder*) Are we united?

All (*louder*) Yes! (Ridley: 1998, 119)

As the characters do this they also find the strength to address their own individual problems within the storytelling context. Each plays a part in the play and enacts a role within the story they tell that exhibits similar traits to that of their characters. Jake finds the courage to come out from "behind the bins", Polly and Natasha confront fathers, the three 'wannabes' and 'sidekicks' find their individuality while Shane and Russell overcome the 'dream-boat' and brooding stereotypes that they have conformed to. This enables a moment when Russell rushes to help Jake rather than brutalise him:

*Russell rushes forward and pulls Jake away from Finn*

Jake Wh...what are you doing?

Russell The Dragon's broken your arm. You can't carry on. Let me take your sword. Please (Ridley: 1998, 121).

Even the 'monstrous' Finn wins approval and acceptance and the others work hard to stop Finn, the dragon, crying:

Shane What can we do to stop him crying?

*Slight pause.*

Polly You must lay your hands on the Dragon and say ...Oh, tell the Dragon you're his friend (Ridley: 1998, 123).

This tiny moment within the enactment clearly enables the audience to understand that the character of Finn (which is much like that of his dragon role) is lonely and also needs friends. The dramatisation of the fairy-tale ends in an idyllic, if predictable happy ending whereby Jake tells the group that:

And, from that moment on, the land lived in perfect peace. The Prince and the Princess lived happily in their Castle. The Wizard and the Witch created planets together. The one-time horses, Thunder and Lightning, became best friends with the one-time frog and nightingale. I – the King – was forgiven. And, at night, if children saw a strange light in the sky, their parents would say. ‘Don’t worry, my love. That’s just moonlight on the Dragon’s wings’ (Ridley: 1998, 124).

This textbook, picture perfect ending is echoed by the characters’ acknowledgement that: “It was all of us. Together! The story belongs to all of us” (Ridley: 1998, 124). The final words of the play reiterate those sentiments with the group refusing to let the moment go and committing to future fantasy sessions in a scene that is almost too saccharinely sweet for audience tastes:

Russell But...we can’t just stop there!

Shane We should meet again...

Natasha And we’ll tell another story!

Russell All of us together!

All yeah!

Russell We should call ourselves something!...

Finn...Sparkleshark!

*Slight pause*

*They start making their way up the metal staircase to the raised platform...*

*They all smile at each other, then look at the roof around them. Then, suddenly and simultaneously, they all punch the air with the clawed salute and –*

All (*triumphantly*) SPARKLESHARK! (Ridley: 1998, 126).

In his review of the revival of the play, Macaulay claims that:

Laughter was widespread; and mine were not the only tears. As people - young and old - left the theatre after Philip Ridley's hour-long play, it was apparent that Sparkleshark had carried many of us through real emotion and wonder (Macaulay: 1999).

The fairy-tale atmosphere that is created by this piece allowing 'real emotion and wonder' holds until the end of the final 'triumphant Sparkleshark', but the spell is broken in the blackout that follows. During this moment the audience is left to ponder on the fact that as the characters leave the rooftop they must return to the ground. Although they have witnessed a bonding and growing understanding between the characters, it is hard to believe that anything has changed outside of this 'magic' rooftop space. The play clearly conveys a message about the power of storytelling and communication leading to understanding. However, ultimately nothing changes within the wider contexts of these characters' circumstances.

The somewhat flat, two dimensional characters that Ridley writes for his audience are not presented as examples of naturalistic characters, but archetypes, and ultimately this role playing fantasy is a staged fairy-tale that is not an authentic representation of young people on a London council estate in 1997 or 1999. It is, however, a fairy-tale that promotes questions for the world beyond the theatre, and leaves those questions with the audience in, and after, the blackout. This play challenges the idea of the family home as a place of safety which provides protection from an outside world that is uncontrollable and dangerous. Social geographer, David Sibley in his 1995 essay 'Families and Domestic Routines: Constructing the Boundaries of Childhood' argues that:

For children in the most highly developed societies, the house is becoming a haven...at the same time, the outside becomes more threatening, populated by potential molesters and abductors, so the boundary between home (safe) and the locality (threatening) is more strongly defined (Sibley: 1995, 121).

His essay considers the boundaries where children feel they should and should not go and the excitement or anxiety caused by the transgression

of these boundaries. Here what is pertinent to my reading of the plays of the period in which he was writing is that the perceived safety of the home is preferable to the perceived danger of the world outside the home. Sibley draws on a study by Hillman, Adam and White-Legg entitled 'One False Move: A Study of Children's Independence, and Mobility', conducted between 1971 and 1990. This work documents what the writers perceive as a withdrawal of children from the outside and public spaces. They claim that:

More of our lives are now spent in cocoons of house and car, and the outside world has become impersonal. As the streets fill with traffic, they tend to empty of people, and as street life retreats and public transport declines, the world outside also becomes more menacing (Sibley: 1990; 90-91).

Sibley argues that there is a spatial binary that works to ensure that young people remain within the 'safe' boundaries of the home, the school and other institutionally organised spaces where they are subjects of the technologies of discipline and a perceived withdrawal of children from unregulated spaces. The characters of *Sparkleshark* opt to inhabit rather than withdraw from these public 'unregulated' spaces and use the rooftop of their tower block homes as a geography of resistance that offers a 'haven' from their family homes. The rooftop is therefore an unregulated space that is not school or the family home but is a 'third space'.

Cultural geographers Matthews, Limb and Taylor in an essay entitled 'The Street as Thirdspace' (2000) consider the perceived "progressive retreat from the street by urban children" (Matthews, et al: 2000, 63). They suggest that young people are "increasingly confined to acceptable 'islands' by adults and so are spatially outlawed from society" (Matthews, et al: 2000, 63). This is a development of the 1995 argument presented by Sibley. The rooftop in *Sparkleshark*, is such an outlawed space, a space where young people can meet in an unsupervised or unregulated area, where they are seen as neither end of the binary that defines young people at large in society ('angels' or 'demons'); neither are they a threat to adult ownership of public spaces and a menace to others and

neither are they seen to be vulnerable or under threat themselves. Matthew, Limb and Taylor assert that the street is “an important part of [children’s] everyday lives, a place where they retain some autonomy over space” (Matthews, et al: 2000, 64) and in Ridley’s play the children’s ‘street’ where they can be seen to have autonomy, is the rooftop. This ‘thirdspace’, becomes a space in which they “can gather to affirm their sense of difference and celebrate their feelings of belonging” (Matthews, et al: 2000, 64). It is a ‘lived space’ where they develop their own identities and challenge hegemony by contesting social conventions and asserting their independence. The audience assumes that this is a temporary reprieve and resistance because the fairy-tale ambiance ensures that the audience accepts that this is not reality either in the theatre or for real young people. The audience are invited to ‘fill the gap’ and question the need for such outlawed spaces and the conditions from which young people feel the need to escape from, if only temporarily. As such this ‘thirdspace’ of the rooftop haven represents Ricoeur’s third level of Utopia. On the rooftop, albeit only for a brief part of the day, this group of characters can be seen to be “exploring the possible”, as they explore the “possibilities of living without hierarchical structure and instead with maturity (Ricoeur: 1983, 310). The audience witnesses characters that are still living within the ideological circle, but not entirely conditioned by it, for these characters change becomes possible.

This play confronts the challenge of creating a better future by exploring what could be and in doing so invites the audience to question social reality and the assumptions that there are no alternatives to existing social structures such as the family. In *Sparkleshark* I suggest that the alternative offered for consideration is that of the neo-family. The group provide emotional support for each other and create a network based on friendship that generates a sense of belonging and security while out of the family home in a ‘third’ lived space. The play invites the audience to reflect how this neo-family provides what is missing from the characters’ families through its theatricality; the two dimensional characters, the storytelling and role playing devices that create gaps in which the

audience can reflect in the moment. A similar use of space and theatrical devices can be seen in Rebecca's Prichard's *Yard Gal* (1998), in which the audience witnesses a group of young people finding a safe, third space inside a disused block of flats.

### **The Girl Gang as Neo-family – *Yard Gal***

In Rebecca Prichard's *Yard Gal* (1998, Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London) there are six female characters who form a "posse" or gang who have the air of a neo-family about them. The plot of this two hander play focuses on the story of two of the characters, Boo and Marie and their relationships with each other and the 'posse'. The actors play out these roles through multiple role-playing, direct audience address and storytelling techniques reacting to the major events in the gangs' lives:

BOO This is a story about me and Marie and the posse that we used to move with. It's about chatting shit, getting fucked, getting high and doing our crimes innit (Prichard: 2001, 5).

The gang meet in a derelict flat which becomes a home to them. The structure of this peer group mimics that of a family demonstrating that the idealised image of familial home life is strong and the audience witnesses an acknowledged form of neo-family where the girls actively recreate an abandoned family home as substitute for their dysfunctional traditional family homes and relationships. In doing this they make the abandoned flat a place of safety and security. The gang includes a mother figure in the form of "Threse!... the mampee of our crew" (Prichard: 2001, 6). The gang also provides a sense of safety and security for the individual members:

Everybody chats about the violence and the guns and drugs on the East Sides, saying we should get out – but uh uh – no way – I don't leave my roots at all. That's what I was born and brought up wiv – and that's what I stay with. I'm a rude gal. I'm a Hackney gal! And wherever I go everybody knows I'm there. Nobody touch me, nobody talk to me and nobody come near me cos they cross me they know my crew cut them up (Prichard: 2001, 5-6).

Marie, Boo and one of the other members of the 'posse', Deanna, have been in the care system and found that it or their biological family home supported by the tutelary complex provided them with no safe haven.

- MARIE She was from the kids' home. That's where Boo's from as well. I live with me Dad.
- BOO But most of the time I go up Hackney. Cos I hated it at the home. They call it a kids home, but basically it was a nut house. I was like fifteen and I couldn't wait to get out.
- MARIE Me and Sabrina and Threse we used to love going up there. We climb in through the windows at night. There was nuff drink and nuff gear in there. You could get out your box and nobody done nothing. The carers they just see it as a job din't they (Prichard: 2001, 8).

The characters portrayed in this play find their only safety in the gang and their squat:

- MARIE But most the time we spend with the girls innit.
- BOO Sitting on walls wiv a drink when the sun was shining – smokin' up.
- MARIE And getting high.
- BOO We had a squat in Hackney where we used to go and ready to go raving – and where we come back to sleep it off (Prichard: 2001,15).

In this way, this neo-family is more developed than that of the child characters in *Sparkleshark*. In *Yard Gal* the characters appear to commit to each other for more than just a couple of hours a day. In the moments of the play where the audience witnesses the girls getting ready to "go raving" they observe a sense of community amongst the gang members. Each character helps the other characters to get ready and it is possible to see that they rely on each for the sense of security that traditionally comes with family membership; here we see a possible model for neo-family.

- MARIE I do your hair, and you do Deanne's. Nobody done Sabrina's cos she already spent all day on it anyway (Prichard: 2001, 15).

The group appears to take responsibility for each other – this is particularly in evidence with the characters of Boo and Marie and Boo literally looks after her friend's health. The two take responsibility for

each other and form the basis of a neo-family demonstrated in the following extract:

BOO            I keep my eye out for Marie, in case we see a body – She has fits sometimes don't ya. And its only me that knows what to do. It almost makes me feel happy sometimes when she have a fit, it mek me feel happy that I know what to do. She just starts shaking and shit and I get people's coats and I put them under her, and I stroke her hair. And make everybody keep back (Prichard: 2001, 20).

The play weaves in and out of the gangs' experiences with the police, drugs, violent fights and stabbings, prostitution and theft. It is littered with numerous references to dysfunctional and dangerous biological family relationships demonstrating that the girls provide each other with the only relationships they can rely on and in which the squat is their only safe space. As the play develops the audience observes the safe squat space turn into one of extreme danger for Deanna, who while drunk, climbs onto the ledge of the balcony:

...she raise herself up standing on the ledge. She was swaying unsteadily. The light from the window was lighting up her face and all behind her was black. And the wind made her scream. She was just screaming going "YARD GAL WE A RUN TING! I felt it inside and I said out loud "Shit she gonna kill herself" Sabrina goes "Don't touch her man – you push her off." Deanna was laughing going "Come up here man it's wicked," like she was lovin' it – but I see her fear. She kept her feet still and her body was stiff underneath her movement. She goes "Wine ya body gal" and she make a few moves like to dance. She lose her balance and out her hand out to catch herself. I look at Sabrina's eyes and they was staring. I look at Marie and her eyes was closed. (*Marie closes her eyes.*) It 'appen so fast. One minute she was laughin' and the next I see her face look scared. I see her strain as she go back and out a hand out like we might catch her and then she was gone (Prichard: 2001, 24-5).

The 'posse' do not "catch" Deanna, either practically or metaphorically and the safe squat space proves to be unsafe for Deanna and then the remaining gang members who must leave the area:

We just had to run out of the flat or they would question us again when the ambulance come (Prichard: 2001, 25).

After Deanna's death the gang fragments; each goes their separate way and from this point on the play the group are beset with problems, violence and insecurity.

Marie goes back to her family home where her father beats her and ultimately rapes her and the sense of neo-family and the safety that comes with that is dispersed and the gang stop looking out for each other. When they are attacked by a rival gang, 'Wendy's posse', Marie and Boo are left to fend for themselves when "suddenly Sabrina goes "Shit man you on your own" (Prichard: 2001, 29). It is as if Deanna's death has broken the group bond because they realise that they could not save her and from this point on little responsibility is taken by the members for each other. In the ensuing fight Marie gets stabbed and the gang eventually turn on each other. Boo attacks Sabrina for not supporting them:

BOO ..and Sabrina's like "What's the matter with you man, it's Marie that got cut not you"...Threse was avoiding us for days ..."Whass up wid you? You nuh say we been friends from time so I back you up but I'm sick of your shit...Ya done Marie bad man, you done her wrong. And hear this. You make me sick...You let us down bad man. Don't be treating people like shit or don't be crying when they turn round and do you the same way. Ya lost man. You'll 'ave no one." Threse fucking boxed me (Prichard: 2001, 30).

This pessimistic note to the play implies that the neo-family and the third space they create are not a viable alternative and that gang does not provide support anymore than dysfunctional biological families. My reading of this play is that within the sequences before Deanne's death, the audience observes what Ricoeur might describe as "a partially realised utopia" (1991, 313). Ricoeur describes this concept in his text *From Text to Action*, where he claims:

There are (partially) realised utopias. These are, mainly microsocieties, some more permanent than others, ranging from the monastery to the kibbutz or commune. But they are utopian in the sense that they constitute kinds of laboratories or miniature experiments for broader projects involving the whole of society (1991, 313).

Rather than demonstrating that there is no alternative to the present social and spatial order, the play offers an alternative. Ricoeur describes these partially realised utopias:

Such atoms of self-management are all challenges to the bureaucratic state. Their claim for radical equality and the complete redistribution of the ways in which decisions are made implies an alternative to the present uses of power in our society (Ricoeur: 1991, 131).

Therefore possible alternatives are presented to the audience in the scenes of the play where the posse demonstrates its ability to self-manage. In the final moments of the play the audience observes possible results of this experiment and a real sense of the emergence of hope can be felt.

