

**THE RELATTONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC  
AND PRIVATE LIFE AS DRAMATIZED  
BY DAVID HARE IN HIS PLAYS :  
A THEMATIC, TECHNTCAL, STYLISTIC  
APPROACH**

**A thesis submitted to the faculty of arts  
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# **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore Hare's ability to depict the relationship between public life and private life in most of his plays. Through this theme, he was able to prove his success as a playwright of popular dissent in Britain. He holds certain political beliefs such as strong leftist support for the working poor, disdain for affluence, and a hatred for England's class system. By criticizing a number of establishments and their leaders, he reveals how peoples' private lives are affected badly by their wrongs.

The study is divided into an introduction, two chapters and a conclusion. The introduction gives us a general idea of the thesis and its contents. The first chapter aims basically at showing Hare's unique ability to relate individuals' private lives to the public world in order to indicate how they are deeply influenced by its ills but can't influence its status quo. At the centre of each play is an individual in conflict with some form of public frame. The acts of that individual, either virtuous or evil, serve as both a moral and ideological touchstone against which the audience judges the corrupt public world. Moreover, the individual is presented as a martyr to or parodic emblem of corrupt contemporary society and his private world is generated by the public activity or institution in which he is involved. Thus, the private decay of such characters becomes an implicit critique of the public corruption of the capitalist contemporary world. However, the hermeticism of institutions which represent the public world negates any form of individual protest from the Left or Right. Successful revolutionaries are always absent from the onstage action. Even when the emblem of the status quo is converted, it is left to the audience to find a positive alternative to the status quo.

In **Paris by Night**, for example, the institution which represents contemporary corruption in England is the Conservative Party, and the individual who represents political corruption is Adam Gillvray. Like many of Hare's characters, he is a conservative who has moved away from socialism and has abandoned any attempt at radicalism in his youth. His private moral corruption by conservatism is expressed on a sexual level through making obscene telephone calls to Clara. He defines conservatism as a release from uncertainty and guilt of socialism, "Not wasting your life in uncertainty and guilt (**Paris 11**). Conservatism asserts the individual's right to follow gut instinct.

This conservative philosophy – the absence of moral values – is depicted through Clara's private life. She is a politician whose private life is directly determined by her involvement in conservative politics. Gillvray's description of guiltlessness inherent in political conservatism is quite reflected on Clara's family life. Clara's thoughts of her child are inspired not through affection but by accident. She remembers to ask him about his school only when her assistant asks if she wishes to take political papers about education with her on her trip to Paris. Even when Simon has to go to hospital to have an operation, she refuses to return to England; she is an obdurate mother. Not only does Clara neglect her son, but she also neglects her husband. She sacrificed her home life to political success through public participation in politics. Thus, she is killed by her husband because of her political conservatism which has corrupted her private life.

The second chapter intends to show the different technical and stylistic devices used by Hare to dramatize the relationship between public life and private life. One of Hare's technical tools takes the form of flashback, the interruption of the story's continuity to portray an episode

or incident that occurred earlier. In **Paris by Night**, for example, Clara's corrupted private life is revealed through her past which affects badly her present. Clara and her husband have taken Swanton's money by force but he could not get revenge on them. When she sees him in Paris at night, she decides to get rid of him. She commits a crime of murder but feels no remorse for that which proves the absence of moral conscience.

Inanimate objects and dead characters are also technical devices used by Hare to highlight the past and its effect on individuals' present private lives. In **Plenty**, for instance, Susan takes out her gun and cleans it from time to time which illustrates her thoughts of wartime experience. She returns to the past because she can not change her life or the lives of others around her. Again, the gift that Brock, Susan's husband, has bought for Susan symbolizes the affluence of Brock's financial world. Susan refuses to open the big package which reveals her rejection of the economic richness of post war society. In **The Secret Rapture**, Hare uses the dead character of Robert to portray the relation between the corrupt public political life and the decent private goodness. This relation is depicted through the others reactions towards Robert and his ideology. His liberal idealism is always rejected by the decadent contemporary society.

One of stylistic devices used by Hare is the discrepancy between what is said and what is done. This device of irony serves to indicate the characters failure to change the corrupt status quo or their acquiescence to its corruption. Clara, for example, asserts that " if you do something, you must live with the consequences" (**Paris** 15). However, her speech is ironical because she has killed Swanton and has carefully avoided the consequences. Another device used by Hare is imagery to reflect the relation between public life and private life. The clearest example is the

visual image of the happy child Clara sees at Wallace's sister –in– law's home. The child was happy between his parents "almost as if she were in a proscenium arch" (36). Clara realizes that she is privately unhappy as she can not return to England to see her son.

The conclusion of the thesis is an evaluation of Hare's portrayal of the relationship between public life and private life, his technical and stylistic devices.

