

# David Hare's Memoir of Coronavirus and His Political Rage in *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue*

*Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* Adlı Oyunda  
David Hare'in Koronavirüs Anıları ve Siyasi Öfkesi

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## Abstract

In *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (2020), David Hare gives a personal account of his illness period during the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, from the middle of March 2020 to the first week of April. In this monologue play, Hare deals with the decay of his body under the attack of the coronavirus and then dwells on his recovery process. On the one hand, this play appears to be a personal chronicle of the playwright's experience with the Covid-19 virus. On the other hand, Hare's narration of the news about the virus from the United Kingdom and the world serves to reveal national and collective memory of the crisis. As a playwright who frequently works on political realities and topical issues, Hare intermingles his personal memory and the collective record of the pandemic to censure the leaders incapable of coping with ambiguous circumstances. Thus, his memoir unveils not only Hare's political commentary but also his political rage as his tone is tinged with anger and disappointment when it comes to the Conservative Party's failure to protect people against the virus in the country. This paper intervenes in Hare's monologue play, *Beat the Devil*, to investigate the playwright's use of autobiographical and collective memory and evaluates Hare's expression of political rage in his exploration of the coronavirus.

**Keywords:** David Hare, *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue*, memory, political rage, coronavirus

## Öz

*Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (2020) adlı oyununda David Hare, Mart 2020'nin ortasından Nisan ayının ilk haftasına Covid-19 pandemisinin erken dönemi boyunca devam eden hastalık döneminde kişisel olarak yaşadıklarını anlatır. Bu monolog oyunda Hare, koronavirüs saldırısına uğramış bedeninin çöküşünü ele alır ve sonra iyileşme sürecinin üzerinde durur. Bir yandan bu oyun, oyun yazarının Covid-19 virüs deneyiminin bireysel bir kaydı gibi görünür. Öte yandan, Hare'in Birleşik Krallık ve dünyadan virüsle ilgili haberleri anlatımı krizin ulusal ve kolektif belleğini ortaya çıkarmasını sağlar. Çoğunlukla siyasi gerçeklikler ve güncel konular hakkında çalışan bir oyun yazarı olan Hare, belirsiz durumlarla baş edemeyen liderleri eleştirmek üzere bireysel hafızasını ve pandeminin kolektif kaydını birbirinin içine geçirir. Böylece, Hare'in anıları siyasi yorumunun yanı sıra, ülkede insanları virüse karşı korumada başarısız olan Muhafazakar Parti'nin konusu geldiğinde, yazarın tonu öfke ve hayal kırıklığıyla dolu olduğundan aynı zamanda siyasi öfkesini ortaya çıkarır. Bu çalışma Hare'in *Beat the Devil* isimli monolog oyununda oyun yazarının otobiyografik ve kolektif belleği kullanımını analiz eder ve Hare'in koronavirüsü ele alışındaki siyasi öfkeyi ifade etmesini değerlendirir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** David Hare, *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue*, bellek, siyasi öfke, koronavirüs

David Hare (1947- ) has already established himself as an eminent political playwright of British drama. Since the early 1970s, Hare has embedded his observations about contemporary politics into his dramatic art so that his *oeuvre* always includes the political

