

**STAGES AS A POLITICAL PLATFORM:
AN ASSESSMENT OF JOHN McGRATH'S *THE
CHEVIOT, THE STAG AND THE BLACK, BLACK OIL***

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Of the post-war generation of playwrights, very few remained in Agit-Prop (Agitation-Propaganda), the most notable being John McGrath. An overtly socialist and political activist, McGrath persistently worked for the creation of revolutionary culture and strongly advocated the necessity to use the theatre as a medium to mobilise the revolutionary potential of the working-class in order to overthrow the hegemony of capitalism, and finally to build a socialist society which he saw as a genuine alternative to the current system.

To this end, McGrath was personally involved in the early stages of Centre 42 project(1), aiming to bring the theatre to non-theatrical venues and to non-theatre going public in the early 1960s, and in this way to raise the consciousness of the working-class to social and political affairs. He also visited Paris as a representative of British artists during the 1968 student uprising, the very event which led him and many other radical dramatists of the period to an abiding alignment with the counter revolutionary, anti-bourgeois culture(2). It is evidently seen that at the very early stage of his dramatic career he remained on the political end of the oppositional culture, and was strongly influenced by the international socialism. As Michelene Wandor described, McGrath "nailed his political colours to the post, in his allegiance with a left that sought to be more radical than the post-war Labour Party had become"(3).

In response to his recognition of the necessity to fight for the creation of new socialist culture and to establish a new relationship with the exploited classes, McGrath also contended that theatrical interventions into working-class locations were of a paramount

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importance for the new expressions of the cultural opposition to the status quo:

It was no longer enough to consider ourselves as democratic, left wing artists, full of sympathy for the working-class and in general for the exploited. Sympathy was no longer sufficient... We had to place ourselves entirely at the service of the exploited, become their minstrels. Which meant going to work with the structures provided by the lower-classes(4).

As an intransigent critic of the bourgeois values, McGrath also tried to use the stage as a forum for matters of social conscience, a place of judgement, in order to assess the past, evaluate the present and hypothesise about the future. His abandonment of repertory theatre and the mainstream of BBC television in response to his new political consciousness can be viewed as his most determined attempt to materialise all these compelling ideals and to destroy the ideology which he believed society at large mistakenly acknowledged. Also his move from London, a theatrical capital, to Scotland, a provincial periphery of 700 miles further north, in 1973 with an ultimate objective in mind to commence a new kind of ideological theatre practice certainly signalled a decisive break, possibly the final stage in his deliberate shift from his involvement with the conventional mass populism of the media through the subsidised mainstream theatre and finally to a self-financed popular localism. His ultimate target in all this was essentially to create a counter culture which would develop "in richness and confidence until it eventually displaces the dominant bourgeois culture of late capitalism"(5).

Among McGrath's initiatives was his founding in 1973 of one of the most influential, interventionist theatre companies in the history of British alternative theatre in Scotland, called 7:84 as a collective, determined to promote Marxist analysis of current social and political events through regional tours. Brecht's political maxim

that 'it was not enough to understand the world, but it was necessary to change it' was certainly epitomised by this bold initiative, which was also seen by some critics as "one of the most striking examples of an attempt to put theory into practice and to relate political theatre to political realities"(6). Named to highlight the peculiar statistics of social inequality in the 1970s, the very title of this overtly political company which McGrath himself described as a "working-men's club"(7) was a reference to the fact that during the years of its founding, seven percent of the population owned eighty four percent of the nation's wealth, which denoted to "the basic economic structure of the society... from which all the political, social and cultural structures grow"(8). The fact in the seventies was that like 7:84, several other Agit-Prop theatre groups came out of the 1968 social and political experience in order to promote egalitarian, libertarian and emancipatory ideologies, and they were regarded as "the most developed body of socialist practice in arts"(9). Although these companies were relatively short-lived, Scottish 7:84 continued to operate for a long period of time. In fact, alternative theatre companies, which proliferated in the seventies, offered a significant challenge to the established bourgeois theatre, mustering the ideological muscle to shift the status quo in a progressive direction. Even though David Edgar strongly disputes this in his article "Ten Years of Political Theatre, 1968-78", in which he illustrates his idea that socialist alternative theatres had failed to make a considerable impact on the mainstream theatre(10), 7:84, alongside the others, certainly assumed an influential role in the revolutionary theatre movement, achieving not only national but even international reputation.