# **Chapter One**

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

David Hare, like most of the British writers, is chiefly concerned with public and private violence. He hoped for a revolution that never occurred as the playwright encountered clear institutional corruption. His work reflects a sociopolitical critique of governmental power structures and how they affect individuals' private lives. This reflection is hinted at **Layby** (1971), a play written by David Hare, Brian Clark, Trevor Griffiths, Howard Brenton, Steven Poliakoff, Hugh Stoddard, and Snoo Wilson. The play examines a real newspaper article about fellatio on a British lay-by. It associates pornography and private sexual violence with a large-scale public moral decay in England. However, the focus is put on the private corruption resulted from association with public institutions and how it affects the individuals' lives.

In **Layby**, Lesley is the victim of the sexual violence of a pornographer who works for a public institution of art. He raped her in front of her friend Joy. Then, the same scene is repeated on a lay-by Jack and Marge as a voyeur. In **Look Back in Gender** (1987), Micheline Wnador notes :

Apart from some brief moments, Lesley as the 'victim' is isolated from the other women. Marge is on Jack's side, and Lesley's Friend Joy is hardly a real support. The active protagonists are all men

and one way or another they all act on Lesley, either verbally or physically, lending the images an air of semi-pornography. In theory the audience is put in the role of Jury ... They are asked to accept nudity in public and judge violence in private sexual acts; they are being asked to Judge the degree of the man's guilt as well as the woman's responsibility or position as victim. (103-104)

At the court, Jack and Marge's advocate has succeeded in questioning Lesley's testimony by convincing the Judge that she was taken not by force but at her will. She was sentenced with Jack and Marge wrongfully. This implied that the judicial world is as corrupt as that of the lay-by. Immediately after the unjust sentence, Lesley injects herself with drugs and finally she dies desperately in prison. Lesley, Jack and Marge are really significant victims of institutionalized corruption. In describing the bad treatment the prisoners have received in prison, a female voice-over, for instance, mentions how Marge has given Birth to child in prison: "It's a terrible mess, they're brutes, they take it away and make her clear up after birth, don't treat people better than animals" (Layby 72). Few persons sympathize with the victims but their weak revolution finds no way in front of the inertia of the public institutions.

Like Layby, Hare's How Brophy Made Good (1969) refers to the effect of the public corruption on the individual. However, the cause of that corruption is clearer in the latter text. Nearly all characters are associated with and corrupted by the public institution



of media. Smiles, the broadcaster, believes strongly in the vital role of the media:

Smiles: If the media mean anything. (*Pause*)

And they do, then they mean the unfettered dissemination of information. Media are optimistic. Media are progressive. Media says listen to me now and you will not need me soon. Media matters. (*Pause*) Matter media. (**Brophy 96**)

Brophy, her lover, knows well that the liberal programs of media which Smiles broadcasts are only intended to perpetuate the status quo: “Social conscience and moral outrage must be flouted on the screens at all costs. It is the perfect way to keep the public docile ... It reassures people to know that the media care” (**Brophy 97**). Smiles liberal ideology is unreal because of her involvement with the public institution of media: “The whole point of your awful shows is to prove how bloody liberal you are” (**Brophy 108**). Brophy, here, reveals the relation between the public work and the private aims.

Peter’s socialism and Leonard’s revolution, like Smiles’ liberalism, has proved to be impotent by their joinment in the institution of media. Leonard has become a professor of communication, and Peter has joined the Ministry of Communication. Their private corruption is expressed on a sexual level as they are home sexual levers. Instead of refusing to continue their involvement with the media, they are absorbed by it.

Brophy, a popular media satirist, also was thinking of a real change:

Smiles:                    You mean you came to represent the values you had originally satirised?

Brophy:                    No (*Pause*). It is not a question of quality but of quantity. Just too many hours. Too much air-time. I'd become reassuring. The need was for change.

Smiles:                    For revolution?

Brophy:                    No, for change. (**Brophy 106**)

Yet, his initial intention to effect any change has become a dream by continuing to work for the media. His private life has become increasingly corrupt. Sexual obsessions reveal his moral collapse, "when I hear the word culture I reach for my sex" (**Brophy 95**). Not only is he rude in his obscene telephone calls to Smiles, but it is revealed that he may have been beyond Peter's brother murder.

Like **Layby** and **How Brophy Made Good**, **Slag** (1970) focuses on the moral decay of individuals involved with the public institutions to provide an implicit critique of a socio-political status quo. Hare himself notes that **Slag** is about every institution he has known-school, Cambridge, Pathé, and so on. In his introduction to **The History Plays**, he says:

My plays are intended as puzzles, the solution is up to the audience ... **Slag** was about all educational

establishment which I've known, including Cambridge, where there is a very self-regarding obsession with personal relationships. (9)

He sees all institutions to be the same as they greatly focus on rituals and discussions about trivial matters.

The play is a humorous treatment of a year in the private lives of three schoolmistresses who run Bracken Hurst School for girls. They eventually decide to be isolated from the dominance of male society. Each of the characters represents a political ideology, and their conflict can be regarded as a revolution. Roger Cornish, in an early literary biography of Hare, states:

The play is best seen as presenting a revolutionary conflict in which conservative England (represented by Ann) competes with Maoist radicalism (Joanne) for the loyalty of the common masses (Elise). (236)

Bracken Hurst is a microcosm of the enclosed English society in which Joanne, a radical socialist, aims at turning Bracken Hurst into a pure alternative society without men: "Bracken Hurst inches the world forward. Bracken Hurst is sexual purity. Bracken-Hurst is the community of women" (59). Ann, the headmistress, takes the role of the media in How Brophy Made Good. She is the oppressively tolerant who tolerates every unreasonable act of Joanne to keep the status quo of her institution.