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realities of British history from his left-wing political stance. The playwright's keen interest in recording significant moments of history makes him known for his timely plays. One of his latest plays, *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (2020), is illustrative of Hare's prompt reply to the contemporary pandemic crisis. Because of the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus, theatres were immediately closed down in March 2020 after the outbreak of the pandemic all around the world. Following a series of lockdowns in the United Kingdom, the Bridge Theatre in London reopened its stage with a repertoire of one-person monologue plays for the autumn season of 2020. David Hare's *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* was the first play to be performed by Ralph Fiennes who also acted in the film version of the play directed by the playwright, available online on *Showtime*. Hare's monologue play or, monodrama, in other words, narrates what happened to Hare from the middle of March 2020 to the first week of April. The play recounts how Hare was infected with the coronavirus and how the virus affected his body day by day. In this personal chronicle, the playwright tries to depict the decay of his body in detail by relating the influence of the coronavirus on his body to the images of violence such as a bomb attack and the devil's possession of the body. More interestingly, Hare's memoir is not only about his recent memory but also delves into the current news about the pandemic and the government's response to the spread of coronavirus as he quotes from the news at that time. Therefore, the monologue play puts a political spin to ensure the failure of the Conservative Party in the UK in fighting against the coronavirus. This paper sets out to analyse Hare's monologue play in which he records and responds to the current pandemic crisis by enmeshing autobiographical and collective memory to express his political rage. Eventually, it reaches a conclusion in the exploration of the efficacy of Hare's expression of anger in this play.

In understanding Hare's approach to personal and collective memory, it is initially useful to note that most of the critics credit the playwright with his integration of personal and public experiences. As a case in point, drawing on Hare's interest in the influence of history on personal memory, Hersh Zeifman argues that "the public and the private constantly commingle in his plays, so closely interwoven that the threads finally become inextricable" (1994, p. xii). Likewise, Scott Fraser emphasises the presence of "private dissent [. . .] placed within the contextual frame of public history" as can be observed in Hare's different plays such as *Fanshen* (1976) and *Saigon* (1983) (1996, p. 198). In another instance, Finlay Donesky notes the playwright's concurrent use of individual and global viewpoints in terms of his moral ethics as a postwar British dramatist (1996, p. 9). Taken together, there is agreement on Hare's investigation of personal memory in tune with his political and historical observations. Mingling personal and public memory, Hare sheds light on contemporary happenings and constructs personal stories to create a kind of historical record on stage. That is the reason why Michael Billington includes Hare's works in his analysis of state-of-the-nation plays in which political realities are intermingled with personal stories to record contemporary British history in the postwar period (2007, pp. 215-220; 258-262; 329-334). Hare himself affirms the interplay between public memory and individual storytelling in his plays. For the composition of his works, he makes research on his topic and uses his imagination by oscillating between factual memory and personal interpretation. As for Hare's Iraq play, *Stuff Happens* (2004), Steve Nicholson argues that "Hare again has no compunction about mixing research with imagination, stating that the private scenes between leading public figures are 'based on what I believe to have happened'" (2007, p. 184). Drawing on the link between the personal memory and the public memory established by the playwright, it is also possible to define Hare as a historian or a chronicler. Hare's statement that "history has a great effect on who you are and how you think" (1993, p. 218) indicates that his works are the

product of collective historical memory. What prevails here is that Hare's personal memory or private accounts from his life make their appearance in his account of collective memory or, in other words, the public recollection of events.

By focusing on the use of memory in Hare's plays, it is possible to claim that the playwright draws on autobiographical memory and reports collective memory. Bruce M. Ross defines autobiographical memory as "the possible or actual descriptions of past happenings that would be considered by most people as 'part of one's personal history'" (1991, p. 4). Despite the individual perspective on the past, the remembering self not only registers personal stories but also stores historical moments. There emerges a narrative to zoom in on collective memory through the capture of historical moments in an individual account. Regarding that "history may be considered as an art of memory" (Favorini, 2008, p. 91), the stock of individual memory resides in collective memory. Here, collective memory can be defined as the collection of national and historical stories which enable to bring social, historical and political past together. Although Hare's works are not purely based on autobiographical elements, he embarks on his personal memory to narrate this kind of collective historical memory from time to time. In these cases, Hare tends to incorporate autobiographical memory into monologue form while bringing the historical self into light. To illustrate, Hare wrote his first monodrama, *Via Dolorosa* (1998), after visiting Israel and Palestine in 1997 (Megson and Rebellato, 2007, p. 243). Based on his own experience of the Middle East, *Via Dolorosa* turned into a one-man play in which Hare appeared on stage. The monologue form and Hare's performance made the play part of Hare's collection of "intimate pieces" in Richard Boon's terms (2007, p. 4). Concerning the monologue-play experience, Hare comments that "one of the effects of one-man shows is that you feel that at the end of the play you know the person on the stage terribly well" (Boon, 2003, p. 157). As it is known that his personal experience is the source of his monologue play, the character on stage is directly associated with Hare to the extent that the audience "felt very close to me [Hare], and responded much more intimately than they had with certain of my [his] plays" (Boon, 2003, p. 163). This sense of intimacy can be regarded as functional on the ground that the personal becomes political, and the play preserves historical memory stemming from personal experience.