This optimism can be seen in the relationship between Boo and Marie and their friendship. In the words of Boo, “friends are the people who wanna take care of you and you wanna take care of them (Prichard: 2001, 38). Boo sacrifices her freedom for Marie, by taking responsibility for Marie’s crime and going to prison for stabbing Wendy. This allows Marie and her baby to start to live a different life away from the posse where she takes responsibility for “little Bukola” (Prichard: 2001, 41). This mirrors the way in which the elder Bukola, or Boo, has taken care of Marie. Utopian scholar Ruth Levitas, drawing on her own reading of Ricoeur, argues that “utopia is about how we would live and what kind of a world would we live in if we could do just that” (Levitas: 1990, 1). In this play then the audience witness Marie living in a utopic world, which she has defined. A utopia where individuals learn to take responsibility for each other and live up to that responsibility by creating the space and support networks to do so.

I argue that the final stages of this play proffer the audience an opportunity to, in the words of Jill Dolan in her text *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*, “crystallize social relations and offer them to spectators for critical contemplation” and that therefore this play is “utopian” in its ability to

persuade us that beyond this “now” of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we’re seared by the promise of a present that gestures towards a better later (Dolan: 2005, 7).

The structure and content of the play together enable the audience to “crystallise” or reflect on the social conditions that have allowed Marie to make this change. In my reading of this play this neo-family almost reaches the third level of Ricoeur’s utopia where change becomes possible. The posse in this play does not present the audience with a fully-fledged successful vision of a neo-family collective that works to support its members, but it does present them with a model from which a utopic vision can be glimpsed and then built upon in the future. *Yard Gal* was not the only play of this period to provide audiences with a look at a ‘posse’ of young people. The following section considers two further plays through which the concept of the gang is presented as an alternative support network to that of the family.

### **The Family Gang – *Mojo***

Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo*, (1995, Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, London) also focuses on a gang that may offer a neo-family as an alternative to the nuclear family. In this play the family home is, again, portrayed as being a space that creates a damaged and damaging young man in the form of a character called Baby. The plot involves a small time London gang operating in the 1960s and focuses on the relationship between the gang members in the aftermath of the murder of their leader at the hands of a rival gang. The hierarchical structure of the gang is examined as the character of Mickey takes control supplanting the natural heir, Baby. Baby is, according to Stuart Young’s review in *Theatre Journal*, the most interesting character due to his “psychopathic behaviour” (1997). He is also the most interesting character with regards to this thesis as his character is pivotal to both family and gang relationships. *Mojo* like, Ravenhill’s plays *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Handbag* (1998) also focuses partly on the search for father figures. Although Ezra, gang leader and the father of Baby, has been present during Baby’s childhood

and is in fact present, or at least his body is, throughout Act One. He proves to be an abusive parental figure and the audience is given the opportunity to consider a variety of surrogate fathers for Baby and fellow fatherless gang member Skinny throughout the play.

The first of these potential surrogate fathers is Mickey. Skinny, the club skivvy and often Baby's victim, clearly looks up to Mickey and treats him like a father. During his constant squabbles with Baby, he calls on Mickey to protect him and referee the fights between the two of them. When, at the start of Act One Scene One, Baby has him tied to a chair, Skinny is relieved to see the arrival of Mickey: "Mickey. Christ. Thank Christ" (Butterworth: 1995, 15). Later in the scene after taunting Baby, Skinny attempts to hide behind the protection of Mickey again: "I'm going to get hurt here Mickey... This is it Mickey. You see? It's time..." (Butterworth: 1995, 19)

Skinny's biological father is missing, but he has a replacement in the form of an Uncle who he appears to idolize:

My Uncle Tommy was in the R.A.F, yeah, and when they were pinned down, and some, say someone said, here Tom, Tommy, fetch me a bit of cake or a cuppa tea you did it because of team spirit (Butterworth: 1995, 49).

Although this is the only section of the play where Uncle Tommy gets a mention, it is clear from the reactions of the other characters that they have heard many similar anecdotes before:

Potts: Uncle Tommy and his Halifax bomber. Uncle Tommy who shot down Hitler. Uncle Tommy who pinned down the bosch single-handedly at the Somme (Butterworth: 1995, 49).

Skinny's character does not refer to any problems or difficulties at home with the Uncle "who is shackled up with" his mother. The audience are left to wonder why Skinny still searches for male role figures. I suggest that this is a critique of the family, and therefore parents and their central role in the socialisation and education of children. As discussed in Chapter Four, those finding themselves outside of this social structure feel the need to search out and inhabit a family model that resembles

that of the nuclear family. Here Skinny transfers the father role to Mickey and he attaches himself to Mickey so closely that the others become jealous and imply that there is something of the homoerotic in their relationship. "Mickey and Skinny got hitched...Whirlwind romance. Very touching" (Butterworth: 1995, 53). At the same time Skinny also casts Baby as a sibling in his make-believe nuclear family. Skinny demonstrates this by copying Baby's dress and style much to Baby's irritation:

Lo and behold Luke walks in this morning it's like I'm looking in a mirror...He copies my walk. I look over there, there's another me. ..It's because he likes me. Oh I know he loves me (Butterworth: 1995, 33).

In this all male play that focuses on the world of gangsters, threats, and violence issues of sexuality and the need for protection are rife in many forms. The play's focus on father-and-son relationships dominate the narrative and centre the audience's attention on the search for male identity and role models. Ezra, Baby's actual father, and the 'father' or leader of the gang, is certainly absent during the performance (although there are constant references to his dismembered body either in the bins in the back yard or actually inside the club and in the fridges) but the plot revolves around this father-and-son relationship. Sierz observes that the play is largely about the relationship between Ezra and Baby. The audience "only sees Baby's side of the relationship. In other words it never sees the relationship but only its effects on Baby" (Sierz: 2001, 166).

Baby's development is the central story of the plot of the play. At the start he is shown to be a taunting, teasing, tantrum and chair throwing child who "couldn't find his way to the gents in this place without asking" and who "Ezra wouldn't trust" (Butterworth: 1995, 11). By the closing scene of the play, he is a leader of the gang, worthy of taking the place of his father, a character who can stand up to Mickey and who is capable of killing and torturing those who stand in his way. At the start Baby is presented as an irritating, lazy, incompetent youth who takes little

interest in the club. The other characters show no surprise that he loses his keys to the club. I argue that the fundamental root of his lack of responsibility and strength lies in the abusive relationship he has with his father. On hearing of his father's death, Baby hardly reacts at all. This lack of emotion leads Potts to comment that his father's death doesn't hurt him. Sweets replies:

...yeah but there's dads and dads. You're thinking of a dad. Like in a book. Fucking figure of something...Not some bloke waits for you to come home from school stuffs his hand down your pants. Not one that has you biting the sheets and then don't tell your mum (Butterworth: 1995, 44).

According to theatre scholar Ken Urban this dialogue "reveals that his cruel and erratic behaviour stems from the violent abuse he received at the hands of his father. This results in the fact that he cannot feel that any action in the world has any meaning" (Urban: 2004, 368). Baby's character describes this numbness in his final confrontation with Mickey:

Sometimes when I wake up I feel totally not there. I feel completely numb. And I think, Come on. Come alive. Feel it. Like you used to. But I'm numb. I lie there, and my mind spins on nothing (Butterworth: 1995, 77).

Baby, in common with Debbie in *Fair Game* (1997), demonstrates that he is incapable of empathy. He, like Debbie, has learnt not to feel himself and hence the ease with which he shoots fellow gang member and potential sibling Skinny, and will eventually deal with Mickey.

Butterworth provides details of Ezra's abusive behaviour and makes it clear that his violent and sexually abusive behaviour is common knowledge amongst gang members. With the arrival of the character Silver Jonny, Ezra grooms a surrogate son to take the place of Baby. Skinny draws the audiences' attention to the nature of this developing relationship when he exclaims that:

Ezra never saw straight again the day the kid walked in here. Buying him silver suits. Wearing tight trousers himself...Just because some old man wants to fuck children for a hobby don't mean we all have to die in his good name (Butterworth: 1995, 47).

With Ezra's death comes some sense of release for Baby who starts to take on the mantle of his father proving himself to be a 'docile body' who like the character of Jay in *Bruises* (1995) has learnt how to behave and conduct business from his abusive role model. He systemically puts the facts together and unmasks the traitor in their midst. After this he moves from strength to strength, offering to run the club jointly with Mickey, wishing to be more like him (Butterworth: 1995, 34). Mickey rejects this idea treating Baby like the infant that they are used to, sending him upstairs like a naughty child. At this point the audience observes Baby as he realises that he must take control. Confronting Mickey publicly first in a macabre dance, then with his father's cutlass and finally with the facts of his treachery.

It is in his one-sided conversation with the bound and upside down Silver Johnny that the audience start to gain more of an insight into the character of Baby as he reveals the sheer terror he felt at the hands of his father. He recounts the story of a night drive when he:

Noticed that in the front of the cab there's this big bag of sharp knives. And like, a saw and a big meat cleaver.

And I thought 'This is it. He's going to kill me. He's going to take me off and kill me once and for all'. And I sat there in silence all the way to Wales and I knew that day I was about to die (Butterworth: 1995, 67).

During this scene with the silent and gagged Johnny, Baby reveals much of himself, asking if Johnny knows why he is called Baby and then reverting to the chorus of a rock n' roll song. This scene with its brutal language and imagery and the physical presence of a tortured Johnny Silver, allows the audience to reflect on the conditions that brought Baby to this point and the inhumanity that has developed through the privacy of the domestic sphere. Both characters on stage have been abused and damaged by staying in a nuclear family structure that enables the abuse to continue uninterrupted. This scene implies that even the death of Ezra will not halt the abuse as Baby has now become Ezra's replacement, just as Maureen becomes Mag's replacement in Martin McDonagh's *The*

*Beauty Queen of Leanne* (1996) and the patterns of behaviour have been set for life just as surely as they have been for the women in Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (1996). The end of *Mojo* (1996), however, as opposed to these texts, is filled with optimism. Baby takes control of the space and asserts his authority within the space. He does not need a "third space" in which to do this. Baby changes the perceived notion of this club space, changing the defined routines that have socially produced this space for the gang up to this point, refusing to passively accept the role that has been prescribed to him. The 'home' space of gang therefore becomes a site of resistance in which Baby resists the social regulations places on him, adapting the rules for all those who frequent this space.

The character sheds his role as the Baby and is finally addressed as Luke, as light literally floods the stage and a new day breaks:

Silver Johnny. I opened the windows.  
Baby I can smell the dawn. Good Is the sun out?  
Silver Johnny. It's getting hot out (Butterworth: 1995, 80).

The end of the play is almost, to quote the words of Edward Bond, "irresponsibly optimistic" as the audience witness Baby/Luke take control and take his inheritance as well as a new respect from the gang members. They also observe his new found ability to empathise and to let in his own feelings. There is hope for the now adult Baby who can feel emotions and is able to offer Silver Johnny a real relationship and, therefore, the hope of a better life:

Baby Do you want to go out there.  
Silver Johnny. What?  
Baby Out in the street. Get a nice cool drink. Walk around. It's lovely out this time. It's my favourite time of day. Before anything happens.  
Silver Johnny Okay.  
Baby Good. Good. Let's do that (Butterworth: 1995, 80).

The play ends with a utopic vision and two characters that are ready to re-envisage family groupings and take responsibility for each other. The two abused characters leave the set together, free of Ezra, and in control

of their own lives, Baby leaves the silver jacket on the floor as a symbolic leaving behind of the past and “*Exit Baby and Silver Johnny into the light*” (Butterworth: 1995, 80). Baby has first taken responsibility for himself and now for Silver Johnny and they are able to start again, in a new day and recreate social relationships and space in a new way. I would argue that in this way Butterworth is presenting the audience with two characters who are a neo-family of two, in a utopian vision.

Butterworth’s uses reflexive pauses created by both the characterisation and plot both revolving around the search for father figures and the abuse these figures deal out invite the audience to reflect on the role of fatherhood. While at times the play appears to be naturalistic, the dialogue is fraught with stylistic nuances designed to create a sense of distancing inviting a reflection on both the events and characters. The opening sequence of the play thrusts the spectators into the heightened theatrical world of the play. In the words of the theatre critic for the *Independent on Sunday*, Michael Church, the play opened with a:

Bam! To deafening rock, a sequined Elvis-figure hip-swivels in strobe lights until, with the music still pounding the stage goes black. Then – sudden silence, bright lights, and two spivs in sharp suits perched on stools. A *coup de theatre* cries out with whip-cracking precision (Church: 1995).

The dialogue continues at this pace throughout the production and for many theatre critics proved difficult to follow. The *Sunday Times* and The *Sunday Telegraph’s* reviewers also felt the need to comment on the dialogue while Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* used much of his review to comment on this aspect of the production saying that Butterworth’s:

demotic dialogue often makes David Mamet seem like Enid Blyton. Obscenity is piled on obscenity, wild slang upon wild slang and the effect is irresistibly energetic. Butterworth turns his sleazy, inarticulate characters into non-stop spouters of insane urban poetry...they repeat or vary the same phrase again and again, like jazz musicians improvising...we get all our information for much of the first half from two small-time associates, popping pills and waiting nervously (Spencer: 1995).

This rapid delivery of the “urban poetry” styled dialogue and reportage, according to Ian Shuttleworth, of the *Financial Times*, “leaves the audience, like his characters, scrambling to keep up with barely suggested twists” (Shuttleworth: 1995). In other words, it leaves the audience to piece together the plot as they prize out nuggets of information. The heightened theatricality of the poetic non-naturalistic style of the language works as a means of distancing which invites the audience to reflect and consider the information they are given. Audiences find themselves in a similar position when watching *Ghosts from a Perfect Place* (1994) by Philip Ridley. Here they must piece together the events that happened in the East End of the 1960s to make sense of the events of the same area in the Nineties. In this play we are told by Neil Smith of *What’s On* that “Ridley gives us conflicting messages but no clues” (Smith: 1994a). While John Gross said that as audience you would “gradually piece together what lies behind the nostalgia” (Gross: 1994). Having pieced this together the spectators are able to consider the versions of families that these texts offer. In both these plays the act of piecing together the plot places the audience at a distance from the plot itself or creating what Ricoeur might describe as a “referential moment” (Ricoeur: 1991, 292). This is in effect a dialectical process that invites the audience to hold two aspects, the world of the play and the world outside together and is an “opening up of the world by the work (Ricoeur: 1991, 292). This creates a distance from not only the narratives, but also for the audience members from themselves and the world they know creating understanding of that world through the distance. Both of these plays create a distancing that allows for reflection on the family structures at the centre of the narrative and therefore expose the myth that the family home is a place of safety and protection.

In *Mojo* (1996) the family and its home territory provides little or no protection for its individual members who suffer at the hands of fathers or father figures. However, the play does provide a glimpse of neo-family relationships that have the potential to break away from constricting and

regulating traditional family roles, and a utopian spirit as the characters have the opportunity and the willpower to search for a new space and new social structure that may be better able to support them. In doing so Butterworth presents the audience with an opportunity to confront the conditions of the world outside the theatre and conceive different ways of living. The play, as the others discussed within this thesis, provides the audience with no answers or solutions, but leaves that different way of living open to individual interpretation and clearly is therefore an example of utopic reflexive theatre that has the potential to “shatter contemporary illusions and open up possibilities” (Pinder: 2005, 130). Each character or pair of characters at the end of these plays is left in a ‘no where’ in which new possibilities open for them or in the words of Ricoeur, the “field of the possible is now open beyond that of the actual, a field of alternative ways of living” (Ricoeur: 1991, 312). The question is now, as posed by Ricoeur “whether imagination could have any constitutive role?” outside of the play (Ricoeur: 1991, 312).