McGrath's efforts towards the integration of arts with politics can best be seen in his 1973 production of **The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil**, "the first class Agit-Prop theatre, which avoids that monotonous dullness which often characterises didactic socialist plays"(11). Drawing its energy from the counter cultural ideologies of the 1970s, the play can be taken as one of the remarkable, stimulating examples of oppositional

theatre practices in Britain. First performed in Aberdeen Arts Centre by 7:84 company and then presented in many parts of the country, it attempts to relate contemporary political struggle to the wider history of the movement in which every single element of dramatic performance is radicalised in order to deliver a socio-political message.

What is remarkable about the play is that it marked the most striking example of a step taken by McGrath to materialise his original idea of taking socialist theatre to non-theatrical working-class locations. McGrath's criteria for the venues and the audience are fixed and entirely consistent with his political beliefs. Rejecting the bourgeois theatrical venues, he surely laid the solid foundation for a construction of a remarkable range of radical approaches to dramatic performances. His conviction was that to accept the existing theatrical venues and to perform for the existing middle-class audiences would be rejection of full radical potential of the theatre. Viewing *The Cheviot...* as the combination of propaganda and naturalism, John Bull also stated that seeking non-theatrical venues was an endeavour to reach ordinary people whose history, struggles and culture are the dominant subject matter of the performance(12). Inspired by the notion that oppositional theatre practices have always been particularly responsive to their socio-political environment, McGrath went on looking for audiences in village halls, dance halls, community centres and schools in the North, giving a great deal of consideration to the social and artistic accessibility of dramatic performances. Undoubtedly, in so doing McGrath was conscious of the fact that non-mainstream, working-class venues and forms would provide him with a rather outstanding political advantage. As one critic comments: "If you wish to change the minds of the working-class and increase their consciousness of their times and history, then there is no point looking to do so on the South Bank"(13).

The story of *The Cheviot...* is presented from a Marxist point of view, raising the issues relating the exploitation of Scotland through the centuries and its effects on its own people

from a socialist perspective. The play focuses upon three periods during which Scotland's natural resources have been systematically exploited, each time to the detriment of the mass of the indigenous population; clearances of the crofters from the land in the early nineteenth century in order to gain pasture for the cheviot cattle, and later on the use of the land by British aristocrats from the late 19th century onwards for hunting and tourism, and finally, most recently the exploration of the Scottish oil and gas resources by American and English oil companies, thus leaving it sucked out without any improvement of infrastructure, poorer than ever.

The questions about the Scottish oil, who owns Scotland and who makes the most of its natural resources, and whether the exploitation of these resources will continue as in the past are at the core of *The Cheviot...* Given that the play addresses the most immediate issues, it can be taken as the product of its time, the time of discovery and the development of the North Sea oil field, which provoked in the seventies a wide ranging socio-economic debate, promising political power as well as the economic regeneration of Scotland. It was also a period in which Scotland was animated by cultural and political debates and the issues of independence, the importance of which was reflected in the 1974 national election results for the Scottish Nationalist Party(14).

Like his radical contemporaries who approach historical events from a Marxist point of view and who reconstruct or deconstruct the public perception of history as an attempt to displace the modern times bourgeois values, McGrath in this play embraces a history to speak directly to the audience about the importance of being "aware of the tragedy of their past"(15). Evoking a chilling parallel between the past and the present, he also articulates the urgency to challenge similar events in the future. It is manifest that this is no enigmatic exercise for McGrath to refer to historical events, but it seems very much in conformity with a Marxist tradition of analysis that says 'to act upon the future, one must understand the present by looking at the past'.

Viewed from the perspective of a Marxist and socialist history, the play's ultimate concern becomes quite clear; to encourage the Highlanders to alter the present system and the status quo in favour of the whole community.

