

Chapter 3

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MASCULINITY: JEZ BUTTERWORTH'S *THE RIVER*

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Introduction: Deep in The River

A new Britain emerged from the former colonial potential in 1956 as the Suez Crisis displayed the dissolution of The British Empire. The works of the Angry Young Men defended an edgier realism and criticized the authority by revealing the conflicts of the working class the playwrights grew up in. Osborne, Arden, Wesker, and Pinter pursued later by Barnes and Orton approached drama in peculiar ways. However, each wrote to focus on the restlessness around him.

Similarly, the In-Yer-Face generation was part of 'Cool Britannia,' a wave of British artists that started the popular culture at the end of twenty years of Conservative rule in Britain. After the Thatcher and Major periods observed an escalated privatization of public services and an increase in unemployment, the Blair administration was established in 1997. While Kane, Ravenhill, Neilson, and Butterworth are not as principally political as the Angry Young Men, nor as the playwrights like Churchill, Barker, Bond and Hare whose plays are about Britain and the new world around them. Even though the In-Yer-Face playwrights do not think apparent political essence as a key or effective approach, in their post-Tarantino atmosphere, each one shocks the theatre audience in a more instinctive manner: sexuality and violence incorporate a composite theatricality which depends massively on tough realistic elements, but they also examine the surreal, expressionistic, or episodic when necessary. These young men are not so much angry as they are passive and befuddled.

Despite the characterization of the In-Yer-Face playwrights as the second coming of Angry Young Men, it would be too simple to classify the In-Yer-Face generation as merely inspired by opposed to those who came before. In his *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, the theatre critic Aleks Sierz (2000: 4) regarded the plays of the mid-90s as provocative but innovative. In Sierz words, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson, Jez Butterworth, Martin McDonagh, Patrick Marber, Phyllis Nagy and Richard Zajdlic take the audience by the scruff of the neck and shake it until it gets the message. In-Yer-Face Theatre was a revolution in new writing, primarily in contrast to a few years before when Michael Billington exclaimed in 1991 that "New drama no longer occupies the central position it has in British theatre over the past thirty-five years."

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