*Mojo* takes a further step towards an alternative social structure than either Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) or Edward Bond’s *The Children* (2001) and Judy Upton’s *Sliding with Suzanne* (2001). All four of these plays end on a note of what theatre critic Charles Spencer describes as “feel-good euphoria” (Spencer: 2001). In each case this euphoria arises out of a bleak and dystopic scene. Each play ends on an ambiguous note where the audience cannot know what the writers’ intentions are and the protagonists in each are left ‘hanging’. The audience must use their imagination to fill in the future with possibilities of a different life, possibilities where representations of young traumatised characters can find the strength to create a new way of existing, taking responsibility for themselves and for the others they meet along the way. It is unlikely that either will remake the past, but the way is left open to create a better way to live. These plays end on utopic moments where individual characters stand on the brink of a new future alone and ready to take responsibility for others, while Butterworth’s play gives the audience an example of a character that has started to build a new or neo-family. It is in Mark

Ravenhill's play *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) the audience is left with the clearest image of a complete neo-family in the theatre productions of this period.

### **Mark Ravenhill's Neo-family – *Shopping and Fucking***

Chapter Four of this thesis considered *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) specifically in regards to the character of Gary as an example of an abused young man, let down by both the tutelage complex and the potency of the idealised image of the privacy of the domestic sphere; it also looked at his search for the perfect surrogate father figure. Here I examine the neo-family presented in the relationship between the characters of Mark, Lulu and Robbie. These characters in the final moments of the play present the creation of an alternative and non-oppressive and restrictive family form. A network of relationships based on friendship and commitment that generates a sense of belonging, support and security providing both emotional and economic support. This is a family of choice or a new way of conceiving 'family' or intimate life that offers the individuals who are part of it, mutual involvement and support and shared responsibilities while acknowledging and realizing individual needs. The opening scene of the play focuses on these three characters as Lulu and Robbie encourage Mark to eat.

**Lulu and Robbie** are trying to get **Mark** to eat from a cartoon of takeaway food.

**Lulu** Come on. Try some.

*Pause*

Come on. You must eat.

*Pause*

Look, please. It's delicious. Isn't that right?

**Robbie** That's right

**Lulu** We've all got to eat.  
Here.

Come on, come on.  
A bit for me (Ravenhill: 2001, 3).

The characters fail in the attempt and Mark vomits on stage it is the first of many uncomfortable scenes for the audience.

Mark has bought Lulu and Robbie from a stranger in a supermarket when he offers them to him:

they're both mine. I own them. I own them but I don't want them – because you know something? They're trash. Trash and I hate them. Wanna buy them? (Ravenhill: 2001, 5).

He tells them “the shopping story” of how they came to live with him in his house at the start of the play, focusing on the importance of the home space.

And I take you both away and I take you to my house. And you see the house and when you see the house you know it. You understand? You know this place. And I've been keeping a room for you and I take you into this room. And there's food (Ravenhill: 2001, 5).

The characters know and understand the house and the situation because it replicates the social norm of the family home, but it is a setting that Mark can no longer tolerate and he announces, “Listen. I didn't want to say this But I have to. I'm going” (Ravenhill: 2001, 5).

The audience then witnesses the series of events that ensue as Lulu and Robbie try to take responsibility of themselves for the first time and the characters attempting to look after each other. In series of scenes that follow these characters take and sell drugs, abuse themselves and each other, are threatened and abused by Brian, and commoditise themselves as phone sex providers. Their chaotic lives lurch from one disaster to another, but throughout each event Lulu and Robbie are learning to take responsibility for first themselves and then each other.

Until the final scene comes full circle and presents the audience with Mark, Lulu and Robbie alone and together again. Mark retells the

“shopping story” but this time as a utopic vision of the future. A future in which:

It's the future. The Earth has died. Died or we killed it.  
But humanity has survived. A few of us...jumped ship (Ravenhill: 2001, 89).

Or a future in which there are no prescribed roles and where a new social structure can be imagined. A future where Mark can purchase an alien “mutant creature” in the same manner in which he brought Lulu and Robbie, but this time the story ends with him telling the mutant that:

I'm freeing you. I'm setting you free. You can go now. And he starts to cry...he tells me:  
Please. I'll die. I don't know how to ...I can't feed myself. I've been a slave all my life. I've never had a thought of my own. I'll be dead in a week.  
And I say: That's a risk I'm prepared to take (Ravenhill: 2001, 90).

The mutant must learn to take responsibility for himself, just as Robbie and Lulu have done. The character of Lulu declares that she likes the ending (Ravenhill: 2001, 90). This is a stark contrast to the opening scene in which both she and Robbie were like the mutant terrified to be left alone. Having learnt to take responsibility for themselves and each other, they can now extend their neo-family to include Mark as an equal and not someone to take care of them. The end of the play sees the three characters feeding each other as equals, but each taking responsibility for the others.

Robbie Hungry now? I want you to try some. *(Of the ready meal.)*

*He feeds Mark with a fork.*

Nice?

Mark Mmmmm.

Robbie Now give him some of yours.

Lulu Do you want some?

*She feeds Mark*

Is that good?

Mark Delicious.

*Robbie You've got a bit of blood.*

Lulu Bit more?

Mark Why not?

Lulu *feeds him.*

Robbie My turn.

Robbie *feeds* Mark.

Mark, Robbie *and* Lulu *take it in turns to feed each other as the light fades to black* (Ravenhill: 2001, 90-91).

The utopic vision here is one of neo-family not conforming to prescribed roles but free from social structures that allows for an equality and joint care taking and giving, offering a progressive notion of what a family structure might look like.

Ricoeur argues that:

Utopia is the way in which we radically rethink what is family, consumption, government religion and so on. The fantasy of an alternative society and its topographical figuration 'no where' works as the most formidable contestation of what is (Ricoeur: 1991, 312).

In *Shopping and Fucking* the audience is presented with a radical rethinking of what family, consumption and government are. The audience is invited to reflect on the fantasy of might be and in so doing contest what *is*. Ricoeur continues to say that "ultimately what is at stake in utopia is the apparent givenness of every system of authority" and that "utopia always imply alternative ways of using power, whether in family, political, economic or religious life, and in that way they call established systems of power into question" (Ricoeur: 1991, 312).

My suggestion is, following Ricoeur, that the role of a reflexive theatre is to question structures and systems of power. A reflexive theatre enables audiences members to view current ideological constructs from a "no-

where” or at a distance in order to critique them is then utopic. Here I am interested in how reflexive theatre can invite audiences to question the concept of the family and may in turn make them agents of change.

This connection of the imagination and situating the audience as agents of change is the focus of Edward Bond’s theoretical writing and his plays for young people. I will consider Bond’s plays of 1993-2001 in detail in Chapter Nine because it is in his work that the connection between theatre and the idea of the social imagination, or social engagement come together most explicitly. I will argue that in Bond’s plays for young people he provides not only a critique of the social structures of both the family and education system but he also paves the way for an alternative in the form of a neo-family structure.

## Chapter Nine: Edward Bond and Using Theatre to Prompt Social Responsibility

### ***'You Have to Learn to be on Your Own'*** ***(The Children: Bond 2000)***

In this chapter I will focus on the work of Edward Bond as it is in his writing that the concepts reflexive utopian theatre and the neo-family can be seen to come together explicitly. There is an implicit assumption in his plays, and stated in his prose, that theatre invites reflection on the world and through this reflection the possibility of change. Bond deliberately positions his audiences as 'meaning makers'; as a result his theatre is politicised. Bond creates specific moments in his theatre for reflection and these moments or gaps function to create a dialogue between the plays and its audience. As reader response theory suggests, the audience builds on these gaps and develops a new understanding of their world as a result of this dialogue. This chapter considers how these gaps are filled in by the audiences' imagination and makes connections between Bond's theory of the imagination and Ricoeur's concept of the 'social imagination' and in doing so Bond's plays for young people can be read as both political and utopic in intent. This chapter considers how these gaps are filled in by the audiences' imagination and makes connections between Bond's theory of the imagination and Ricoeur's concept of the 'social imagination' and in doing so Bond's plays for young people can be read as both political and utopic in intent.

This chapter examines plays written by Edward Bond between the years of 1993 and 2001, focusing on Bond's representations of families and specifically the role of the child in the family structure. Bond uses characters of children in his theatre for young people as a means to examine the concept of what he describes as 'being human' (Bond: 2000a, 1). I argue that Bond's young characters invite audiences to reconsider social structures and contemplate alternative ways of living specifically in relation to the concept of the family. The chapter also

examines the way Bond's writing for young people is used as an educative tool to encourage and develop a sense of responsibility for both the individual and society. I argue that Bond creates reflexive gaps in his plays in which the audience is invited to consider the idea that society and controversially, the family are oppressive. I will demonstrate that this form of reflexive theatre invites the audience to consider their responsibilities and that this, in turn, opens the way for a utopic vision of social structures that support these responsibilities in the form of neo-families. Bond's theatre and theatrical pedagogy is predicated on the idea that the audience has agency and that the dynamic between the play, performance and audience is utopian. My reading of these plays, influenced by Foucault, suggests that Bond's work of the period represents how power over human beings is developed through disciplinary and regulatory techniques, particularly those of the family and education system. This chapter considers Bond's work in the light of Foucault's theory of the technology of the self as constituted through the dominant structures of power that regulate life. It will argue that in these plays Bond illustrates, in Marxist terms, that from early childhood, school educates young people to become "docile bodies" within the capitalist society.

In this chapter I bring together a Foucauldian reading of the plays with Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatus. In my reading of Bond's plays it can be seen that by offering the audience representations of young people within family structures on the cusp of adulthood, he invites the examination of the compliance, or resistance to, the institutions of power. Althusser considered the family and the school as being key "specialized institutions". In his 1917 text *On Ideology* he states that:

- I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions...
- the religious ISA (the system of different Churches)
  - the educational ISA (the systems of the different public and private 'Schools),
  - the family ISA (Althusser: 2008, 17)

In Bond's plays discussed below the audience witnesses representations of young people under the influence and control of two ideological state apparatuses working together; the family and the education system. Together these institutions can be seen as training young people to be compliant and to enter the work place. Each of Bond's young central characters is tested and offered choices that determine their ability to resist the disciplining and regulatory controls at work within society. Those who demonstrate this independence are shown to be able to take responsibility for firstly themselves and then others as they develop a social conscience and move away from traditional family structures towards neo-family support groups.

Throughout his long career Bond's work has been dominated by the question of what it means to be a human being in contemporary life and has often focused on the power structures that shape our existence. As a result, his work has frequently placed children, young people and their families at the centre of the work. His early work, particularly *Saved* first performed in 1965, can be seen to reverberate through many of the plays discussed here from the Nineties. In this period Bond, moved away from writing plays for adult audiences to producing theatre for young people, claiming that:

The Royal National Theatre trivialises drama and – with a consequence that is so inevitable it is almost the punishment inflicted on error by history – has made itself incompetent to deal with the problems of being human. It is a consequence that is the lesson of drama itself. I am not surprised that the Royal National Theatre has not learnt it (Bond: 2000a, 1).

As a result Bond shifted both the settings in which his plays are produced and context in which they are set. There is, however, a consistency in the political nature of his plays which is sharpened in his writing for young people. Bond's early work deals with the same issues and confronts its audiences with events that test the characters' (and the audiences') capacity for humanity. In his recent work, which is specifically aimed at young people, these concerns become more

focused through the use of adolescent central characters right on the boundary of adulthood, and their families.

### **Theatre and Social Justice**

Throughout his work Bond uses theatre to examine social injustice. By placing images of children and their families as central to his dramas he highlights the inequalities within this structure that lead to violence. Using children as the victims, survivors and perpetrators of violence, he positions the audience members to consider critically these injustices and the basic structures of society. Central to Bond's work is his belief that the social purpose of the theatre is to question what it means to be human and to explore alternative ways of living. Bond suggests that mainstream theatre demonstrates an 'incompetency' (Bond: 2000a, 1) in dealing with these problems. This resulted in Bond's work since 1995 being performed in the United Kingdom by a series of Theatre-In-Education companies and youth and community groups; 1995 saw the first collaboration between Bond and Big Brum with the production of *At the Inland Sea*. Within these performance contexts Bond believes that it is possible to "take young people back to important basic situations and enable them to question what it means to be a human being" (Bond: 1997a, 101). Using theatrical devices that create the distancing through a series of gaps or pauses in the narrative and structuring of the plays, as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, Bond's young audiences are required to 'make meaning' from what they are shown and reflect on the position of the characters within the performances and ask the question 'what would I do in that situation?' In this Bond is encouraging the audience to fill that 'gaps' he creates in the text and to consider alternative social structures. Bond is positioning the audience as potential agents for societal change and it is his intention is to create reflexive theatre that the audience both perceives and receives at the same time and invites a reconsideration of both what it is to be human and how to become more humane. This chapter will focus on a close

reading of how this is achieved in *Olly's Prison*, *Tuesday*, *11 Vests*, *At the Inland Sea* and *The Children*.

Throughout his working life Bond's main preoccupation has been with the question of 'what does it mean to be human?' He explains this view in an interview with Ulrich Koppen for *New Theatre Quarterly*:

My basic message remains the same, but it has developed. If you want to live in an inhuman world and accept it you become inhuman. You need to say why that world is inhuman, why it matters to you, and why you want to change it. It all relates to ownership. What I aim at is a form of socialism in which people can own themselves (Koppen: 1997, 104).

According to Bond living in and accepting the "inhuman" world results in a repression of human potential. Bond's examination of the frustration and injustice this creates clearly exhibits his Marxist principles and is reminiscent of the philosophies of Althusser. This repression of potential is the result of the constitution of human beings as subjects as interpellated by Ideological State Apparatuses, which allow the individual to become complicit in their subjugation. It is here that I make the connection with Foucault's theories of power being asserted through 'regulatory controls' or the bio-politics of the population. For Foucault it is the "development of the great instruments of the state, as *institutions* of power [that] ensured the maintenance of production relations" (Foucault: 1991, 263). In Foucault's work the repression of potential is the result of the institutions of power acting as "factors of segregation and social hierarchization" working to ensure "relations of domination and the effects of hegemony (Foucault: 1991, 263). These institutions of power work to create productive citizens by ensuring that young people's bodies undergo a "controlled insertion ...into the machinery of production" (Foucault: 1991, 263). Here the two institutions of power that play the most significant role in this "controlled insertion" are that of the family and that of the school system. Both the earlier Marxist concepts, and those of Foucault which I am using here to interpret Bond's work, and which were prevalent in the Nineties, explore complicit subjugation

and the waste of human potential which have been the themes underlining Bond's work since the 1960s.