There is no doubt that McGrath intends to achieve a number of political objectives in his radical approach to the exploitation of Scotland and his extensive treatment of local history. Here he presents history in Marxist terms as one of the class struggle, as expressed in the opening section of **Communist Manifesto** 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle'. In fact what is overwhelmingly demonstrated in **The Cheviot...** is the centuries-old conflict based on contradiction between the capitalist exploitation of the Highlands at the expense of its indigenous community and working-class labour out of which capitalist mode of production would develop. As a natural consequence of this conflict the working-class community is presented in the play as being separated from the land on which their livelihood depended by means of various stratagems, eviction, enclosure of common land and so on. Thus, showing the social discrepancy, revealing social forces that deeply affect not only the Highlands community in the 19th century but also the contemporary society from a Marxist point of view, McGrath makes class conflict an element of the indictment of the audience.

With this Marxist view of history in mind, McGrath shows in the play how the clearances and forcible evictions took place in the past in a documentary style, using rather authentic elements from the history of the Highlands community. Although all these horrible events happened in the past, they are shown as an inevitable process that is still going on in the operation of oil giants and multi-national corporations in Scotland. This is strongly stressed in the play through the juxtapositions of several terrible past events with the modern times process of the exploitation of the Highlands:

Then it was the Great Sheep. Now it is the black black oil. Then it was done by outside capital, with the connivance of the local ruling class and central government- And the people had no control over what was happening to them. Now it is being done by outside capital, with the connivance of the local ruling class and central government... Now black black oil is coming. And must come(16).

The impression one gets from these juxtapositions of the past and the present situations is that just as the people were pushed aside during the clearances of the 19th century by the introduction of the cheviot cattle, so the interests of the Highlanders in modern times are similarly being ignored by oil companies and the class allies of international conglomerates. The show's main ideological aim is therefore made clear by raising the issues relating to the ownership of the North Sea oil from a socialist perspective, suggesting to the audience that only a revolutionary response can stop the present time exploitation of Scotland.

Although the play seems to raise predominantly the issues of the national concern, the presentation is emblematic, perhaps of, how a performance could crystallise global concerns in the localised details of the Highlands history. Being always on the political end of counter culture and having been greatly influenced by international socialism, McGrath would never be expected to confine this play to the problems of the Highlands community only. As he has contended: "If people there... realise that there is a choice, that it must be made soon and decisively, then not only can what is good be saved, but a future built in the Highlands, and in the whole of Scotland that could inspire the rest of the world(17).

The show therefore proposes a powerful appeal for a classic Marxist internationalism, by making its audience aware of the issues concerning the process of capitalism operating on an international scale:

MC. One thing is for certain, these men are not just the figures of fun. They are determined, powerful and have the rest of the ruling class on their side. Their network is international.

M.C.4. Question: What does a meat packer in Argentina, a merchant seaman on the high seas, a docker in London, a container-lorry driver on the motorways, have in common with a crofter in Lochinver?(18)

The important immediate issues raised in the play as such clearly suggest that the exploitation is not only national, not simply confined to Scotland but international. And the working-class of all the world always come under pressure from the same capitalist minded, profit oriented, multi-national corporations. This is more firmly stressed in the following lines uttered by an actor speaking directly to the audience: "In other parts of the world - Bolivia, Panama, Guatemala, Venezuela, ... - the same corporations have torn out the mineral wealth from the land. The same people always suffer"(19).

Here McGrath seems to evoke that international victory of the working-class is an absolute practical necessity if the capitalist system were to be replaced with socialism. The conquest of power by the working class in one region or in one country would only be prelude to such victory. The victory they win, however small the issues involved may seem, would boost their confidence necessary to extract power from the bourgeoisie. In common with the previous creators of the Agit-Prop, McGrath in this play delivers a strong message which is reminiscent of the communist manifesto; 'working-men of all countries unite!' against the unjust, unequal treatment of capitalism which does not recognise any national boundaries.

Shift away from individual to collective focus is the most outstanding feature of the piece. In line with his socialist notion of communality, the writer discourages his audience to take individual

action to stop the centuries-old exploitation and instead strongly advocates the necessity to "unite to take action altogether as one body"(20) and to organise mass opposition in order to crush the status quo. In this context the play alludes to some pockets of resistance here and there during the time of clearances and forcible evictions: "When they came with the eviction order it was always women who fought back... The first blow was struck by a woman with a stick"(21).