Likewise, *Beat the Devil* yields a similar experience at the intersection of personal, national and collective memories. In this case, the use of monologue play is out of necessity considering the pandemic circumstances. One actor on stage, maintaining a distance from the audience, made it possible for all to return to the theatre in a safe environment. Thus, in the production of the play, there is only one character speaking alone on stage. Although the character is unnamed both in the play's text and on stage, the reader/audience easily realises that Ralph Fiennes narrates what happened to Hare from March 16th, 2020 to the first week of April. The setting reminds a kind of study room or an office place, and it is decorated with simple functional objects such as a table, a chair and, as for the actor's props, a suitcase and a diary which are quite practical materials in this account of personal memory. Because of health concerns, the Bridge Theatre hosted only 250 people who had to watch the play with their masks and in distant seats (Hare, 2020b, n.p.). The time that the monologue play was performed accords well with Richard Eyre's significant remark about Hare. "He's really, really smart about," the Artistic Director of the National Theatre says, "the particular time to do a particular play, and at what sort of theatre" (Boon, 2003, p. 221). *Beat the Devil* lays bare that Hare timely works on the contemporary context to reflect his personal and political perspective in the best way that the pandemic circumstances allow him during the global crisis. Establishing direct communication with the reader/audience, Hare sets out his very personal memory about the early days of the Covid-19 virus and his experience of the pandemic. In this

context, he launches a political debate about the failure of the British government and other leading figures during contemporary times of crisis. In the rest of this study, the analysis of the play maps out Hare's autobiographical story and then deals with his expression of political rage through his use of personal memory.

About Hare's monologue play, it is very telling to start with Quentin Letts's description of the play as "Hare's medical and political fevers" (2020, p. 17). At the heart of "medical fevers" lies Hare's personal story evolving into a collective record. As a matter of fact, the play is thoroughly about our current daily life during the Covid-19 crisis. After the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, Hare, like all of us, could not comprehend the necessity of taking measures to avoid infection. Considering the pre-pandemic times, Hare at first depicted his "ordinary" day. In early March, he was busy editing the episodes of his television series, *Roadkill*: "The three of us – director, editor and I – squeeze into the attic space and do an honourable day's work. At some point the director, Michael Keillor, a strong, rangy young man from Dundee, with Billy Connolly hair, makes us all a welcome cup of tea. We share a plate of biscuits" (Hare, 2020a, p. 3). Yet the simple moments of communication inflamed the disastrous period in Hare's life. After Keillor informed Hare that he got the virus, Hare needed to isolate himself at home. Instead of staying at home in quarantine, however, Hare preferred going to the studio to bring his work home, and notwithstanding the symptoms of the Covid-19 virus that he had, he was trying to continue his daily routine and even taking photos while cooking Chinese food for himself and his wife. Even though Hare initially denied the virus, it attacked his body and decayed his health day by day.