This waste of potential is an extended preoccupation in Bond's work. It can be seen in the youths of *Saved* (1965) as in this play frustration leads a group of young men to act in inhuman ways. The character of Len watches as the gang kill the drugged baby as the audience do. This may create identification with Len's character. This identification invites the audience to question what they would do in similar circumstances. It positions them to consider what it would take to drive them to the same state of inhuman behaviour. Debra Castillo argues in her 1986 article "Dehumanized or Inhuman: Doubles in Edward Bond" that "Bond's theatre is political, and his focus of investigation is nothing less than the survival of all the human, humane qualities of the political animal, the dweller in a contemporary polis" (Castillo: 1986, 78). Bond's concept of "the human" or "humanness" is also debated by the drama educationalist, David Davis who argues that humanness:

is not a thing given to us, it is a relationship we create between other things nature, society, economy, rationality, emotion, imagination, the search for justice...the logic of humanness is always to achieve the balance between them which most increases our shared welfare and happiness, so that where there are enemies there are friends. If we get the balance wrong we destroy ourselves (Davis: 2005, 92).

So for Bond this "humanness" is the ability to offset "shared welfare" and "individual happiness" and here lies the political nature of this vision, in that humanness involves taking responsibility for the welfare of others. To be human and to "become more human" involves a search for this balance, and humanity is lost living within a dominant ideology where "authority replaces human responsibility and initiative with conformity" (Bond: 2000a, 119). For Bond drama "is the logic of humanness" (Davis: 2005, 92) and his plays throughout his career have attempted to explore this political commitment. Davis claims that Bond has "found a form of theatre that can face the individual with his or her social responsibilities" (Davis: 2005, pxvi).

It is clear that for Bond the role of the theatre is to raise questions about the values of humanity in contemporary society. Children, or adolescents, within their families provide a metaphor through which to explore these issues, both as the helpless charge, who are dependent on adults for survival, and as emerging independent beings struggling to form their own identity. This is why children and their parents have been prominent in many of Bond's plays. In his later productions these figures become more central to this 'basic message' as he explores "the effect on young people of the inhibiting and corrupting culture that Bond identifies as lurking at the heart of the modern capitalist-individualist society" (Davis: 2005, 10). For Bond the 'heart' of the modern society is a vacuum created by an unjust capitalist structure, a 'nothingness' that leads to frustration and ultimately to violence. He states that "the cause and solution of the problem of human violence lie not in our instincts but in our social relationships" (Bond: 1977, 12). Bond's theatre examines these social relationships often using the trope of the child and its family to emphasise his belief that contemporary society is inherently unjust. Clearly "there are wide differences in the sort of lives the people in it live. This creates discord" (Bond in Stuart: 2001, 117) and it is this discord that leads to unfilled lives and hence violence.

Bond's use of theatre to examine and question the naturalisation of systems of control and production which are at the roots of this "discord" can be seen as the antidote to mass produced popular culture. According to the Frankfurt School, mass produced popular culture is entertainment that anaesthetises the audience into accepting their docility. The Frankfurt School, and specifically Theodor Adorno, also argue that mass produced popular culture stops its audience thinking. Adorno explains in his essays 'On Popular Music' first published in 1941, and 'How to look at Television' first published in 1954 that, inequality and capitalist consumerism creates a vacuum that can never be filled. This vacuum generates a competitiveness that will not be satisfied, it ensures that the population exchange their labour for capital with which they can

purchase commodities, and this exchange of labour for capital produces industrious citizens who are “chained to their work and a system which trains them for work” (Adorno: 1991a, 193). The vacuum created by capitalist consumerism is filled by the ‘Culture Industries’ which ensure that the “commercial production of cultural goods has become streamlined, and the impact of popular culture upon the individual has concomitantly increased” (Adorno: 1991a, 160). The result is a mass produced popular culture and means of “psychological control”, which “patronizes and humiliates [the public] in order to summon up the strength for work, which is required of them under the arrangement of society” (Adorno: 1991a, 163). Thus popular culture is ‘standardized’ into a generic formula that can be accessed easily and mass produced cheaply whilst given an air of uniqueness. This ‘pseudo-individualism’ masks the standardization by “endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself” (Adorno: 1991b, 203).

The Culture Industries create “a profit centred social life” that can be “utilized for the recreation of expended labour power” (Adorno: 1991a, 189). This in turn eradicates time to think or in Adorno’s words “a certain unruliness of mind” (Adorno: 1991a, 190). This “unruliness of mind” allows the masses to be “distracted by spurious and illusory activities, by institutionalized vicarious satisfactions [rather] than face up to the awareness of how little access they have to the possibilities of change today” (Adorno: 1991a, 194). In the follow section I shall explore the idea that Bond’s plays provide an antidote to the distraction created by ‘spurious and illusory activities’ and invites audiences to face up to the possibility of, in fact the necessity of, creating changes today.

### **Theatre as an Antidote to the Commodified Cultural Industries**

Bond’s own theoretical writings resonate with ideas found in the writings of the Frankfurt School. He believes that mass produced entertainment distracted its audiences from having ideas of their own and creates

nothing but a meaningless illusion. In Ian Stuart's edited collection of Bond's letters, Bond writes that:

When the Imagination is not owned by the imaginer but by the state (which is our case) drama (as shown on TV and in films) must appear to be about ideas but in fact be idealess. Idea and emotion are *one* in drama. So state Imagination (money Imagination) creates a rictus in the psyche but is meaningless (a vacuum) in the spectator which is filled by illusion (Stuart: 1998, 55).

The result being a "fascination with cops-'n-robbers TV" and "reductive" film and television production that presents closed scenarios focusing on "*who dunit*" rather than the question that intrigues Bond of "*Why* they did it?" (Stuart: 1998, 55).

Bond's plays present their performers and audiences with material which invites them to think about the problems in society outside the theatre and encourages them to think about the 'whys' that he claims television and films distract them from. This I believe chimes with Ricoeur's theories on ideology and utopia as outlined in Chapter Two. By presenting the audience with situations and characters with which they are familiar Bond is creating "understanding at and through distance" (Ricoeur: 1991, 84). This distanciation in the moment of performance allows for reflection, thus enabling the audience to reflect on familiar settings and contexts in the world outside of theatre. The role of these plays becomes one of both raising critical questions and finding solutions; or in Bond's Marxist terms of filling the vacuum created by capitalist consumerism, by presenting situations that make these questions explicit:

I'm interested in situations and not characters. This is because the situation is the most interesting thing about the characters. I am not interested in what one man does! I am interested in what the situation produces and so in what everyone in it does and what it does to them (Stuart: 2001, 17).

Bond's plays invite audiences to reflect on 'what the situation produces' and what it does to his characters and audiences is akin to Ricoeur's concept of the social imagination. For both writers, the imagination is a

key concept in creating changes in society. Bond's theory here therefore, chimes well with my theory of reflexive theatre being utopian, which is also based on Ricoeur's concept of the social imagination. Bond outlines the way in which children can imagine a world before they have the facts and Ricoeur's theories consider how literature can stimulate the readers' imagination to create different possibilities from within the present circumstances, or 'after they have the facts'. In both cases drama or theatrical performance can stimulate the imagination on matters surrounding family structures and position audience members as agents for change who may see alternatives given the reflexive space to do so.

Bond achieves this partly in placing characters with which the audience identifies in extreme positions where they may lose control and become, in his terms, less humane. This makes Bond's theatre of the period, both reflexive and utopian. *Olly's Prison* demonstrates this in the opening scene when the audience is positioned to identify with a frustrated father figure. This play was written in 1991 and first performed as a televised drama for the BBC which aired in May 1993. In a long and harrowing series of events Mike loses control and strangles his only daughter. Throughout the scene Mike, and the audience, become more distressed by Shelia's obstinate silence. Mike's anguish at being ignored leads from pleas for a responsible relationship, "least we can treat each other like human beings in our own place" to an understandable frustration: "You work hard, try, where does it get you? You don't even know what's in their heads. I don't even know if you're listening" (Bond: 2003, 4-7) until the frustration eventually leads to anger:

Help me! No no...No she wont the hard-faced little bitch – grinning inside her head ...The bitch. The dirty little bitch...My god one day *you'll* ask and no one'll listen! You're my child – you hard-faced little slut...You Bitch! (Bond: 2003, 12)

There is an inevitability about the scene which is both "concentrated and intense" (Bond: 2003, 13). In the early stages of the scene the audience is in what Ricoeur might describe as a stage of Mimesis<sub>1</sub> or "prefiguration" (Ricoeur: 1984, 55). The length and intensity of this scene

is uncomfortable and the discomfort caused at witnessing the murder works as a means of distancing. In this distance a reflexive gap is created in which the audience is invited to consider the events and their logical conclusion. This happens because the audience make assumptions about what might happen based on previous knowledge of family relationships, before the final chilling moments of the scene. The audience then watch as Mike's anger leads inescapably to violence when he strangles his daughter.

Throughout the remainder of the play Mike denies the event whilst the audience waits for an explanation, or a way to make sense of the murder but this is withheld. Here the audience enters the stage of Mimesis<sub>2</sub> or "the kingdom of the as if" (Ricoeur: 1984, 64). In this stage the audience members may see that their assumptions in the mimesis<sub>1</sub> stage are justified, in that Mike does murder his daughter but they are frustrated at the lack of justification and explanation. Bond leaves a reflexive pause in the narrative as he states that his aim is not to give answers:

A writer is useful precisely when he does not provide answers. To provide answers would not be to give answers. The writer must define the problem – make the problem useful. If he knew the answers, it would still be useless to provide them: it's the act of answering that frees the audience – they must answer... He must expose the audience to the problems (Stuart: 2001, 325).

This is akin to mimesis<sub>3</sub> or 'refiguration', the site of an "intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader" (Ricoeur: 1984, 71) in which the audience members may adjust their comprehension of the real world with that of the play and opening up the "possibility of critique of the real" (Ricoeur: 1991, 292). Here the audience is exposed to a problem that is familiar to many parents and they are invited to initially identify with Mike's frustrations. Mike loses control and the audience witness Shelia's murder:

**Mike** *slams his hands round Shelia's neck, lifts her straight up out of the chair and strangles her. For a moment she is too shocked to react. Then her hands go up and claw at his hands. Her body wrenches round once so that it is sideways to the table – the chair comes around with her. The shape of her body is contained in his body as if they were one piece of sculpture. The struggle is*

*concentrated and intense – their bodies shake, vibrate, violently judder – like a magnified drop of water on the end of an icicle before it falls. Her hands claw more weakly, they seem to be patting his hands. No sound except breathing* (Bond: 2003, 12-13).

The 'concentrated and intense' death scene are reminiscent of the events in Scene Six of *Saved* as the baby is pinched and stoned to death over a prolonged period of time. As with his earlier play, Bond creates a need for the audience to understand how the actions intensify and this invites them to ask what it would mean for each of them to lose control in a similar manner. In doing so Bond raises questions that challenge the status quo as the audience is invited to examine the structures of society, and especially that of the family, that allow these events to occur and ideally, this may lead them to consider the changes that would need to be made to the construction of society and specifically the structure of the family to avoid future tragedy.

In discussing his writing for young people Bond's emphasis is the social role of the imagination, believing that, "in adult society the Imagination is controlled" (Stuart: 1998, 53). Whereas children are free to imagine and create a different world because they "imagine a world before they have [the] facts of real world" (Stuart: 1998, 52). Bond believes that this stimulation of the imagination is the role of drama and especially the role of drama for young people:

Drama is at the foundation of the human mind. It must be developed in ways that are humanizing – not ways that are regimenting and convenient to authority. A society that properly understood how to use drama would never have to need to punish anybody – child or adult. The mind would be released to create its own knowledge of where it was and what it did (Stuart: 1998, 6-7).

By focusing events on young central characters and their family settings, as they reach the cusp of adulthood and define their identities, Bond asks his audiences to engage in a critical questioning of the institutions of family and education and their role in the development of young people's identities and codes of behaviour. For Bond this move to writing

for young people in order to harness their imaginations and create agents for change is not a change of focus or theme. This ambition has remained constant through his work, but the question of what it is to be human has become more resolute in his later work. It is possible to see his commitment to this and his belief that young people can be the instruments of this change by examining his portrayal of childhood.

### **The Dramatic Child**

Bond's writing places children and their development as well as family relationships at the centre of his work, partly because he is writing specifically for young people. Bond rejects the romantic imagery of children as redemptive, but positions them as the possible agents for social transformation and it is this idea of social change that is focused on young people which is at the centre of his work. *Olly's Prison* (1993) *Tuesday* (1993), *Coffee* (1995), *Eleven Vests*, (1997), and *The Children* (2000), all have adolescents positioned at the threshold of adulthood and each play has these adolescents facing difficult moral dilemmas.

In positioning figures of childhood prominently in his plays Bond follows a long-standing tradition in British art. Bond's notion of childhood, however, differs from widely used mythologies surrounding children in literature. It has been recognised that childhood is a trope that is surrounded by mythology. In her study of children's literature Jacqueline Rose points to the connection between childhood and myth:

Myth and childhood belong together, in that myth is so often identified with what is primitive, even infantile, or is seen as a form of expression which goes back to the origins of culture and speech (Rose: 1985, 88).

There are two prevailing Western mythologies of childhood, according to sociologist and philosopher Chris Jenks. The first being the Dionysian Child "whose image rests on the assumption of an initial evil or corruption within the child" (Jenks: 1996, 79). The second is that of the Apollonian Child, which sees the child in what Jenks describes as, infants who "are angelic, innocent and untainted by the world which they

have recently entered” (Jenks: 1996, 73) and this is “the modern, Western but only ‘public’, way of regarding the child” (Jenks: 1996, 79).

Depictions of children in Western art largely fall into these two categories either symbolising hope for the future or frustration with the present.

Peter Coveney observed in his 1957 study of children in literature that:

The child could serve as a symbol of the artist’s dissatisfaction with a society which was in process of such harsh development about him...the child could become the symbol of Imagination and Sensibility...In childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, of fear and bewilderment, of vulnerability and potential violation (Coveney: 1957, 31-32).

It is possible to read the death of the baby in scene six of Bond’s play *Saved* (1965) in this way. Here a baby is tormented by a gang of male youths, the baby can be seen as an example of childhood symbolising ‘insecurity, isolation, fear, bewilderment vulnerability and violation. The youths casually torment and abuse a baby sleeping in its pram in a park. The baby is spat upon, pinched, urinated on, punched, and finally stoned to death, in a scene that is both horrific and yet compelling.

In Bond’s more recent work he rejects the polarisation of childhood into the Dionysus and the Apollonian child, believing that:

There are two widely accepted – but false – beliefs concerning the upbringing of children. Really they are negative and positive versions of the same argument. The negative version is that a firmly disciplined child will grow to be a decent, law-abiding citizen; but a child will grow to be anti-social if its parents are not strict enough with it. A child trained in fear may conform – but fear produces obedience without the ability to judge, or cynicism with the inclination to opportunism. And obedience is the moralised form of cynicism (Bond: 1997a, 86).

Bond dismisses the more positive ‘version’ as this may lead to the “idly content” child who is unable to protect itself in a “bad society”. As a result Bond’s use of the child as a character in his plays does not conform to this polarisation. In fact as his young characters move between childhood and adulthood, according to theatre scholar Helen Nicholson, “far from presenting a Romantic idealisation of childhood, Bond’s young

characters are often troubled themselves and cause difficulties for others” (Nicholson: 2003, 13-14). For Bond then, this development from childhood to adulthood is not a development between two individual and unconnected states, but a process by which the child comes to terms with the injustice of society and through taking responsibility for itself and others becomes more humane.