However, the audience are immediately reminded that such individual resistance in the past proved to be futile and never became adequate to reverse the eviction order. This is explicitly conveyed as one of the characters in the play explains the reason behind the collapse of the resistance: "At the time of the Clearances the resistance failed because it was not organised. The victories came as a result of militant organisation - in Coigeach, The Braes and the places that formed Land Leagues."(22)

More to the point, McGrath even creates a fictional collectivity in order to emphasise the significance and the utmost necessity of taking mass action in a scene which dramatises the resistance to the clearances as a public meeting, which also suggests how much the play concentrates its potential on the political education of the working-class:

Here the people made a stout resistance, the women disarming about twenty policemen and the sheriff-officers, burning the summonses in a heap, and ducking the representatives of the law in a neighbouring pool. (*Big cheer.*) the men formed a second line of defence- (*Groan*)- in case the women should receive any ill-treatments. (More groans.) They... returned home without serving single summons or evicting a single crofter. *A big booch from the Company, the fiddle strikes up and they leap onto the stage to dance to celebrate this victory.*(23)

McGrath's thesis is that the passive acceptance of the status quo and lack of solid resistance to the current system would certainly mean losing control of the future. It is therefore everyone's responsibility to agitate and to fight for achieving the kind of collectivism and socialism which would "involve every individual in creation of the future, he or she wants, that measures progress by human happiness rather than by shareholders' dividends, that liberates mind rather than enslaving them"(24). Explicitly linking the capitalist inequities of the past with those of the present and adopting a Marxist approach to history and to the present day, McGrath seems to recommend that working-class should take an organised action against the bourgeois hegemony for a better future. This is most blatantly expressed in the play by a character who stir the audience into militancy and mass protest: "We too must organise, and fight - not with stones but politically"(25). This is rather a clear evidence of how McGrath is utilising theatre for interventionist purposes and how he tries to arouse the sense of militancy among the working-class community.

McGrath believes that the effect of this struggle will eventually transform the working-class. His argument is that the triumph of the working class is in no sense inevitable; so everything depends ultimately on their organisation, co-operation and the determined will to achieve socialism:

If we go one by one to make separate claims, we know what will happen. It should not fall on any one person to be singled out for the wrath of the factor. We must go altogether, and any punishment will have to be inflicted on all of us.(26)

This view shows certain parallel with the Marxist principles that it is only by their own effort that the working-class can get rid of capitalism. McGrath, therefore, puts collectivity and collective effort on the top of everything throughout the play.

McGrath also utilises a specific kind of dramatic elements in this play for the purpose of achieving ideological aims. The grounds

for solidarity and collectivity, he suggests, can only be provided in the theatre by popular theatrical elements, which would at the same time "fulfil the role of agitation on an ideological level within the working-class"(27). For **The Cheviot...** he employs a genuinely vital and epic form of entertainment called ceilidh, one of the living traditions of Scottish popular culture, performed by ordinary individuals offering their songs, jokes and instrumental solos in the context of a village dance. Dating from the 19th century, ceilidh has culturally played a significant role in the lives of geographically isolated Scottish communities.

The primary reason for the use of this popular form of the entertainment in **The Cheviot...** is purely political; McGrath's view was that ordinary people would ultimately come to the 'working-men's club' to see a production and spontaneously respond to the socialist message if only one could get through to them, and this could only be achieved by using the forms of entertainment which were only in line with their taste as well as culture. In that way, the working-class would get maximum enjoyment while watching a performance, and at the same time they would be enlightened on political, social and all other issues that concern them. Unquestionably, the ceilidh form and other popular elements used in the play were warmly received by the Highlands community, which also invalidates the argument made by David Edgar that popular forms were no longer usable in the theatre in the 1970s.(28)

Apart from drawing the working-class to the dramatic performance, the ceilidh format also functions as an expression of the ideological identity of the local community. Throughout the performance ceilidh songs and dance, in which the audience can directly participate, contribute to reproducing the sense of group solidarity as called for by socialism, which, it is hoped, will provide positive example for the community to follow even after the play has come to an end. The songs also animate a dynamic relationship between the company and the audience, which also demonstrates that the history of the Highlands is told most authentically by the

collective voice of its own people. As Baz Kershaw has suggested, the concluding ceilidh dance in which the whole audience fully take part, "would represent a lively celebration of ideological solidarity between company and local community".(29)

Not only the folk traditions but all other aesthetic elements of production like songs, music-hall elements are employed in order to make political arguments and reflect the nature and the significance of genuinely collective work. Songs are used throughout not simply as a light relief or a back up to the written text, but they also contain a serious socio-political flavour, and some of them are deliberately inserted in order to convey a strong political message to the working-class, often agitating them for a mass action:

M.C. The song says:

Remember that you are a people and fight for your rights-

There are riches under the hills where you grew up.