After Hare's infection, the depiction of the medical record is one key issue in understanding the combination of autobiographical notes and collective experience. Hare's monodrama displays that the playwright feels the ambiguity, vulnerability and the sense of in-betweenness during the liminal period of the pandemic. Hare is at pains to understand what is happening to his body. The first thing that he realises is his breathing problems. In Hare's account of his medical problems, the play documents a universal record of medical incompetence during the global crisis. Following the narration of Hare's breathing trouble, his medical account of the oxygen rate in blood brings a clearer focus on the collective vulnerability:

Doctors normally feel compelled to resort to ventilators when patients have oxygen saturation counts in the 80s, because by then they're gasping for air. Only with this disease, they're not. One doctor in New York has taken a picture of a woman lying on her belly with oxygen saturation of 54, and she's chattering away on her mobile phone. What the hell is going on? [...] Another doctor is quoted as saying: 'The question is whether this vital sign we've been relying on for decades has been lying to us.' He adds: 'It's very humbling in the twenty-first century with all the scientific advances we've made, and we just don't really know the answer.' (Hare, 2020a, p. 5)

Hare's personal story suddenly turns into a vein of collective memory since he draws attention to factual accounts by documenting the news. His daily physical decay weakens him by giving him an odd sense of fragility. Hare expresses that "Covid-19 seems to be a sort of dirty bomb, thrown into the body to cause havoc" (Hare, 2020a, p. 6). Apparently, what he experiences traumatises him to the extent that he evokes different associations and correlations to express the devastation on his body. For instance, he humorously depicts his high fever which illustrates his vulnerability in times of ambiguity. Checking the thermometer, Hare and his wife believe that the thermometer is not working because it shows 40 degrees. When he finds himself "in a lake of sweat," they understand that he is

suffering from fever, but his body shifts to “Arctic cold” (Hare, 2020a, pp. 8,9). Although Hare employs medical details and notes by quoting from the news, he unfolds personal memory by providing comic relief to the reader/audience:

Nicole has thus far defied medical advice. We're meant to sleep in separate rooms, but we don't. We share a bathroom too. Nicole's convinced she'll never get ill. Her mother lived to a hundred and two. Towards dawn, my fever has headed dramatically in the opposite direction and I start to shake with Arctic cold. Not even extra bedclothes, two thick pullovers and a hot-water bottle are doing anything to help. But I can't help feeling maybe Nicole's pushing her luck with her own immunity to this virus when she climbs on top of me, stretches her whole body against mine and says, 'Don't worry, I'll get you warm.' My wife doesn't seem to have grasped the notion of social distancing. (Hare, 2020a, p. 9)

After this humorous story, Hare peers into the period of eleven days that he calls the “mad phase” of his illness (Hare, 2020a, p. 9). This is the time when the virus attacks his body so violently that various symptoms of the coronavirus hurt him. One sees the density of his suffering in Hare's question: “But, again, am I dying?” (Hare, 2020a, p. 13). In addition to the image of a bomb destroying the body, Hare also offers another striking example to amply illustrate the physical damage in the play. In his conversation with Howard Brenton, Hare's contemporary playwright and a close friend, Brenton tells him that “the disease departs ‘like a demon leaving your body’” (Hare, 2020a, p. 18). Acknowledging the inefficacy of science and medicine in 2020, Hare reminds the reader/audience of the plague in the Middle Ages. Thus, he compares the contemporary crisis with the medieval one in that he offers a medieval understanding of the disease. The impingement of the coronavirus is inexplicable to the contemporary medical world so it is depicted most simply in terms of the medieval mindset. A professor from King's College London, Beverley Hunt, also affirms the situation as Hare cites in the play: “Professor Hunt uses an unexpected phrase: ‘It's almost medieval in what we're seeing’” (Hare, 2020a, p. 7). This impression increases the physical and emotional vulnerabilities as can be observed in Hare's personal account.