This can clearly be seen through the character of the Student in *Eleven Vests* (1997, Big Brum, Birmingham) the events of which are based loosely on the murder of Philip Lawrence in 1997<sup>3</sup>. In this play the audience watches as The Student remains silent throughout the opening scenes, just as Shelia remains silent throughout the opening of *Olly's Prison*. In *Eleven Vests* the only person to speak in the opening scene is the Head as she accuses the Student of destroying a book:

**Head** Why? D’you know why? What did you gain by it? Answer me. Do you deny it’s your handiwork? Well? I didn’t see you do it. No one did. I accuse you because I know none of my other pupils would do it. It has your trademark all over it. And you did it on your own. You couldn’t involve anyone else. The others wouldn’t be so stupid. Aren’t you going to speak? (Bond: 1997a, 3)

The audience works to fill in the gaps created by the silent child, questioning why the character is given no words of defence or justification as he is accused first of destroying a book and then the Other Student’s blazer. The character’s silence continues through his expulsion and ultimately through to his return and stabbing of the Head, leaving the audience to draw its own conclusions about the accusations and the character’s continued silence. It is interesting to note here that even though the acts are a consequence of the Student’s frustration at a world of injustice, we are given no indication of his responsibility for these acts of destruction. The Heads’ assumption that he is guilty, because she knows he is the only one who would do it, results in his exclusion from school with no consideration of circumstances or motives.

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Lawrence, the headmaster of St George’s Roman Catholic School was murdered defending a 13 year old boy from an assault at the school gates on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1995.

Here we see Foucault's philosophy of power enacted through deduction in action. The Head evokes her power through her "right to seizure: of things, time bodies" (Foucault: 1991, 259). Her privileged position allows her to suppress the freedoms of the Student. In contemporary society the Head's power, in Foucauldian terms "forms one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize and organise the forces under it" (Foucault: 1991, 259). Here we can also see the school operating as one of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus in which children:

learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of order established by class domination (Althusser: 2008, 6).

In this example of a child, who does not learn the rules of behaviour that are designed to make good citizens is expelled, perhaps unjustly. This in turn leads him to return, presumably seeking the justice he has been denied, with no other means open to him, and the injustice of his expulsion leads directly to (silent) frustration and eventually to violence.

The Student's impotency is symbolised effectively by his silence; he is voiceless as he faces the Head, the Head being herself a symbol of potency as she represents literal and figurative authority. With no other means at his disposal The Student resorts to physical violence and kills the Head. The stage directions for the actual crime are short and swift as is the playing of them: *The Student stabs the Head. The Head staggers forward* (Bond: 1997a, 14). The lead up to the action is slow and deliberate with the Student again remaining silent through this encounter. This makes the scene reminiscent of Mike's murder of his silent daughter in *Olly's Prison* (1993), The Student kills the Head and then, in a powerful symbol of defiance and ownership, he reclaims the physical ground from which he has been excluded:

The **Student** goes to the gate and looks into the school yard. He stops. The children fall silent. He raises a foot – for a moment it is

poised – then he brings it down inside the gate. A single cry from the children. He throws the knife into the yard. It clatters. Silence. He turns and runs down the street (Bond: 1997a, 15).

The stabbing results in a prison term for the Student, illustrating Bond's point:

The government knows how to deal with disaffected children when they grow up. Put them in prison and keep them there. Interestingly, in schools where the trouble starts we do the opposite: we chuck them out. Expulsion from school is a magical, shamanistic reversal of truanting. Truanting is bad, expulsion good! Shouldn't we cut out this hypocrisy and when we expel children just truck them straight off to prison? (Bond in Stuart: 1998, 118)

'Trucking' the Student 'straight to prison' would certainly have saved The Head's life in this play, and, as the plot continues, the audience observes that he does indeed face a custodial sentence for the stabbing. For Bond prison is not the answer as "people in prisons are disciplined but not allowed to take responsibility for themselves" (Bond: 2000a, 56). This lack of responsibility results in the loss of some of their humane qualities, as we shall see later, it is only by learning to take responsibility for themselves that adolescents will ultimately learn to take responsibility for each other and can become agents of change.

The Student is offered only limited opportunities for employment on his release from prison. Bond suggests that the only employment open to him is the army. Within this institution he can be trained to be a fully functional adult whose frustration and violence can be harnessed for the good of society. The scene following the Head's stabbing shows us the Student being trained as a private in the army, where his *lack* of ability to wield a knife becomes a concern:

**Instructor:** dear-o-dear. Yer disappoint me. I' ad a shuffies in the CO's office. Fingered the files. Saw yourn. Was I chuffed! Criminal 'form'! Majesty's pleasure – a misnomer if she 'ad anything t' do with you. File said knife man! Used a blade when 'e was a kid! Dear God – 'ardly bigger 'n a nipper! 'E'll teach me 'ow t' to do it! Yer couldn't stick a 'atpin in a quiverin jelly! (Bond: 1997a, 18).

The character of the Student is trained in battle tactics and now encouraged to kill in order to protect the society that incarcerated him for violence just a few scenes before, in Foucault's words:

The principle underlying the tactics of battle – that one has to be capable of killing in order to go living – has become the principle that defines the strategy of states (Foucault: 1991, 260).

Now the student's previous crime is turned into a virtue as he has proven himself capable of killing and this makes him potentially useful to the State's strategy. For the audiences watching the progress of the Student, these combined experiences suggest confusion, as society first frustrates and dis-empowers the young boy and confiscates his freedom for the violence that results from his dissatisfaction. Then society teaches him to use a sanctioned and equally deadly violence against others. It is no surprise to the audience when the character of the Student stabs a surrendering enemy soldier in retribution for the death of a colleague.

At this point in the play the Student "exist[s] on the boundary between adulthood and childhood where humanness might be taught" (Nicholson: 2003, 14). Children are no different to adults in that they exist in "the state in which we all live" (Davis: 2005, 13). They do, however, differ in as much as for Bond their imaginations have yet to become corrupted, they are not yet conditioned to be fully "docile bodies". This means that they can envisage a different future, enabling them to be the agents for change, unlike adults, for whom it is too late. In the protracted final scene the audience observes as the Student deliberates killing or not killing the Prisoner. The performance of the scene, like the murder of Shelia, is measured and calculated, designed to enable the audience to contemplate their own actions under such duress. The Student after struggling to attach the bayonet eventually stabs his victim as his training asserts control; he has been conditioned to believe that in Foucauldian terms "one has the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others" (Foucault: 1991, 261). He has been taught the means to kill the threat and his training takes over as he becomes an example of "the body as a machine" (Foucault; 1991, 261). This character

demonstrates the results of conditioning and rather than taking responsibility for his actions, he capitulates to his training and denies responsibility for his actions and becomes less humane in the process. In this moment the audience witnesses his crossing of the border between childhood and adulthood.

The “boundary”, or this period of adolescence, is interesting to Bond because this is a time when it is most likely that our imaginations, and therefore our humanity, may be corrupted. Bond claims that, “probably the most vulnerable times are adolescence and old age” (Stuart: 1998, 96). Imagination in this sense is the conduit to a critical reasoning that can take place within a current ideology, but sees the possibility of alternatives. In this sense it is akin to Ricoeur’s social imagination. Bond differs from Ricoeur and insists that only young people have the ability to see past the dominant ideology “and seek to create the world as it is, not as market democracy want it to be and that is what it means to be human” (Bond: 2000a, 5). This is not, in Bond’s view, possible for adults because “we are mostly [too] busy. We may be too busy to know who we are or what we’re doing (Stuart: 1998, 96). In *Eleven Vests* each scene is performed in a linear narrative structure, but there is no character development or dramatic exploration of the years that pass between each scene. The audience is left to fill in the ‘gaps’ in the Student’s life. The result is a fragmented history of a child who is silent in the face of authority figures and the school systems unjust treatment, whose frustration at inequality leads to violence, which leads to prison where he is dissolved of responsibility, and to an army training that educates him to kill in a situation where, rather than question his actions, he follows that training. The stark sequence of events leaves narrative gaps in which the audience can critique a system that brings the Student to the point of violence twice but does not give him the required skills to make the humane choice and in fact facilitates the inhumane.

In *Eleven Vests* and Bond's other plays for young people, the characters of children are like adults in their susceptibility to corruption. They are depicted as being capable of both inhumane behaviour and of compassion depending on their lived experiences. Ian Stuart's edited collection of Bond's letters and notebooks demonstrate that the problem for Bond is:

that the world of the adult into which they're being inducted is so cruel, arbitrary and absurd and as a result they behave just as adults do and imitate adult crimes. Of course I have in mind particularly the killing of the two years old child. It seems here that children are doing something normally left to the adults – how many children are killed each year by their parents or guardians? (Stuart: 1998, 24).

In this section of his edited letters Bond is responding directly to the murder of James Bulger by the children Thompson and Venables. He references the murder in three of the letters in Stuart's edited volume (1998). Firstly in June 1993 he comments on the public's reaction to both Thompson and Venables when he states that: "Recently two children were charged with murder. When they were taken to court adults attacked the van and screamed "Murder the bastards" (Stuart: 1998, 6). Bond uses this as an example of "mounting barbarism". Secondly in the autumn of 1993 in a discussion of theatre education and the threatened closure of Coventry Belgrade Theatre-in Education where he accuses "ministers of the Bulgerization of children's minds" (Stuart: 1998, 10). Then he refers to James Bulger in the example above from a letter in November 1993. It is evident that the murder was occupying his mind during this period. It can be no coincidence that during this period he was writing both *Olly's Prison* and *Tuesday*. More recently Mark Ravenhill reflected on the Bulger murder and its influence on his own work asking in 2004:

Thompson and Venables and James Bulger – what is the dramatic landscape that reflects their worlds. The shopping centre, the video camera, the child killers. Surely these must have been at the centre – if only indirectly – of the drama of the 'nineties' (Ravenhill: 2004, 308).

It is evident that the murder also had a direct influence on Bond's thinking of the time and that this is reflected in his plays of this period. Ravenhill then continues to examine the murders influence over his own plays of this time. As I discussed in Chapter One, both the murder and the subsequent court case challenged the view of childhood in the UK at the time. In Bond's play and theoretical writings, we see his view that it is not the children who are the problem but that it is the adults who parent these children who are the problem. Responsibility is also placed with those who educate them to accept the inequality which leads to an unjust society. Bonds plays question the institutions of the school, the family and the military and their role in maintaining the status quo.

This can also be seen in Bond's play of 2000, *The Children*, which focuses on the character of Joe who in the opening scenes is persuaded to commit a crime on behalf of his mother. In the first production of *The Children* (2000, Classworks Theatre, Manor Community College, Cambridge), school pupils played the children. The play centres on the character of Joe, who stands on the cusp of adulthood as he strives for independence. In Scene Two this vulnerability is exploited by his Mother who recognises his fragility and manipulates him into committing a crime, on her behalf, by using his position within the family against him:

You can't always be a child. You grow up. Have to make hard choices. They can't teach you that at school. Some children inherit money from their parents – I inherited poverty from mine...I don't ask for gratitude or recompense. But if you love me you'd do what I ask (Bond: 2000b, 12).

She asks him to burn down a house. Joe's character is shown to be mature enough to know that the responsibility for the crime would be his and his alone, "If I do it I'm to blame" (Bond: 2000b, 17). The character imagines the crime, knows it is wrong and yet allows himself to be persuaded to undertake the act. In Bond's words Joe:

move from Imagination to Corruption...through fear. It involves distortion of reason but also metamorphosis of imagery. Sometimes the fear is panic – as in trauma – sometimes it is slow pressure – as in the need to conform at school, work and so on.

When Imagination is corrupted, Imagination is then owned by someone else's reason and not one's own (Stuart: 1998, 96).

In *Eleven Vests*, the Student is 'corrupted' by the army, his family and the education system; here, Joe is corrupted by his mother. Bond presents the character of Mum, as also being vulnerable and damaged by society, but he focuses on the adolescent character as this is where the possibility of an alternative sits. Joe flees after a boy dies in the resulting fire and confronted by violence, he is forced to take responsibility for himself and the friends who leave with him. Joe and his friends run away together to find a new way of living that could be seen to be the start of a neo-family structure. On the journey to this new life he and his friends rescue and take with them a Man, who preys on the children as their journey progresses; the Man kills all those characters that choose to stay with Joe. The final scene shows Joe to be the only survivor. He now carries nothing, and no one, but his declaration of adulthood "I've got everything. I'm the last person in the world. I must find somebody" (Bond: 2000b, 52).

In the opening scene Joe talks to a puppet – this puppet can be seen to personify his childhood and, the audience understand that Joe knows he must leave the doll and his infancy behind him. He is unable to abandon the toy and all it represents even though he tells both the puppet, and therefore himself, that "you have to learn to be on your own" (Bond: 2000b, 6). Throughout the course of the play Joe learns to be on his own and ultimately leaves the puppet behind. Unlike the Student in *Eleven Vests*, by the final scene of the play Joe has accepted responsibility for himself and others demonstrating a humanity that is beyond the Student's capabilities. Here the audience are exposed to the idea that change is possible due to the potential of young people to take on new ideas and to change. This in turn implies that human beings have the capacity to change, adapt, learn and reject docility and find new ways and structures of living just as Joe does.

## **Children as Docile Bodies**

Bond argues that young people have the potential to take on new ideas:

[To] become responsible for change, to understand and evaluate it and when possible to initiate it by anticipating necessity. Children must be helped to make change more human (Bond: 1997a, 86).

For Bond drama plays a vital role in this process as it “deals with the problems and people of this world” and “lets children come to know themselves and their world and their relation to it. That is the only way they can know who they are and accept responsibility for being themselves” (Stuart: 1998, 112-3). According to Althusser the education system is one of a number of Ideological State Apparatus, which all “whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production” (Althusser: 2008, 28). This means that the education system is also a mechanism of power and control with the aim of creating ‘docile bodies’. Althusser saw the school system as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus because:

It takes children from every class at infant school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most ‘vulnerable’, squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology (Althusser: 2008, 29).

As such the family and the school system together can be seen as working against personal agency. Bond describes today’s processes of education as “reductive” and possibly “dangerous”. In a potentially Foucauldian reading of the school system Bond is on record as saying that:

Children are going to be educated into being adroit and disciplined at taking instructions in school – and that means, in later life, orders – without the sensitivity to ask themselves if they ought to follow their orders and without the understanding of society and psychology to enable them to give a human answer (Stuart: 1998, 1).

The child in contemporary society has become a highly visible commodity and children can be seen to be in need of constant surveillance both for their own protection and that of the future. Much of

this surveillance is located either in the family home or the school both of which can be seen to have the same goal in view, creating productive citizens for the future of society. For the child to become a productive citizen they must be given the relevant skills to enter the work force as labour power and “the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order” (Althusser: 2008, 6). Both the institutions of the family and the school are largely responsible for this training. Althusser describes the school as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus:

It is coupled with the Family just as the Church was once coupled with the Family. We can now claim that the unprecedentedly deep crisis which is now shaking the education system of so many States across the globe, often in conjunction with a crisis shaking the family system, takes on new meaning, given that the School (and the School – Family couple) constitutes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus playing a determinant part in the reproduction of the relations of production of a mode of production (Althusser: 2008, 31).