There is iron and coal there grey lead and gold there-

There is richness in the land under your feet.(30)

Conceivably all elements of the performance become operative in the ideological transaction between the company and the audience. This is mostly because the promotion of class solidarity requires a typical presentation that is quickly absorbed by the audience in the urgency of political movements. **The Cheviot...** is unique in the sort of active involvement it demands of its audience. Unlike the bourgeois drama where the audience are passive consumers of the pre-digested truths, **The Cheviot...** achieves a living interaction between the stage and the audience. The people we see dancing on the stage who for the moment we believe are peasants are actually actors. So, the audience become the most crucial part of the performance and are often invited to join the creative process of communality. The boundaries between the actors in their roles as the political commentators of the play and the audience are extremely fluid and at times totally disappear,

which is a tremendous achievement in terms of cultural intervention in the process of creating an alternative to the current capitalist system.

Like every political play **The Cheviot...** takes sides; capitalism is declared as the arch enemy of the working-class, and its representatives are rendered as stereotypes, figures of fun, the burlesque. The working-class, by contrast, are treated with sympathy and in a dignified manner as the most progressive section of the community. What the working-class say or claim is demonstrably true while what the upper-class say is generally shown to be false and often becomes subject of ridicule and parody. On the other hand, the mistreatment of the indigenous community of the Highlands by the land-owners in the clearances, the bravery of the opposition specifically by the women when their menfolk were in the Army defending the British interests abroad become images of the past shared by all the community in the region.

In that sense **The Cheviot...** is shamelessly blatant in presenting the aristocracy as the oppressors of the ordinary people. It is interesting to note that throughout the play, hatred for the oppressor is much stronger than sympathy for the oppressed. Like other Agit-Props, in this play McGrath effectively uses some literary devices including caricature, satire and parody in order to make an explicit analysis of the real enemies of the working-class. For the most part, real historical capitalist figures such as Lady Phosphate, Texas Jim, Whitehall are all shown as top-hatted masters and are given the idiom of stereotypes. And this technique produces some wonderfully funny passages and extravagant, exaggerated imagery in the performance, given the fact that the symbols of parody are always hard-hitting. For instance, claims made by the aristocracy that they have always treated the Highlands community leniently are immediately deflated by the comic songs. Likewise, in the personalities of Lord Crask and Lady Phosphate, two Victorian aristocrats, representing the pretensions of the powerful voice and state apparatus, are portrayed as a simple mechanism for a broad attack on the privileged class. The

jokes they make are deliberately crude and disgusting in any sense of the word; they first bring on rifles for a shooting party, and then begin to fire them, singing a comic song. As the song comes to an end their speech turns unexpectedly wild, and the tone of their conversation suddenly becomes extensively threatening:

LORD CRASK: We've cleared the paths

LADY PH: We've cleared the bens

LORD CRASK: We've cleared the glens

BOTH: And we can do it once again -

LADY PH: We've got the brass

LORD CRASK: We've got the class

LADY PH: We've got the law

BOTH: We need no more -

We'll show you we're the ruling class.(31)

Then instantly they point their guns to the audience with their faces angry and ravelling. At this point their speech is interrupted by a sad song, and the audience are invited to denounce these persons' action and their aristocratic attitudes because of the contradiction between what they pretend to be and what they are literally doing on the stage. Their weapons metaphorically turn out to be powerful submachine guns pointed to the ordinary people symbolically to destroy their potential for a possible resistance.