Furthermore, the detailed explanation of Hare's bodily damage takes on a special significance in this monodrama. Hare's graphic description of the illness can be deemed relevant to the concept of body memory. Edward S. Casey delineates body memory as “memory that is intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering: how we remember in and by and through the body” (1987, p. 147). In the case of this play, it is mostly about traumatic body memory since Hare gives an account of the pandemic period through its effect on his body. Therefore, it is the body that experiences the coronavirus, and Hare remembers and narrates the pandemic period through the effects on his body. In this respect, the reader/audience is faced with a traumatic event. While the narration of the infected body bridges recent past and current moments in the play, Fiennes's performance makes the audience realise how body memory works on stage. Clive Davis reports that “Fiennes enters with a briefcase and, after hanging his jacket on his chair, embarks on his story. His body language, slightly stooped, gives us a sense of Hare's frailty” (2020, p. 7). That is to say, the performance both uses the storyline and the actor to transmit body memory. The mad phase of the illness is riddled with high fever, coughing, vomiting, sweating, loss of weight and psychological deterioration. The individual experience of bodily trauma explicitly manifests itself throughout the play. Moreover, it seems fair to suggest that Hare's embodiment of memory through his body thrives on the record of collective memory. To put it simply, Hare's experience of the virus brings forth how people from different parts of the world go through the pandemic.

More significantly, Hare's monologue play extends from a personal account to a collective experience when he remembers the early phase of the pandemic by highlighting the political context. To begin with, his infection becomes particularly important for Hare to reveal his political agenda. During the first ambiguous phase of Hare's sickness, his country, as in the case of the rest of the world, cannot comprehend the spread of the disease and conceptualises the Covid-19 virus as a disease of the social, racial and economic other. However, as Hare himself is infected, he comments on the transgression of the disease: "Apparently, I've crossed class lines by carelessly catching a disease which generally attacks manual workers and ethnic minorities. After all, it's already becoming clear that you're twice as likely to die if you're poor. Diseases follow the social gradient. And skin colour. In England and Wales, you're four times as likely to die if you're black" (Hare, 2020a, p. 13). His statement reveals more about the existence of social injustice and inequality among classes and races. In the world order where leaders like Donald Trump call ill people "losers" (Hare, 2020a, p. 13), the Covid-19, like the Black Death, makes them all equally "losers": "Can't think why, but for some reason it's no longer a disease for losers. Suddenly Covid is for men – in particular, blond white men – who have extraordinary resources of character with which to fight. Our prime minister turns out to be one of these" (Hare, 2020a, p. 17). What emerges here is that Hare's discussion of Covid-19 becomes convoluted as the monologue play draws on his personal experience and encapsulates the collective encounter. His monologue offers a discussion on the social injustice and inequalities that hinder underprivileged communities from having medical treatment.

In the flow of the monologue play, Hare's comments about his illness and his criticism of the government go hand in hand. Lying in his bed and watching the news, Hare observes that "just as my [his] illness enters its mad phase, so does the Conservative government" (Hare, 2020a, p. 9). This is to say that the phase of his sickness is parallel to the emergence of more problems in the UK. In effect, the play from its opening sentences presents a recurrent image to materialise the sense of political discontent and disgust. The bitter taste of sewage, repeated six times in the play (Hare, 2020a, pp. 3,7,14,18), not only alludes to a symptom of Hare's illness but also is intended as a commentary on political corruption. The play opens with Hare's complaint that he has a terrible taste of sewage. Then, when he grumbles about the same taste in his mouth, the narration points to the national news about Boris Johnson's first decision about the lockdown (Hare, 2020a, pp. 7-8). In a similar fashion, the next reference to sewage precedes Hare's note about his despair and his report of the current news in the country. Responding to the news, Hare discloses:

My mood is aggravated by the dense blizzard of cliché which is fogging up my television. You would think, given that by the second week of May more people will have died in the UK than in any other country in Europe, a note of contrition might begin to be heard in the public realm. But no, the preferred route through the crisis is bullshit. Government ministers must now, every man and woman, toil their way doggedly down the centre of the bullshit highway. (Hare, 2020a, p. 14)

It appears that the playwright alludes to political corruption by representing his feelings of aversion and discontent in a concrete image of waste. In this light, Hare seeks to criticise the Conservative government by referring to the taste of sewage and subsequently commenting on their incompetence. The fact that this taste is not a common symptom of Covid-19 allows us to regard his repetitive use of sewage as a means of Hare's severe censure.