As such both the Dionysian and Apollonian Child and their families are to be observed and controlled in society and therefore childhood forms probably the most watched and closely governed area of life. A Foucauldian reading of this development would imply that the child is observed and controlled in society to ensure its development as a productive, law-abiding citizen. Nowhere is Foucault’s metaphor of the panopticon (Foucault: 1977) more entrenched than in childhood. The world of the child is ordered to a strict timetable that governs both time and space; children, therefore, exist in a state of almost constant surveillance both in and out of the home. Every aspect of their lives is scrutinised both by professionals and parents – or parental figures - to ensure that they are cared for but also it could be argued that they grow into productive and useful members of society.

This view is clearly reflected in Bond’s *At the Inland Sea* (1995 Big Brum, Birmingham). In this play the Boy is preparing to take his exams, under the watchful eye of his mother. The results are prized as the route to

entering a productive working life at a level that will ensure both his and his mother's security for the future. The Mother tells the Boy that:

You don't have to worry. The teacher said you'll pass. As long as you concentrate. That's your trouble. Always staring out the window. I think you'll end up a window cleaner. No good just scraping through. You need good passes. Keep up with the high-flyers (Bond: 1997b, 1).

Bond's critique of the current education system is reminiscent of Foucault's disciplinary technologies. The disciplinary technologies produce docile bodies by formally moulding human beings by linking a variety of forms of power. An important part of this process is space, "the disciplinary space is always basically, cellular" (Foucault: 1977, 143). In schools the space is not exactly cellular but classes are arranged in such a way as to:

know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able to at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits...aimed at knowing, mastering and using (Foucault: 1977, 143).

"The control of activity" is achieved via the timetable and aided by hierarchical observation; the timetable is designed to "establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate cycles of repetition" (Foucault: 1977, 149). This is mirrored and supported by the family home, in which children's activity is controlled by parents who also regulate cycles of repetition within the home and who encourage children to learn the required skills and knowledges in order to achieve success at school and therefore be more likely to enter the labour force.

In many ways the classroom is a strong example of disciplinary apparatus in that it is possible "for a single gaze to see everything constantly" and where the teacher is in an optimum position:

A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned (Foucault: 1977, 173).

A “gaze” that is remarkably similar to Althusser’s description of the Ideological State Apparatuses in its capacity to use “suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only the shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family” (Althusser: 2008, 19). In *At the Inland Sea*, the character of the Mother compares her son’s ability to study and therefore to get a good job, with Mrs Lacey’s son Ron. Throughout the play she hovers over her son as he revises for his exams determined that he will not be “ending up in a dead-end job” (Bond: 1997b, 2). Here it is possible to see how the school and the family work together coercively to ensure the Boy passes his exams and therefore flourish within the system.

The school system tests and examines children with the support of the family and these measuring devices are used to determine the ‘normality’ of the bodies that are observed. Writing in the late eighties about schooling from the mid-sixties sociologist Nikolas Rose argues that:

Universal schooling, gathered together large numbers of children in the same physical space, and sought to discipline them according to institutional criteria and objectives. It thus established norms of conduct and performance organized behaviour space and enables divergences between children to be charted (Rose: 1989, 140).

Thus the school aided by the family, could be seen like the military, to create docile bodies whereby in Bond’s words: “it’s preparing the mentality which makes it possible to use people as apparatuses of government” (Stuart: 1998, 1). Bond illustrates this particularly poignantly in both *Eleven Vests* and *Tuesday* (1993). These plays each feature an adolescent who enlists in the army, either rejecting, or conforming to, this role of state apparatus, having been “ejected” from the school system. These characters can be seen to be preparing to be the ‘apparatuses of government’ whereby they are as Althusser stated:

provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society: the role of the exploited (with a ‘highly-developed’ ‘professional’, ‘ethical’, ‘civic’, ‘national’, and a-political consciousness); the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to...give the workers orders and to speak to them: ‘Human

relations'), of the agent of repression (ability to give orders and enforce obedience 'without discussion', or ability to manipulate the demagogy of political leader's rhetoric), or the professional ideologist (ability to treat consciousnesses with respect...)  
(Althusser: 2008, 29-30).

In both *Eleven Vests* and *Tuesday* the role of the adolescents is one of exploitation. The Student in *Eleven Vests*, as I have argued, is alienated and silenced by the school system. The injustice he experiences leads to frustration and violence and then to incarceration. Although the audience does not witness the Student in prison (the cellular space), control of activity and hierarchical observation are presumably employed to re-train him into a docile body, ready for enlistment. The irony being that the crime for which he was imprisoned now becomes a virtue and he is seen as a promising recruit by his weapons instructor as discussed above.

The audience observes as the army trains the Student to "respect the rifle" with its bayonet attachment and as he is told that in his hands he is "holding the history of science – the modern world" (Bond: 1997a, 16). Although initially his instructor tells him that he is a disappointment because he "couldn't stick a 'atpin in a quivering jelly!" (Bond: 1997a, 18), he learns his lessons well and becomes the docile killing machine that bayonets an enemy prisoner as he kneels crying on the ground attempting to surrender. Here the audience sees that prison and army life have succeeded where the education system failed and have made the Student a useful member of society. The Student is rejected by school. Eventually he is trained to use his only resource, his body, which becomes pliant enough to be capable of violence in the name of the state.

*Tuesday* (1993 BBC TV Education), also contains characters trained to kill for the state. Irene's Father, has an army background in which we hear that he has seen it all:

Tanks on fire. Human ovens. Legs and arms sticking out of the turrets – waving about – like the legs of a beetle on its back. They were dead – bodies contracting in the heat. We called it the fire dance. They didn't feel it but we had to see it (Bond: 1997a, 52).

Having docilely served his time as part of the state apparatus he has no useful function, unemployable for anything but violence he spends his days in the job centre wishing he could “afford Irene a few extras – some fun with her mates” (Bond: 1997a, 52). He predicts that Brian, his daughter’s boyfriend, is heading for the same future as himself.

Both of these plays examine the tragedy of wasted potential as the characters demonstrate how the coupled ideological state apparatus of the family and the school train individuals for the role of the exploited and creates a social problem. The system judges the Student, Father and Brian all as being suited to a role within the armed forces as a result of these characters’ failure to pass school exams. Had they passed exams they would have demonstrated themselves suitable for a different role or profession. These characters are left no route for employment and therefore, no route to becoming productive citizens, apart from joining the army. The army trains each of them to commit violent acts in the name of the state. They are trained to follow orders without question and therefore take no responsibility for actions or themselves. The training process as a result strips them of their humanity; their ability to be human is destroyed in the process. This can be seen in the description that Brian gives of the killing of the wounded, enemy soldier:

One of ours – nerves gone – goes over to theirs yelling shut it, shut it...Ours screaming: not words now – warning – orders – reasons – praying Ours: screaming with a bayonet on judgement day ...puts the bayonet in – in the wounded belly – and theirs arms go up as if to embrace – then fall back to sides ...and ours stops jabbing... ours mutters as he wipes his bayonet on their jacket...The fag still in his mouth (Bond: 1997a, 65).

In Brian, Bond offers the audience an example of a character who attempts to leave this life and his social conditioning to return to his girlfriend, Irene and this act demonstrates an attempt to regain responsibility for his actions. He believes that she will make his world safe by offering an alternative to the restrictive and prescriptive regime which removes his ability to make decisions for himself. Unfortunately

she proves to be just “like all the rest!” (Bond: 1997a, 63). When Irene attempts to shoot her father, Brian blames her father for this act and it is possible to see that her father is partly responsible. He, like the Mother in *At the Inland Sea*, has encouraged the docile compliant attitude in his daughter that creates dutiful citizens who sit and pass exams:

How d’you expect her to get ready for her exams in that state? If she messes them up her whole future’s put in jeopardy (Bond: 1997a, 49).

So the character of Father can be seen to be preparing Irene to become the perfect citizen fulfilling her own role with no more freedom to make her own choices than Brian has been offered. The audience when witnessing the juxtaposition between the representations of these two young people whose lives have been mapped out for them, becomes aware of the extent to which, “before its birth, the child is therefore always-ready a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived” (Althusser: 2008, 50). What is expected is that the child is expected to do its duty for both family and state.

Both *Tuesday* and *At the Inland Sea* feature central characters who are young people studying for forthcoming exams and who have parents who want the academic success and white collar professions that they themselves were denied. We see this clearly in *At the Inland Sea*:

Mother: ...I worked hard for these exams. Gave you all the extras. Books. Bits and pieces for your computer. I had to do overtime. You are taking the exams for *me* – not just you. I’m going to pass. I deserve it...I am fed up with being on the bottom of the heap. I want a bit of life for a change (Bond: 1997b, 5).

Bond is critical of both the families of these young characters and an education system that creates a competitive atmosphere that sets one child against another in the race for results. He argues that this prepares future generations for the capitalist society which they will enter on leaving education. He states that:

the class group combines two things: groupness – be together – with individuality – pass this exam or receive this approval and

show you are better than the others in the group (Stuart: 1998, 34).

Bond believes that education should prepare young people to take responsibility for themselves and others while “enabling children to acquire the great hunger for knowledge,” (Stuart: 1998, 10). This would be an education system that would encourage true democracy and citizenship. Bond believes that “force feeding facts by rote deadens the mind” and “certainly isn’t education for democracy” (Stuart: 1998, 10). This forms part of a “barbarizing process” that he describes as the “Bulgerisation” of children’s minds whereby “children are being educated to sell themselves” and the whereby the state “has murdered our young people’s souls” (Stuart: 1998, 10-11). Bond believes that there is an alternative that creates a more optimistic future for society.

### **Social Optimism**

Bond’s alternative to a highly regulated education system is to use drama to engage the imagination. He believes that theatre allows the participants to reject docility by proposing and testing solutions that encourages them to take responsibility for themselves and their peers. This testing allows them to become the agents for future change. To invite this taking of responsibility, Bond presents his audiences with a ‘gap’ or a void specifically in terms of social injustice and a lack of social responsibility. In other words the ‘gap’ stimulates the audience’s social imagination. Through physically playing and empathising with the central characters in his Bond’s plays, the young actors face this gap and therefore can consider their own social responsibilities:

The extreme situations in which the young people are placed in *The Children* leads them to ask fundamental questions about who they are and what they would like to become. Although the situations are inherited from the adult world, the young people have to find ways of living without losing their sense of justice – their radical innocence – which they had taken for granted in their world (Nicholson: 2003, 17).

The use of these gaps in the narrative and structure of the plays, also positions the audience members to examine their own social responsibilities. This involves exposing young people to moral dilemmas and posing 'profound questions' that:

...take young people back to important basic situations and enable them to question what it means to be a human being. Young people ask profound questions. What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of the world? (Bond: 1997a, 102).

Bond poses these questions in his drama for young people but also aims to re-establish the more important question of, 'how can I become more human?', rather than the question which adults in later life becomes more individual, "how can I survive my job?" (Bond: 1997a, 102). By asking these questions in the theatre, Bond believes that it is possible to address them in life, to become 'more human', or more capable of behaving like "Human beings – not animals" (Bond: 1997a, 60). For Bond this means behaving with compassion and humanity by constructing a more equal social order without the injustice that creates frustration that leads to violence.

This question of becoming more human is central to Bond's writing and is intrinsically part of his Marxist politics. Marx's own writings on the concept of what it is to be human are inherently bound in his notion of 'species being'. For Marx the state of being human is one that involves being a social being that recognises that being human implies being a member of a species. He states that:

It is Man's nature ...to be constantly developing, in co-operation with other men, himself and the world about him (Marx in McLellan 1977:121).

This 'constant co-operation' is similar to Bond's notion of social responsibility. For Marx this development is inhibited by capitalism, which dehumanises individuals via exploitation and alienation. Marx claimed that to overcome the effects of capitalism man has to "reclaim his humanness" (Marx in McLellan 1977: 28). Bond takes this a step further claiming that capitalism not only alienates but leads directly to frustration

and then to violence. This also dehumanises the individual who then asserts her/his desires above those of others and does not take account of those the violence directly affects or the species in general.

To be human in this sense is, therefore, to take responsibility for oneself and others. Bond's own social optimism is rooted in this Marxist ideal of the human being and his own belief that drama can provide this more 'human' quality, allowing participants to think and act as others and through doing so develop a sense of commitment to the species or a sense of duty to others. To encourage this Bond uses theatre to pose difficult questions, believing that through interaction with characters and plot the participants' imagination will be able to see a range of infinite possibilities open to individuals, and so releases their potential for change and making them possible agents of change.

Much of the weight of this responsibility is borne by Bond's Theatre Event or TE, which is similar to the theatrical event as described by Sauter in Chapter Three. For Bond the TE is:

The conscious use of 'theatrical drama' to enact or illustrate the centre. It does not comment on meaning but creates it from the interplay of the freedom and the tragic. The solution is guaranteed by the problem: the problem was itself the search for humanness (Bond: 2000, 17).

Bond simplifies its meaning in *The Hidden Plot* (2000) as being a time in the performance when:

...time may be experienced as slower, as in a car accident. TE can be understood by comparing it to a whirlwind or cyclone. The centre of the cyclone is calm and quiet. In a TE the spectator stands in the still centre. It is the site of the TE. In it everything is seen with great clarity. It is surrounded by the violently rotating grey walls of wind. There are two things on the wall. The whole of the play's text is written on it. And there are bits and pieces – debris and mementos – swept away from the freedom-tragic conflict (Bond: 2000a, 17).

This is reminiscent of the reflexive "gaps" in the structure or narrative of theatre that enable critical reflection. In Bond's TE the development of the plot is suspended to allow the audience time to consider the central

question being posed by the drama and imagine how they might react in the same situation. They are not distanced from the characters and situation as in a *verfremdungseffekt*, but distanciation is created while the audience are still within the story. David Davis describes Bond's use of the TE as "a temporal distortion...the integrity of the story is not broken, but crucially...there is no 'right' way to respond...Here, in Bond's TE we are genuinely provoked" (Davis: 2005, 37-8). Bond himself says that the "TE dramatizes the situation's meaning. It alienates within the situation by creating commitment. It may be provocative. It is not distance from situations. ...The point of view creates meaning" (Bond: 2000a, 40). For Bond the possibility of change is found in the Theatre Events and it is these that create social optimism in his work. In my reading of Bond 's work, which I am linking to Ricoeur's concept of the social imagination, these Theatre Events make Bond's theatre a reflexive theatre in that it leaves gaps or "temporal distortions" in which the audience may produce meaning through interpreting the signs and symbols provided by the play.

In *At the Inland Sea* one such event, or moment of reflexivity, is centred on a cup of tea, before the Woman first reveals herself and asks for his help, "...the Boy starts to tremble slightly. He steadies the mug with both hands and wedges it against his chest" (Bond: 1997b, 2). When the woman approaches him his "arm straightens" and "he holds out the cup to the Woman... The tea starts to drip from the cup and then slowly spill" (Bond: 1997b, 3). For Bond it is in these moments that the performers and the audience are "invited to create the connections" (Bond: 2000a, 48). Once these connections have been made, Bond believes that the meaning-makers "must take responsibility for them" (Bond: 2000a, 48). In other words once understanding has taken place, social responsibility is undeniable. These Theatre Events, or reflexive interstices, enable the audience to read the situation and re-consider history in its contemporary context. For Bond this means that the audience understands the past and takes responsibility for the actions that occurred historically, clearly this is not meant literally, but the audience is enabled to feel the weight

of the lack of humanity exhibited in the past that allowed atrocities to take place.

