

Abstract

The focus of this dissertation is the representation of the artist as a character in British theatre. In this study, which includes three chapters and one introductory chapter, I attempt to show that British playwrights, whether male or female, use their main fictional characters as artists either for self-reflexivity or to comment on the situation of being an artist. In accordance with the above premise, the responsibility of the artist and the function of art is investigated with due reference to radical thinkers, philosophers and writers such as, among others, Immanuel Kant, Oscar Wilde, Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin, Viktor Shklovsky, Bertolt Brecht and Jean-Paul Sartre. This investigation concentrates on the conceptualization and contribution of those intellectuals to the definition of the role of the artist.

Though I focus mainly on the period from the 1970s to the 2000s onwards, by analysing the dramatic texts of three British playwrights: Tom Stoppard, Howard Barker, and Timberlake Wertenbaker, I also discuss the decade following John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). In this manner, I trace the key changes that have taken place in British theatre during the second half of the 20th century. Though there is an abundance of critical material on the subject which focuses on the figure of the artist to show self-referral for the dramatist, the present thesis goes beyond that to highlight the role and responsibility of the artist in British theatre, the function of art, the potential dilemmas he or she may confront and the economic and political circumstances surrounding them.

The plays examined in this thesis range from those depicting the problematic role of the artist as an intellectual, who is torn between morality and immorality, as in Stoppard's *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972) and *Travesties* (1974), to those which reject the utilitarian function of art, for example Barker's *No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming* (1981) and *Scenes from an Execution* (1984). In the case of Wertenbaker, I highlight the role and dilemmas of female artists as they use theatre as a means to show the hegemonic political and economic constraints imposed on their artistic creativity. By analysing several of Wertenbaker's plays which centre on the use of the artist as a character, her *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) and *The Line* (2009), reflect the relationship between male and female artists and the dilemmas they faced.

This thesis poses the following questions: as a fictional character, how can the artist function as a member of a certain community whilst at the same time retain the distinctiveness of his or

her role as an outsider? Is he or she committed to the creative work or to the social usefulness of society? If so, can we expect art or the artist to have the answer to society's problems? Or is that an overly high expectation to place on the artist? How did artists feel living in a society under censorship? How can they avoid being censored? And if they failed, what is the price of free expression?

Springing from the discussion about the dilemmas of the artist in British theatre, it will become apparent how these dilemmas, represented by fictional characters, bring forth the dominant plays about artists. Within the framework of the above mentioned playwrights, it is demonstrated that the pressing dilemma which radical artists are faced with nowadays are multiple: social, commercial and political.