In the play, Hare records his autobiographical memory of sickness until the first week of April. Thanks to his doctor's medication, on April 6th 2020, the special date that his first full-length play was staged 50 years ago, Hare eventually recovers. After the liminal period of sickness, Hare is aware of the fact that he has changed. He believes that he is a different person now. He feels the joy of life, cries for still feeling alive and thanks the universe every morning now. In addition to these, however, Hare senses the growth of another strong feeling, which is anger. He clearly announces that "I don't [he does not] have survivor's guilt. I have [he has] survivor's rage" (Hare, 2020a, p. 18). This expression is a key moment to comprehend the playwright's political tone in his work. Having established Hare's document of the illness period, it is possible to consider how he entangles political rage into his autobiographical account. Probably because of his similar views on the government in a radio programme on BBC 4, the play is regarded as "a performed essay" (Ball, 2020, p. 878). However, Hare's political commentary and his expression of rage in this monologue play may recall the postwar dramatist John Osborne's style in *Look Back in Anger*. Lanre Bakare reports Hare's interest in the postwar playwright as follows: "British theatre must take inspiration from John Osborne and make itself essential to a mass audience if it is to thrive in a post-Covid world, according to David Hare, who says the art-form is in need of a 'revolution'" (2021, n.p.). Although Hare's play cannot be glossed over as revolutionary, his angry tone in the form of a monologue seems to resonate with Jimmy's iconic speeches, but Hare's expression of political rage is debatable in the contemporary period.

By focusing on Hare's anger in more detail, it is possible to trace the play's amalgamation of the personal with the political. Precisely, the analysis of Hare's critique of the policies during the pandemic is functional to pinpoint the playwright's account of collective memory. The play lays bare that Hare accuses the Conservative Party and their lack of judgment and control in a time of crisis. While the virus attacks him like a bomb or possesses his body like a demon, the news that he is watching makes him angrier. For him, the wrong policies are the storm centre of chaos and vulnerability in the UK: "In this emergency, if you're looking for the government, you'll always be sure to find them running along five miles behind the public" (Hare, 2020a, p. 10). Oscillating between the account of his physical deterioration and the news about the government's failure, Hare declares that the Tories under the leadership of Johnson make more mistakes and tell more lies to the public. He is highly critical of the prime minister's concern about the public. Johnson's long winter holiday and the news about his personal life make Hare question Johnson's competence and responsibility as a leader. Therefore, the playwright claims that Johnson's inability to fully understand the danger awaiting his country worsens the crisis. Likewise, the whole government is not unlike Johnson:

The country remains mysteriously open to visitors from viral centres like Italy and Spain, who pour in at airports unchecked and unquarantined. At a COBRA meeting, also on March 12<sup>th</sup>, the government are still indulging their more fanciful advisers. They have been flirting with a policy of herd immunity – the happy-go-lucky notion that if the most vulnerable among us sheltered and hid indefinitely, it might be possible for everyone else to carry on and take their chances. Not until the very day, March 16<sup>th</sup>, that I contract the disease – now this is a happy chance – do our rulers realise that although the theory of herd immunity is conveniently allowing them to let mass gatherings like the Cheltenham Races go ahead, it may unfortunately one day lead to 250,000 deaths. The government immediately throw themselves into a desperate U-turn by opting instead for a conspicuously late lockdown. No wonder I'm feeling that I didn't need to get this bloody thing. It's somebody's fault. And I can tell you exactly whose. (Hare, 2020a, p. 10)

As noted above, Hare accuses the government of letting people from the viral centres travel to the UK, causing people to die because of their policy of herd immunity and threatening their lives by imposing a lockdown quite late. His ironic remarks and aggressive tone are clear enough to unfold his political rage. What is more, his chronological account of the events comes closer to a record of public memory. The detailed description of factual notes indicates the play's intersection of the personal and the political. Arifa Akbar is correct in the following contention: "The personal segues into the political and slightly overshadows the tender, first-person story. [...] There are dates, statistics and medical science, [a]n initial poetry in the language is lost to a flatter, more muscular polemic when [the play] launches full-throttle into political diatribe" (2020, n.p.). In this regard, Hare piles the news into a kind of national memory by dwelling on his personal story.