Moreover, Ann forgets her vows when she had a sexual relation with the first man she meets (a butcher). Many times she

tried to get rid of Joanne's disturbance by poisoning her: "The slow sprinkling of arsenic seemed as humane a way as possible. I've not thought Joanne evil or depraved. Wayward more like and needing me" (**Slag 74**). Joanne, herself, subverted her position as liberal feminist by teaching the pupils how to masturbate: "Masturbation is the only form of sexual expression left to the authentic woman" (**Slag 21**). Elise is depicted as an apolitical woman; she only is interested in sex and pregnancy: "The whole thing can probably be blamed on some childhood vitamin deficiency. Or a great rush of air to my legs that sucks men to me ..." (**Slag 15**). Thus, Joanne's revolutionary ideas has failed and has replaced by moral decay as a result of their involvement with the public institution of education which refuses any political change.

In Hare's next play **The Great Exhibition** (1972), the relationship between public life and private life is quite clear. The text is about Charlie Hammett, a disillusioned Member of Parliament who looks for a real political world. Hare states:

... I think (The Great Exhibition) was to do with labour and politics generally in the sixties. The only experience I had was believing passionately in the labour Government of 1964, and watching that government sell everything down the river. So the play was about a disillusioned labour MP.  
(**Itzin 115**)

As in **Slag**, Hammett has lived in his own self-enclosed world as a result of being a middle class emblem of the labour party of the

sixties. He mentions that his constituents" resent me because I'm not working class" (**Exhibition 28**).

In **The Great Exhibition**, the public life is the political life which increasingly affects the private lives of its characters. The division of the text into two similar Acts take the title "Public Life" and "Private Life" implies that there is no difference between the characters' personalities in their public and private lives. Hare mentions that:

The thing is, Hammett feels himself to be an exhibitionist both in his public life and in his private life. He feels conscious that he's performing in parliament, and conscious that he's performing in front of his wife. (**Itzin 116**)

Maud's words give us the impression that Charlie's public life is a type of performance "Charlie's idea of public life [is] that by some incredible process he's been cannibalized ... This man is one of the world's great performers" (**Exhibition 25-26**). In their private lives, their performance is expressed when Maud returns from work and asks Hammett to prepare her dinner and to help her to change her clothes.

The similarity between Public and Private life is implied when Charlie associates his and Maud's private relationship (courtship) with performance and political references:

**Hammett:** We moved on to rip up a regional seat of government. That's a place where old Tories go to die. After the bomb drops-remember the bomb? –

it's down to the dugout and lashings of hot cocoa and discipline. Survival of the fittest – the fittest is this case being Harold Macmillan, Sir Alec Douglas – Home, Reginald Maudling and a little – known neuter from Broad stairs called Edward Heath. Poor chap. Anyway, Maud was with an actress of left-wing disposition. She had left-wing disposition like other people have smallpox. That's where we met. I wore a duffle coat. Maud wore an expression of extreme distaste for the whole experience ... And in the following week I talked to her about socialism, and as I talked I became so convinced, it became so clear, that I decided to become a politician. My own eloquence, you see. The platform, the business of speaking it delighted me. I courted Maud with public speeches. My actual proposal drew heavily on **Das Kapital**. (**Exhibition 25-33**)

Charlie and Maud have failed in their private relationships and public careers. Maud has failed to work as a casting director for a production of **King Lear**. Furthermore, she has decided to leave her husband, and the detective Abel is the one Hammett hired to photograph her private affair with her lover Jerry:

**Hammett:** Do you know that dud detective Abel sat in the cupboard and recorded you saying that you didn't love me anymore. I found that oddly reassuring.

**Maud:** Really?

**Hammett:** Puts the whole thing on a public footing. More or less performance.

**Maud:** And he photographed me? (**Exhibition 40**).

Like Joanne in **Slag**, Jerry represents an alternative culture in the play, however his position is subverted by his self-indulgence.

The failure has extended to Charlie's public life:

**Hammett:** ... I've never to this day spoken or argued out what I believed. My entry into politics was perfectly mistimed. I decided to be a politician about three days before the rest of the world became revolutionaries. Since then. (*Pause*).

Those who live by the word shall die by the word.  
(**Exhibition 34**).

Finally, Charlie's rebellious act is expressed on a sexual level. He has decided to become a flasher on Clapham Common. This is a desperate way of a politician accustomed to exhibiting himself in a parliament full of ideological flashers. He is an exhibitionist both in his public life and private life. His revolt is ineffective as the woman he flashes, Catriona, has refused to respond. The failure of this rebellion is due to Hammett's artificial performance:

**Catriona:** I could tell you weren't an original, you know. That mac was far too calculated, and the small brown case. You were acting the part I'm afraid.