These moments where the audience are invited to take responsibility form the basis of the optimism in Bond's work. He argues that this is the social purpose of drama:

Drama searches for meaning and expresses the need to bear witness to life. Drama uses disciplines to define meanings, not take the place of meanings. And culture is essentially dramatic. It uses dramatic processes and expresses itself in dramatic signs. This belongs to the humanising of our species (Bond: 1997a, 92).

Bond's work is utopic because it invites questioning, and engages the social imagination in such a way that it becomes possible to see the present from a distance and thereby consider possible alternatives. This is especially true of Bond's plays for young people where it can be seen that his work is optimistic, or utopic, precisely because it places the child as the potential agent for change. His belief in drama's ability to release this potential due to its position at "the foundation of the human mind" and that, "it must be developed in ways that are humanizing – not ways that are regimenting and convenient to authority" in the hope of creating a "society that properly understood how to use drama" and would therefore "never have need to punish anybody – child or adult" (Bond in Stuart: 1998, 6). This is indeed almost "irresponsibly optimistic" and extremely idealistic. Underpinning this theory is the belief that the key to our humanness and for taking responsibility for ourselves and others is the power of the imagination which may be released through drama. This enables us to "search for justice from our births onwards: each human has a 'right to be' almost inbuilt in the genetic make-up and each human infant starts life afresh with 'radical innocence'" (Davis: 2005, XV).

This notion of the imagination as the key to social responsibility can be seen most clearly in Bond's play *At the Inland Sea*. Towards the end of the play The Boy receives notification that he has passed his exams. As he and his Mother read the list of grades that are all As and Bs the Boy gets to his mark for History and "stops in disappointment" exclaiming that

“They didn’t mark it right!” (Bond: 1997b, 16). We never learn if he passed the exam or not, but throughout the play we see him learn to take responsibility for history, which for Bond is far more important than passing the exam. Through the course of the play the Boy is confronted by a Woman and her child who were murdered in the Nazi gas chambers. The Woman begs him to save her child and he witnesses the events that led up to their deaths. He can save neither the mother nor child, nor change history, but through this journey into the past he emerges from a rite of passage knowing that he must accept responsibility for the past and all its horror, and in doing so, he emerges as an adult, claiming that he is “not a child” (Bond: 1997b, 34). This declaration indicates the moment in which he has marked and then taken responsibility for the past, having done so, he can now potentially take responsibility for the future. It is Bond’s belief that by accepting the past he can change the future. This new found sense of responsibility can be seen in the tiny gesture contained in the last words of the play, “I made some tea” (Bond: 1997b, 34). This brief line shows The Boy starts to put into practice his ability to take responsibility and that he has started to care for his mother, rather than expecting her to care for him. In this play for young people Bond has addressed an adult dilemma and the audience witnesses the Boy learning more than he can in the conventional classroom. Bond explains the political implications of this play:

The theme must not be only about (an) adolescent problem. It must concern the choices which the world confronts adolescents with. It’s not a question of reminding them of morality! – but of responsibility. Transcend the classroom! – and its horizon of exams (Stuart: 2001, 320).

This play, although full of violent and unsettling imagery ends on an optimistic note because it implies that change is possible.

Bond has always claimed that his work and outlook are optimistic:

I don’t see the future as a dark space: the sort of space into which one would want to, or at any rate could, shine a torch. As a writer I think of our future as a large white sheet, perhaps as big as the

sky, covering whatever is in front of me; on this sheet I wish to draw (Bond in Stuart: 2001, 127).

He is on record as saying that the silence at the end of *Saved* is a silence filled with possibilities and that *Saved*, as the title suggests “is almost irresponsibly optimistic” (Bond: 1977, 309). In the final moments of the play Len opts to stay. He, Harry and Mary are held in an almost companionable silence. This silence is also echoed at the end of *Olly’s Prison*, the last line of which sounds bleak:

Frank murdered my daughter an’ your son. ‘E wasn’t there when it ‘appened – didt ‘ave t’be. ‘E did – just as ‘e blinded Olly. For the same reason. ‘Ow can I make anyone understand that? See the connections. They can’t. That’s why we go on sufferin. Olly’s prison. ‘E’ll never get out. We’re all in it now (Bond: 2003, 71).

However, there is an optimistic note here; Frank and Ellen might not be able to make anyone else understand the connections, but they see them and have come to understand them as they lie in “the large single bed. Naked, still” (Bond: 2003, 71). In these moments the audience sees that they have come to the realisation that they are responsible for each other and everyone else who is in “Olly’s prison” – in other words everyone in the species, they have become “species-beings” with a duty of care to others.

Despite its bleak conclusion there is also optimism at the end of *The Children*. In the last scene Joe is alone, all his friends having been murdered by the man they helped. The stage directions describe his isolation. “Joe come[s] on. He carries nothing” (Bond: 2000b, 52). He has nothing left, but yet claims: “I’ve got everything. I’m the last person in the world. I must find someone” (Bond: 2000b, 52). Through facing dilemmas and learning to accept responsibility for himself and others he has finally left behind his puppet and he has learnt “to be on his own” and is now ready to “change the world” (Bond: 2000b, 6). These are things which at the start of the play were unthinkable. This utopian urge to change the world is only possible because the character of Joe is stripped of everything, including the constructs of family and education.

The naturalised social structures have been removed so he can rebuild alternative forms that do not conform to conventional social ideas. Having learnt to take responsibility for himself – he now “must find someone” so that he can find alternatives with a reinvigorated sense of social responsibility, and for Bond, create a more humane society. The play ends here, allowing the audience the reflexive space to envision what form that alternative social structure might take. This does not necessarily lead to action, a critically active audience does not necessarily lead to activism, but it does lead to questions about what Joe’s utopia might look like and, therefore, a troubling of the current systems. This is an example of the role of reflexive theatre, not to resolve this uncertainty, but to reveal the question. This play, and Bond’s work in general, therefore, disturbs and challenges the audience, leaving them contemplating the possibility of change and providing optimism by recognising that change may be both desirable and possible.

Bond’s work for young people is replete with closing images of optimism. Examples include the cup of tea the boy makes his mother in *At the Inland Sea*, the Student taking the vests at the end of *Eleven Vests*, Irene’s plea for life in the midst of death at the end of *Tuesday*, Nold’s survival and the crying child at the end of *Coffee* and Grig’s silence at the end of the “*scene of the seven howls*” (Bond: 2003, 269). Each of these plays contains a character that is striving to become more human by taking responsibility for and caring for others, and so holds the potential for a neo-family structure to emerge. Each also has a central character for which the plot provides a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. In *Tuesday* this role is fulfilled by Irene. At the start of the play she is a child who seeks her father’s advice when her boyfriend deserts from the army. The course of the play is her rite of passage and she emerges as a strong independent woman who can accept the responsibility of her actions, which include the attempted shooting of her weak and dependent father, and can face the world alone. In the last moments of the play she falls asleep clinging to life with the plea “Let me live. Let me live” (Bond: 1997a, 79).

At the centre of *Tuesday* is the image of a child walking into the desert:

A child is lifted from its mother – the cord stretches. It walked away. From its father – mother – us. ..It walked away from everyone. We hate and kill. It had had enough. Children have begun to walk away from human beings (Bond: 1997a, 62).

Here is Bond's hope for the future; children will walk away from the 'inhuman' world in which they exist, turning their back on the violence and injustice and strive to live in a different way. The image of the child alone in the desert is echoed by the toddler, who during the gun fight, "climbs down from the neighbour's arm...crosses between the others and Brian...chuckles and points its stubby finger at the gun" (Bond: 1997a, 68). It appears that the child is questioning the violence, and laughing at its incongruity. Irene, herself, also resembles the image of the desert child when after shooting her father, she takes full responsibility for the intended action, which in essence was an attempt to put her father out of his misery, and is left alone – just as alone as the child walking away from human beings and Joe on the side of the port at the end of *The Children*.

Bond states that the words of the two adults who perform in productions of *The Children* should be "performed as they are printed". The young people should however improvise some of their words:

[The children] perform their roles, as they are printed in Scenes One, Two, Four, Eleven and Twelve. In all other scenes they should create their own parts, guided by the situations and words given to them in the text (Bond: 2000b, 4).

This enables the young performers to improvise the roles and give thought to what they might say given similar circumstances. In this way it is possible to see how Bond's work may provide a rehearsal for life and promote the undertaking of responsibility, by literally putting the young people in role and encouraging empathy and understanding for those in different circumstances to themselves. They can explore possibilities, and are not bound by certainties, drawing on their imaginations. Bond believes drama will enable them to use the imaginative tools developed

in rehearsal to play with alternatives and adopt a similarly imaginative approach to life outside the theatre. In using drama in this way it becomes an educative tool through which to examine the human condition and identify it as being constituted by power-relations and the technologies of domination established through disciplining techniques and regulatory controls. Consequently, having recognised these factors in the drama, alternatives may be imagined and then put into action. Therefore Bond's work is utopic in outlook and it is possible to see that the central characters may become agents for change. Bond takes this a step further when he implies that the audience, having experienced his plays may also become agents of change:

The spectator is like someone taken over an obstacle course: they go through it, drop out through weakness or boredom and so on. But the course changes them: they take in their boredom or indifference, or they are changed by the course: in their life they will...stand on chairs or run upstairs differently. They might become climbers or runners where before they were dawdlers. A play reconstitutes the spectators to a degree: the spectator isn't free to intellectually choose his response, he must declare himself (Stuart: 2001, 182).

In practice it places an overwhelming responsibility on the theatre. It is a view that has optimistically, informed Bond's writing and the development of the techniques he used within all of his theatre, but has been sharpened in his work for young people.

### **Children as Agents of Change**

Bond rests the weight of his optimism on children whom he sees as being the architects of transformation as they can use their imagination to see possibilities for change and to trouble social concepts. Adults, by contrast, have lost this ability. He believes that children are capable of this due to their innate 'radical innocence'. This 'radical innocence' enables young people to learn to take responsibility for themselves and the world and is key to his use of theatre as an agent for social change.

When using the word innocence he does not:

mean a psychological attitude; I am referring to the way perception, emotion, reason and need inter-relate and create the

self as the site of imagination ...I mean the child as a creator of its world (Bond in Stuart: 1998, 99).

Thus the newborn child is aware of itself and this self is the centre of its world; it can only imagine or create the world that surrounds it, so that “innocence is the child’s knowledge – its ontological knowledge – not its practice” (Stuart: 1998, 83). As the child has created its world it is responsible therefore for this world and feels at home within it and with that sense of belonging comes a sense or desire for justice within its world. As the child grows it interacts with society while continuing with this search for justice, still placing itself at the centre of its world. It is this search for justice that makes the child’s innocence radical. However, the society it encounters is not just and this results in rage as the child learns that it is not the centre of the world, and it must therefore learn that “it is not a God before it can become human or inhuman” (Bond: 2000a, 122). Bond’s concept of radical innocence is defined in detail within *The Hidden Plot* but simply put:

Radical innocence has no situation (other than totality), it is only the need to be at home in the world and so desire justice...The origin of humanness is radical innocence’s need for justice (Bond: 2000a, 181).

Consequently “education should preserve the child’s radical innocence so that it can later accept responsibility for the world” (Stuart: 1998, 83). It can accept responsibility only by using its imagination to fill the void created by injustice. Filling the void or “facing the terror of the ‘blank canvas’, facing the ‘gap’ where the human individual has to make his own mark” (Davis: 2005, XV). The imagination fills the gaps and finds the answers in human justice. I see this moment of ‘filling the void’ as being akin to the moment in theatrical performance where the audience is offered a reflexive moment in which to question that which has been taken for granted. Those moments where the audience member may create an alternative and where utopia may be glimpsed. In relation to young people and their families, as in the work of Bond, the social imagination of the audience can view the current prevailing naturalisation of the nuclear family as a false consciousness and through a critical

hermeneutics critique that 'given' and configure something else. This can be seen in the final scenes of *The Children*.

The character of Joe insists that he and his friends carry the Man although this slows down their progress and is literally killing them. Joe is seen to be developing a sense of justice that drives him to take responsibility for those who cannot take responsibility for themselves. Through this he recognises his guilt and acknowledges it asking for forgiveness from his victim. In doing so he also concedes his liability for the deaths of his friends at the hands of the Man. Having accepted his culpability he is now ready to re-enter society and work as an agent for change.

Joe along with the Boy from *At the Inland Sea* and Irene in *Tuesday* can all be seen to have rejected their family relationships and *to have* learnt to 'be on their own' and in doing so to take responsibility not just for their actions but those of society, both present and past. Bond believes that:

the meaning of anyone's life is only given by the meaning of everyone's life: the meaning of your life – whether good or bad – can only be derived from the community and your part in it (Stuart: 1998, 22).

In relation to the neo-family, these characters must reject their nuclear families which are seen to be oppressive and dehumanizing and take responsibility for themselves before they can rejoin and remake a new family structure or supportive network that will enable them to retain their new found sense of social responsibility or their humanity. The optimistic and utopic notes that these plays end on is that when these individuals rejoin society they will do so with this sense of responsibility and new 'humanness' intact demonstrating that "Bond's notion of 'humanness' is socially optimistic" (Nicholson: 2003, 13).

This is only possible with the use of imagination.

The imagination is a way of exploring reality...so imagination isn't a special access into a world of its own; it doesn't create values of its own; it doesn't even really invent anything of its own. It's used

to understand what happens outside the reach of the senses – not merely in space and time, but also what is categorically beyond their reach; thus it uses the signs given by people to interpret their subjective life. This is an ability we need to live in society (Stuart: 2001, 77).

If this ability is denied and the imagination of an individual is repressed this leads directly to less creativity and frustration which in turns leads to violent outbursts which are the expression of the need for justice and equality. This is exhibited in Scenes One and Two of *Eleven Vests*. The Student is unfulfilled by his schooling and, further frustrated by victimisation and marginalisation, the violent outburst is aimed at authority as represented by the Head and once she has been disposed of the Student can regain his territory, albeit briefly, by claiming back the school grounds. Denial or corruption of the imagination makes us less human and more likely to become barbarous and capable of murder but to avoid this we must contact our imaginations as this is the route to become more human or more humane. Bond explains this in some detail in “The Reason for Theatre”.

Imagination is needed to ask why. Imagination and not reason makes us human. We are self-conscious. Imagination and self-consciousness cannot exist without each other, they are aspects of each other...Reason seeks the rational, imagination seeks the logical – either as fate or freedom...If we are to be human there is a logical practice of imagination. More, the logic of imagination requires us to be human (Bond: 2000a, 113).

Nicholson has stated that “this connection between imagination and humanness turns on the belief that becoming human is an act of self-creativity; it is a process which has to be learnt” (Nicholson: 2003, 13). In *At the Inland Sea* the Boy is visited by the Mother and her baby and travels with them in to the holocaust. Clearly this journey takes places in his imagination, through which he sees the people crowded into the gas chamber and the “Man on the Roof” as he is “crouched at the hole. Pouring the tin... Through the hole. Falling on the shoulders. In their hair” (Bond 1997b, 21). His imagination allows him to witness “The people. All... together. Breathing. Together. Dying.” (Bond: 1997b, 33). He then returns, no longer a child, but a man who has seen what it is to be

inhuman and who can take responsibility for the past by envisioning a future where such atrocities cannot be allowed to happen and hence the Boy becomes an agent for change. Bond's belief that others who witness this rite of passage from child to responsible adult can also envisage and create a more human society relying heavily on this theory of radical innocence.