Another example where capitalists are lampooned and made fun of appears towards the end of the play when Texas Jim commences a community dancing party typically featuring folk and square dance. Up to a point he pretends to be very friendly and on the side of the audience, amiably shaking hands with those sitting on the front row. Yet after a while, his words become more and more aggressive: "So leave your fishing, and leave your soil,/ Come work for me I want your oil. Screw your landscape screw your bays/ I'll screw you in a hundred ways"(32). As a result of such provocative words the audience naturally isolate him, and they are eventually made to realise that in real life "there is much more to those figures than the mere laughter and scorn of the theatrical

audience is capable of eradicating"(33). By means of caricature the play involves audience in the actual process of demonising the capitalist exploiters like Texas Jim, who are throughout the performance presented negatively via satirical stereotyping. It emerges that the major story of the play is authentic and realistic, whilst points are made through sharp-edged satire.

Yet, comic and satirical delineation of the aristocratic figures and those representing capitalism may be dismissed as a ridiculous exaggeration. Since parody depends very much on caricature for its comic effect, this kind of portrayal naturally produces some sort of theatrical crudity. As Baz Kershaw has suggested, this type of characterisation of the figures representing state apparatus may bring about a theatrical formalism in which satire fails to hit any mark in the reality of the audience since it is rather clumsy, direct and full of theatrical and ideological risks(34).

Although throughout the play the enemy is marked out as capitalist exploiters, McGrath is careful to avoid labelling either the Highlanders as victims or English and American people simply as enemies. He is instead using the theatre as a weapon to expose bourgeois capitalist values in general rather than to blame any particular nations or attack abuses. He has, therefore, chosen a path rather different from the paths of the politically committed writers and the artists of the period like Bond, Hare and Edgar.

Set against the capitalist exploiters, the play instead suggests an alternative political and economic solution to the problem. According to McGrath this solution is not simply to stop the oil extraction in the North Sea, but instead to ensure that this ongoing exploitation in favour of the capitalists should be stopped first and these natural resources should be used not only for the benefit of multinational oil companies but for the benefit of all individuals. And more importantly, as M.C. explicitly utters in the play, people must own land, people must keep their own cultural heritage and Scottish people must control what goes on in their land(35). The play strongly argues that these are still yet within reach and the British society could still be changed, and McGrath

himself believes that the interventionist theatre of this kind will certainly contribute to that change by raising the political consciousness of the working-class.

McGrath created this type of interventionist theatre maybe in anticipation that there was the potential for revolution in Britain in the early 1970s as he himself indicated in a letter to Arnold Wesker, "time is ripe for revolutionary socialism to make itself known as a real alternative to the failed pragmatism of the Labour leadership"(36). However, by the end of the seventies nothing in this vein came true, despite the fact that his initiatives somewhat managed to mount an alternative opposition to dominant middle-class culture and the hegemony of the bourgeois ideology which had prevailed the stage for so long.

Judged in relation to the optimism of the 1970s, when, like McGrath many political theatre workers proclaimed their ambition for a real socialist revolution, the subsequent works of 7:84 and many other overtly political theatre companies failed to become effective in political arena; even they could not stop Conservative governments rising to power. While the reception of **The Cheviot...** was impressive it became obvious that the company's intervention in the working-class struggle was peripheral. In the absence of the revolutionary socialism or an attempt towards the creation of it, the representation of the socialist plays as such with which to stir the working-class into action was no longer an acceptable or favourable currency in the late 1970s.

If McGrath's initiative to create revolutionary counter culture resulted somewhat in failure, it nevertheless raised the crucial issues of the political theatre such as the question of aesthetic and audiences, the function of the political writer as an artist and an activist and his role to create a new culture and new relationship with the exploited classes. Even though the play had no immediate impact on the ownership of Scottish land and the operation of oil industry in Scotland, it helped to create pressure in the seventies within the Labour Party from all over Scotland for some measure to reform the estate ownership and land use in the Highlands. It can

therefore be said that its effect is primarily cultural and social rather than revolutionary since it hardly fostered any revolutionary or political change. However one important contribution of the play is that it demonstrated to the Highlanders that they should not lament their history, but should organise themselves into taking a militant action so that the exploitation that the play and the history reveals would not be repeated once again to the detriment of the working-class in the future. The fact that the story has "a beginning, a middle, but, as yet, no end"(37) leaves the completion of the narrative to the audience. So the ultimate message is that it is in the hands of the Highlands community as a whole not to let such terrible tragedies of the past happen again in the future.