Hare's recollection of the recent past not only manifests his condemnation of the government. The monologue play culminates in the presentation of the major reason for the failure during the pandemic circumstances. This is demonstrably the case in Hare's comment on the national health system. Going back to the national policies and practices a decade earlier, Hare shows the decline of investment in health services. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the government has gradually reduced the funding of the National Health Service and derogated the profession of doctors and nurses. Finally, the wrong policies of the state have led a great number of doctors and nurses to die as they were left unprotected in the fight against the coronavirus. More than these failures, what forces Hare to vent his rage is the state of neglect that defines the current government. The home secretary of the UK Priti Patel's reply to the questions about the death of people from health services that "I'm sorry that people feel that way" (Hare, 2020a, p. 16) embodies the lack of connection between the government and the public. This attitude displays that the public is left alone in the middle of the pandemic. As Hare maps out each wrong step, his play critically encompasses the country's recent political and medical histories.

With regard to Hare's personal account of the sickness, it is telling that his story is tinged with universal experience. Specifically, the sense of insecurity, ambiguity and the feeling of vulnerability define the collective experience of the pandemic all around the world. By the same token, Hare's political criticism is not limited to domestic issues but extends to international affairs. The play deals with the approach of other leaders to the global crisis. Hare demonstrates that the ignorance of political leaders contaminates the world. Like Johnson, Donald Trump, for instance, denies the high risk of coronavirus in the early days of the pandemic. He attempts to make people believe in the illusion that only "few Americans are at risk" (Hare, 2020a, p. 12). Yet death equalises all people disregarding the boundaries based on race, class and other types of otherness. In contrast to the impotence of male leaders, however, Hare praises the policies of female politicians during the pandemic. In the Brexit transition period, Hare regards Angela Merkel as a heroine and also compares Jacinda Ardern from New Zealand to the British politicians:

Surely, looking abroad to the examples of Angela Merkel in Germany or Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, something must have stirred inside the head of at least one thinker in Downing Street. Given how well those two leaders were doing, and how badly we were doing, did it really never occur to anyone in power that possibly following their example and levelling with the public might be a more fruitful political tactic? (Hare, 2020a, p. 19)

The comparison and ironic commentary cite the political agenda in the traumatic moment of the century. What occupies Hare's mind is the fact that people are simply governed by incompetent leaders. The pandemic circumstances unveil this truth when the world



leaders cannot cope with the emergent situation and cannot avoid the deaths of many. Evidently, this declaration is the gist of Hare's critical response to the political history during the pandemic period.

Eventually, Hare gets his political rage under control by emphasising the act of telling the truth. Thinking about his career as a dramatist since the 1970s, Hare believes that he has always been interested in the exposition of lies told to the public. For this purpose, he highlights the power of theatre. Boon alludes to Hare's emphasis on "the theatre's unique political power and its power to tell the truth. It does stand for that" (2003, p. 111). Fittingly, *Beat the Devil* highlights this function of the theatre that Hare supports. After recounting the recent past, Hare reaches a simple conclusion in the play. He directly demands the truth like a child: "I'm tired of reading that people want to be spoken to like adults. In my experience, it's adults who lie. I want to be spoken to like a child. It's to children all decent people tell the truth" (Hare, 2020a, p. 21). Calling all the members of the government "incompetents" (even worse than mediocrity) (Hare, 2020a, p. 15), Hare asks the people in charge to be honest to confess their lack of ability to govern and control the situation. As stated previously, Hare depicts the virus in the image of the devil. At the end of the play, he alternatively associates the devil with the present government. In his personal life, to "beat the devil," Hare decides to do simple things right like making tea and enjoying his survival each day. The monologue play concludes with Hare's to-do list in his new life after beating the virus: "I make tea. Right now I can only do the simple things. By doing simple things right, my plan is to beat the devil" (Hare, 2020a, p. 22). At issue here is Hare's decision to survive despite the devastating pandemic and the corrupt government. It is also necessary to refer to the taste of sewage as representing the rotten state. The end of the play implicitly replaces the bitter taste with the taste of tea. In this light, the play relocates Hare's angry tone with an optimistic remark. As for the political realm, Hare proposes that there will never be a chance for the public and the government to build a reciprocal relationship following the pandemic period. On the contrary, the personal statement concludes with Hare's hopeful resistance against the destructive forces.