The ultimate optimism is that this sense of responsibility and radical innocence can be transmitted through theatre from the characters to the participants and audiences. Bond intentionally places at the centre of his work the idea of the possibility of social change and focuses this possibility on young people, as agents for this change. In doing so Bond's work, unlike other writers producing work for young people in the period, tackles very serious concerns and is not afraid to confront difficult subject matter. Bond is overt in his intention to write plays that critique social structures, here I have considered how he specifically troubles the concept of the family and the education system. The other playwrights discussed here, during this period invite a reading of their work that questions the naturalisation of the family unit, albeit perhaps less intentionally.

## Chapter Ten: Conclusion

***'It was a strange family.'***

**(*Tusk Tusk*: Stenham 2009)**

Throughout this thesis, I have made a somewhat odd and complex juxtaposition of dysfunctional families and the utopic imagination, while being mindful of the difficult nature of this relationship. The connections and relationships between real life and lives represented in the theatre are at times paradoxical and complicated. The primary findings of this thesis are that the British theatre of the Nineties grappled with these complexities by placing the family, in all its guises, and the family home, in a central position that reflected society at large, while inviting a questioning of social structures in a more direct and provocative way than had previously been done, which made the play inherently political. This contradicts some of the writing from the period which suggested that theatre was “failing to engage with significant public issues” (Gottlieb: 1999, 212). The plays discussed here vary widely in style and form, yet each presents a range of problems that centre on family relationships, but yet offer no solution to these problems. The playwrights, in each case, have offered a glimpse of what is. Through the fractured dialogue, actions and characters, the audience is invited to question and problematise what they have seen. Whilst watching the performance, they are also offered the time to focus on issues and circumstances, which are often taken for granted as being the only options, and to in turn imagine alternatives that may be more optimistic. Therefore, an alternative becomes more feasible, or at the very least, “the ability to avoid perceiving present reality as natural, necessary, or without alternative” is created (Ricoeur: 1986, xxx). I have demonstrated that this then opens up what Ricoeur calls the “field of the possible” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). The field of the possible allows for the “development of new, alternative perspectives [which] defines Utopia’s most basic function” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). Once it has been accepted that alternatives are

possible, then starting from this knowledge offers an imaginative variation on the nature of social structures and a “chain reaction of change” can occur (Ricoeur: 1986, 289). More simply put, this thesis demonstrates that British theatre of the Nineties offered audiences a vision of a dysfunctional present with the possibility of a utopic imagining of a different future through its reflexive staging.

As I write these final paragraphs, my awareness of the complex nature of theatre as a social critique is made more pertinent with the tabloid press proclaiming its outrage over the release of Jon Venables this week. Bulger, Thompson and Venables have often been featured in the press over the last twenty years. This year, the twentieth anniversary of the murder was featured in news coverage. The BBC carried Shelagh Fogarty’s recollections from the trial in which she remembers that Venables “was a different *creature*,” demonstrating that the demonisation of 1993 was still at play; she also comments on his father’s absence at the trial (Fogarty: 2013). This continued attention was heightened further on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013 with stories in *The Sun*, *The Daily Express*, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. Each paper carried photographs or ‘mug shots’ of the 10 year old Venables at the time he was arrested. Each carried quotations from James Bulger’s mother in which she explains her fury at not being informed about the release, as she comments “they should’ve kept him locked up for a long time” (Rayner: 2013). *The Sun* describes Venables as both a fiend” and “twisted” (Moriraty: 2013). The debates surrounding the nature of childhood and dysfunctional families continue. Since 2001, British theatre has also continued to present its audiences with representations of families in all their guises as both background material and the central focus of the plot.

The legacy of the provocative and unequivocal opening up of debates around the family as theatrical material can be seen in the blunt and direct approach to problematising ‘the family’ that continues to be in evidence in theatre since the period. These continuing debates highlight

the need for a reflexive theatre that is critically engaged, and that invites audiences to question what is, and what might be. This underlines the continued relevance and importance of the playwright as functioning as a social critic. In 2003, two years after the releases of Thompson and Venables, two prolific new British playwrights, Debbie Tucker Green and Dennis Kelly, each had plays performed in April. Both of these plays focused on dysfunctional nuclear families.

*Debris* (2003, Theatre 503, London) by Kelly opens with a detailed and graphic description of a father's self-crucifixion, or as the subtitle of the scene describes it, his "cruxicide" (Kelly: 2003, 11). The scene is a monologue in which the character of Michael describes the scene in which he discovers his dying father.

Michael continues to tell the audience that his father knowingly planned the scene for his son's arrival: 'He knows exactly how long it takes to die on the cross. He knows exactly what time I will open the door' (Kelly: 2003, 15). Instead of seeking help and saving him, Michael tells the audience that he slowly leaves and closes the door behind him. It's a powerful opening scene of a play that demonstrates a childhood of siblings having an alcoholic abusive father who lost their mother while still young. It is a fractured and disjointed narrative told by the two young characters who describe various ways in which their mother died, as well as scenes of childhood events. The stories they tell are often contradictory in nature and at times appear to be flights of fancy. Such stories include being born from a mother lying dead and putrifying on the sofa, finding a baby formed out of rubbish, infants that feed on blood or petrified flesh, a brother attempting to strangle his sister, a stranger with a gorilla buying the siblings, and numerous instances of abandonment and abuse from a father destroyed by grief. What is clear to the audience is that they are witnessing characters coming to terms with loss and dysfunctional family relationships. The third scene of the play is particularly poignant. Entitled "Divorce", this scene involves Michael following home a divorced man as he delivers his son home after dinner

in a pizza restaurant. Michael, who watches as the child returns home to his mother, describes the scene to the audience as if it were the ideal image of a family. It is a moving scene that highlights the character's own isolation and search of an ideal family of its own. Michael does not succeed in finding a neo-family. The play ends bleakly with no hint of optimism from either child as they realise "that nothing would be safe from our father's anger" (Kelly: 2003, 24).

*Born Bad* (2003: Hampstead Theatre, London), Debbie Tucker Green's second play, also ends on a bleak note. This one act play depicts a family discussing a history of childhood sexual abuse. The play is both brutal and confrontational in style and content. It features six characters, Dad, Mum, Dawta, Sister 1, Sister 2 and Brother, who all remain on stage through the play as "a blood-related black family" (Green: 2009, 2). The dialogue is centred around Dawta and her search for information and a way to understand why she was singled out for sexual abuse in the family home. The confrontation and abusive interrogation of family members by Dawta is heightened as each of the characters, including the largely silent father, look on. Dawta's direct verbal assault on Mum in scene two is representational of the tone of much of the play:

And I'll call it like iss nuthin, and I'll say it like iss nuthin like the nuthin it is like the nuthin you are like the nuthin you took a try at to mek me.

Bitch.

Cap fit.

Bitch (Green: 2009, 4).

During the play, both Sister 1 and Sister 2 look back on their own childhood, with Sister 1 voicing her hazy memories of Mum making a choice about which daughter to offer as a sexual surrogate to their father, while Sister 2 remembers nothing but an idyllic childhood.

As Brother also starts to remember his own abuse, these assertions from Sister 2 start to ring hollow. This play also lacks a sense of hope or

utopia, as the family turns on each other, confronting one another about who was chosen, and even more disturbingly, who wasn't chosen and why, with the more or less silent Dad watching the arguments as the play progresses. The ever present father figure becomes a physical incarnation of his menacing force and physical abuse on his children and the family home. The play ends with his cold and final condemnation of his wife "You made the wrong choice" (green: 2009, 50). This proclamation and the revelations leading to this final pronouncement leave little doubt that these characters are left broken, with little chance of moving beyond recrimination and the bitterness exhibited throughout the play as a whole.

The focus on dysfunctional families is evident in British theatre throughout the following decade, with a particular emphasis on siblings left alone to fend for themselves immersing strongly from 2009, as illustrated in the works of Dennis Kelly's *Orphans* (Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh) and Polly Stenham's *Tusk Tusk* (Royal Court Jerwood Upstairs, London), and more recently in Vivienne Franzmann's *Pest* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, 2014). Stenham's *Tusk Tusk* (2009) focuses on three children, Eliot (fifteen), Maggie (fourteen) and Finn (seven), as they survive alone in a new house, in a new city, waiting for the return of their mother. We are told this is a "strange family. Because the thing is, Mummy Bear was sick" (Stenham: 2009, 109). The audience slowly becomes aware, as the children forage for food and struggle through accidents and illness that the mother is not returning. Her depression and suicide attempts have dominated the lives of the children with Maggie bearing the brunt of her mother's condition until she can bare it no longer. She reveals in the final moments of the play her last and painful conversation with her mother:

I just knew it would be like every other time. Over and over. And I was so angry. So fucking angry with her. My tummy hurt and I couldn't even tell her. She was crying again. Walking in circles. I tried to make her something to eat...she shoved it out of my hand. She told me I was an accident. A piece of shit like my dead father...And she started threatening things. You know. What she would do...I said... Just go and do it then (Stenham: 2009, 111).

In the last line of the play, the three children decide to stay together and attempt to find a place where they can avoid being taken into care, hoping to live together bound by the fact that as a family, that is what they must do, "Because that is what family is. Suffering for each other" (Stenham: 2009, 93). The same theme of families or siblings staying together, no matter what, is found in Kelly's *Orphans*, which focuses on the care system and its effects on sibling relationships.

In *Orphans*, the audience is presented with two adult sibling orphans, Danny and Helen. Helen's devotion to the concept of family and her brother leads her and her husband to first cover up the abduction and abuse of a stranger at her brother's hands, and then to assist in the strangers torture. Much of the discussion between the siblings focuses on an incident in their childhood, when it was a possibility that Helen would be fostered by a family. The child figure of Danny is depicted as being so distraught at the thought of this possibility that he beats another child to a 'pulp...with a brick' (Kelly: 2011, 68). The fostering is prevented because of this attack and for the rest of their lives, Helen covers up the violent acts committed by her brother. The play's final moments vaguely suggest a more hopeful future when Helen informs Danny that it is over and he must leave his key and not return. But this brief glimpse of optimism is taken away when Helen's partner, Liam, as a result of his own complicity in the violent events of the play, tells her she must get rid of the child she is carrying, with the implication that neither of them are suitable parents and that the world is no longer a suitable place for children. It is a bleak ending mirrored by that in *Pests*.

The characters in Franzmann's *Pests* are sisters, both with criminal records and histories of drug addiction. The play is set in Pink's flat. Pink, on release from prison, has gone back to crime, prostitution and drugs as a means to survive, and has her own child in the care system. Rolly, at the start of the play, is released from prison pregnant and is keen to make a new life for herself. However, this plan is sabotaged by Pink, in

retribution for the fact that she was not fostered as a child, while Rolly was. In a bleak and harrowing play, the audience hears confessions of violence, sexual abuses and self-harm, while Rolly is enticed back into prostitution and drugs, eventually losing her own child. In the final scene, Rolly is aware that staying with Pink can only lead to her destruction and yet in the final moments she decides to sacrifice her own freedom to care for Pink. The final image of Rolly injecting Pink with heroine and then “cooking up” for herself is not one of a utopian future of two people caring for each other and starting on a new life, as seen at the end of *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*, but rather one of a dystopian future that can only lead both sisters to their deaths. In this way, all of these plays differ from the plays that I have discussed in this thesis.

Since 2001, Edward Bond has continued to write plays that feature young characters who struggle within their nuclear families to learn to take responsibility for first themselves and then others, as illustrated in his works of *Tune* (2007, Big Brum, Pegasus Infant and Junior School, Birmingham), *A Window* (2009, Big Brum at Golden Hillock School, Birmingham), *The Edge* (2011, Big Brum Pegasus Infant and Junior School, Birmingham) and *The Angry Road* (2014, Big Brum Pegasus Infant and Junior School, Birmingham). Bond’s plays continue to provide an exemplar for a politically engaged theatre that offers moments of critique, or distancing (through both their form and content), by inviting critique of ideology and paving the way for new ways of thinking about social constructs. These continuing debates highlight the need for a reflexive theatre that is critically engaged, and that invites audiences to question what is, and what might be. This underlines continued relevance and importance of the playwright as a social critic.

The plays discussed in this thesis create moments of critique or, distancing, through both their form and content, which makes possible a critique of ideology. Therefore, an alternative becomes more feasible, or at the very least, “the ability to avoid perceiving present reality as natural, necessary, or without alternative” is created (Ricoeur: 1986,

xxx). This then opens up what Ricoeur calls the “field of the possible” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). The field of the possible allows for the “development of new, alternative perspectives [which] defines Utopia’s most basic function” (Ricoeur: 1986, 16). Once it has been accepted that alternatives are possible, then starting from this knowledge offers an imaginative variation on the nature of social structures, allowing a “chain reaction of change” to occur (Ricoeur: 1986, 289).

In my reading of the plays discussed here, what ultimately is at stake in the utopic endeavours displayed to audiences is the apparent ‘given’ of the family form. Each play is political in that each provides the space for critical reflection on what *is*, thereby paving the way for what might be, or what is not *yet*. The prevalence of the family as a focus in political theatre continues beyond the time frame of this thesis, with new writers and directors questioning family structures both explicitly and implicitly within the theatre, presenting it as both a social and political concept that is in need of revaluation. The media, since the release of Thompson and Venables, has continued to feature dysfunctional families in headlines and single parent families are still highlighted as being sources of risk for children and tax payers alike. The theatre of the period discussed here raised questions and hinted at alternatives, but provided no solutions to those questions. The British stage remains a place with the potential to pose difficult questions for its audiences and invite them to consider new forms and structures of ways of life, while still offering utopic alternatives.

The concept of utopia itself is perhaps currently unpopular. However, the ability to see what is with clarity, in order to see what could be, is surely vital if changes are to be made and social justice is to be found. I, in agreement with Edward Bond’s thinking, believe that theatre provides a strong medium for this reimagining of the future. Bond tells us that theatre allows us to remake reality by asking:

What is drama? There are two cups, one white and one blue. The white cup has a handle. The blue cup has none. We break the two cups and trample and scatter the pieces. We carefully reassemble them. No fragment is left over. There is no crack on the cups, not

one sign of breakage, each cup is perfect. But the blue cup has the handle and the white cup has none. Drama changes reality (Bond: 2006, ii).

All of the plays discussed here are examples of reflexive theatre, in that they offer audiences gaps in the narratives in which they may reflect on what is, and then imagine not *yet*, or what could be. Here, I have explored a set of ideas surrounding utopia and the family, as demonstrated through play texts and productions. In this thesis, I argue in support of a utopic reading of British play texts, which is more often aligned with dystopic visions rather than with hope. The concept of utopia aligning with that of a contemporary political theatre opens further research questions in 2014 and beyond, specifically for me in my work with community and participatory theatre settings. Is the power of theatre to invite a critical perspective on what is, and what could be, felt more strongly for participants involved in making performances in a more applied sense? Does theatre allow us to create change or enable a glimpse of an alternative way of living? Is that change more likely with more active participants? Can utopic visions be explored and new political and social landscapes be created through theatre? Does 'drama change reality?' Or are these questions merely a part of my own abstract utopia, where theatre can and does make a difference?

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