Compared to the other political dramas of the seventies, **The Cheviot...** is much more overtly a didactic play. It appears that didactic intention of presenting the audience with a series of visibly political arguments makes the play a propaganda piece rather than an aesthetic event. For this kind of theatre, aesthetic consideration naturally becomes the least important issue. As McGrath confirms, he is "not particularly bothered with the aesthetic categories of the thing"(38). As if this is not enough, such elements like music dance are used in such a way as to contribute to the overall ideological purpose of telling a radical tale about the realities of everyday life. Based on agitation and propaganda, **The Cheviot...** is understood to have a political rather than a dramatic interest. It seems that the writer has done all this on the conviction that a truly oppositional theatre needs to radicalise every single element of the production in order to achieve its fullest socio-political efficacy. Conceivably, too much political and moral message and the entirely didactic nature of the play simply make the other essential aesthetic considerations subordinate, if not totally obsolete. And with this overwhelming didacticism McGrath has apparently sacrificed drama to socialist ideology in the play.

Notes and References

- 1-However, shortly after its foundation McGrath was to withdraw his support to Centre 42 on the grounds that it was perpetuating bourgeois culture rather than creating revolutionary art form. For further details refer to Catherine Itzin, **Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968**, (London: Methuen,1980), pp.109-112.
- 2-See Simon Trussler (ed.), **The New Theatre Voices of the Seventies**, (London: Methuen,1981), p.106.
- 3-Michelene Wandor, **Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama 1970-1990**, (London: Longman,1993), pp.28-30.
- 4-John McGrath, **A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre, Audience Class and Form**, (London: Methuen,1981), p.35.
- 5-John McGrath, "The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre", **Theatre Quarterly**, Vol. IX, No. 35, (1979), p.44.
- 6-Itzin, **Stages in the Revolution**, p.116.
- 7-Colin Chambers and Mike Prior, **Playwrights' Progress: Patterns of Postwar British Drama**, (Oxford: Amber Lane Press,1987), p.71.
- 8-John McGrath, **The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil**, (London: Methuen,1981), p.76.
- 9-Dave Laing, **The Marxist Theory of Arts**, (Sussex: The Harvester Press,1978), p.137.
- 10-David Edgar, "Ten Years of Political Theatre,1968-78", **Theatre Quarterly**, Vol.VIII, No. 32, (Winter, 1979), p.29.
- 11-Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (eds.), **Contemporary English Drama**, Stradford-upon-Avon Studies, (London: Edward Arnold,1981),p.163.
- 12-John Bull, **New British Political Dramatists**, (London: Macmillan,1984),p.109.
- 13-Rick Rylance, "Forms of Dissent in Contemporary Drama and Contemporary Theatre", in Adrian Page (ed.), **The Death of the Playwright? Modern British Drama and Literary Theory**, (London: Macmillan,1992), p.133.
- 14-While the Scottish Nationalist Party won only one MP in the 1970 general election, in the 1974 election number of nationalist MPs rose to twelve, which implies the strength of Scottish nationalism in the seventies.
- 15-McGrath, **The Cheviot...**, p.77.

- 16-Ibid., p. 73.
- 17-Ibid., p.78.
- 18-Ibid., p.57.
- 19-Ibid., p.72.
- 20-Ibid., p.33.
- 21-Ibid., p.11.
- 22-Ibid., p.73.
- 23-Ibid., p.13.
- 24-Ibid., p.77.
- 25-Ibid., p.73.
- 26-Ibid., p.33.
- 27-John McGrath "The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre, **Theatre Quarterly**, Vol.IX, No.35, (1979), p.51.
- 28-Edgar "Ten Years of Political Theatre, 1968-78", p.29.
- 29-Baz Kershaw, **The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention**, (London: Routledge,1992), p.163.
- 30-McGrath, **The Cheviot...**, p.73.
- 31-Ibid., p.43.
- 32-Ibid., p.59.
- 33-Keith Peacock, **Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama**, (New York: Greenwood Press,1991), p.94.
- 34-Kershaw, **The Politics of Performance**, p.160.
- 35-McGrath, **The Cheviot...**, p. 65.
- 36-Itzin, **Stages in the Revolution**, p.119-37-McGrath, **The Cheviot...**, p.2.
- 38-McGrath, "The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre", p.47.