As can be observed from his political criticism, Hare denounces the Conservative government, and unqualified politicians and blames them for the current situation at home and in the world. Hare rightfully censures the policies, defames incompetent politicians and exposes social injustice and inequality dominating the society. His listing of the lies told to the public and wrong acts that have risked people's lives are just narrated on time as Hare is known to be a dramatist who deals with contemporary political issues. His personal memoir's expansion to the social and political observations in the framework of a monologue play can be acceptable considering the circumstances of Covid-19. Therefore, the play enmeshes the personal state with the political through the use of autobiographical memory and the narration of the collective memory as well. It can be a matter of discussion to argue about whether Hare updates himself as a playwright, but more significantly, albeit his political criticism, his position can be problematic to make a claim on his objective attitude. Letts is right to observe that

[w]e are meant to laugh at Hare's predictable denunciations of Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and Priti Patel, but perhaps not at the portrait of a chi-chi London intellectualism; signature gastronomic dishes, a narrow corridor of arts-world friends, a doctor who plays violin in the London Gay Symphony Orchestra and Hare's characteristic mini-lectures [. . .] on things such as cytokine storms. When the devilish virus finally abates on day 16, our hero announces to Lady Hare that his appetite has returned. He wishes her to bring him a croissant. (2020, p. 17)

That is to say, even though Hare attempts to voice social injustice concerning health issues, he remains part of an elite group. While he does not provide his reader/audience with a new theatrical form or a new language, a close reading of his angry tone also poses a problem for some critics. Davis argues that Hare states what is obvious to all of us because “Hare’s views on the politics of the pandemic will only sound revelatory to members of the audience who have somehow managed to get through lockdown without reading a single newspaper” (Davis, 2020, p. 7). Moreover, although Hare highly esteems John Osborne’s revolutionary angry tone, Jonathan Maitland does not find Hare in the same league: “British theatre is not in a good place today. Where are the revolutionaries? The new, angry young men and women, the new John Osbornes? We don’t need to Look Back in Anger: it’s all in front of us, now” (2021, p. 82). To a certain extent, Hare might be reflecting not only his personal memory and political rage but also echoing the memories of British theatre. However, compared to the influence of playwrights such as Osborne, Hare’s personal and political accounts of Covid-19 do not express anger enough to mirror the depth of individual and collective rage experienced during the pandemic in this play.

To conclude, the account of Hare’s autobiographical memory becomes entangled with his response to the news at home and around the world. Precisely, his memoir puts a political spin to ensure the failure of the Conservative Party in fighting against the coronavirus. He indeed uses his personal story to make his political rage heard, and the playwright still acts as a chronicler to record the contemporary troubles and politics. However, his perspective is limited considering the circumstances he depicts when we contemplate the inequalities that have become clearer once again since most people from different classes, races and backgrounds become vulnerable since the beginning of the pandemic. It appears that the reader/audience’s laugh at Hare’s critical comments on the leader figures or his list of wrongdoings does not adequately incorporate a strong political perspective into his argument in this play.

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