

## *Chapter 1*

# **Europe in Flux: Exploring Revolution and Migration in British Plays of the 1990s**

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There can be little doubt that 1989 was a pivotal year in European history. The revolutions of the communist Eastern bloc, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the subsequent ending of the Cold War were to confront Europe, particularly the countries of the European Union (EU), with challenges which are proving difficult to resolve. The main challenges were, and still are, concerned with security, economic and political stability, migration, and the process of enlarging the EU to incorporate newly 'independent' nation-states. The plays considered in this chapter provide examples of how British playwrights explored and interpreted the challenges faced by post-communist Europe during the 1990s. The focus of these plays is the events in the countries of the former Eastern bloc and the Balkans.

As this chapter is concerned with the responses of British playwrights to the events in Europe during the 1990s, brief consideration has to be given to the relationship between Britain and the rest of Europe and specifically the European Union. During the 1980s much of the political debate in Britain concerning Europe had centred upon issues relating to finance – the exchange rate mechanism (ERM), rebates, subsidies, the single currency versus sovereignty; debates driven largely by the so-called Eurosceptics in both Westminster and the business world. The popular understanding of Europe within Britain, fuelled by tabloid newspapers, had, for the most part, been concerned

with losing the pound and generating scare stories about European legislation governing minutiae like the straightness of bananas. Moreover, Britain's history as a significant colonial power and its 'special' relationship with the USA have always meant that Britain has tended to see itself as apart from continental Europe, a mindset reinforced by its geographical position as an island off the coast of mainland Europe. These issues are heightened by Britain's continuing post-imperial anxiety with regard to integration with the rest of Europe, representing within the popular and political psyche of Britain another step towards its loss of sovereignty and a diminishment of its position as an independent world leader. The idea of 'Britain', though, is a tricky one and a mainly political concept: generally the Scottish and Welsh tend to identify more with the continent than their old colonial power, England.

The British government's relationship with the rest of Europe is complicated further by the problems that surround defining Europe as a cohesive entity. What are its borders – who is included in and who is excluded from Europe? Does it have shared values? Does it have homogeneous cultural imperatives? While the desire to integrate Europe economically and politically remains strong in certain quarters of the EU, the reality is that the means to achieve this are far from mutually agreed by its constituent nation-states. Moreover, it is important to note that the institution of the EU by no means represents Europe as a whole. A number of European countries still exist outside of the EU, a fact that makes drawing conclusions about pan-European ideals, needs and development based purely upon the stated aspirations of the EU extremely difficult. Although Europe has moved a long way since Henry Kissinger asked whom he should telephone if he wanted to speak to Europe (Leonard 2005: 23), questions of definition still plague the project of European integration, and this is reflected in the plays considered here. For some theatre academics, such as Janelle Reinelt, the task of those British playwrights who have tackled the subject of Europe has been undertaken with almost utopian zeal. In her article 'Performing Europe' Reinelt suggests that the plays which she considers represent an 'interrogation of and intervention in the struggle to invent a New Europe' and that 'theatre may emerge from this early millennial period as a powerful force for democratic struggle in its own unique imaginative and aesthetic modality' (2001: 387).<sup>1</sup> However, while accepting that no playwright would wish to distance themselves from such an ambitious and noble position, this chapter argues that many of the plays produced by British

playwrights concerning Europe as it stood during the 1990s reveal a much less optimistic view. The plays that this chapter explores are David Edgar's (b. 1948) *Shape of the Table* (1990) and Caryl Churchill's (b. 1938) *Mad Forest* (1990), Edgar's *Pentecost* (1994) and David Greig's (b. 1969) *Europe* (1994), and finally Sarah Kane's (1971–99) *Blasted* (1995) and Nicolas Kent's (b. 1945) *Srebrenica* (1996). Collectively these plays offer an engaging and at times disturbing account of one of the most significant periods of European history.

The key events that succeeded the revolutions of 1989 and the end of the Cold War are well documented, but their significance lies in the momentous change they brought to the political structure of Europe.<sup>2</sup> The demise of the ideological tensions inherent within the Cold War generated European aspirations for unity, common purpose and mutual understanding. It is significant, therefore, that one of the key political ideas of this period – the notion of a common European home – should be attributed to one of the central architects of this era's political climate, the then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>3</sup> It was Gorbachev's hope that the democratization of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc would begin to unite Eastern and Western Europe.

Implicit in Gorbachev's desire were the central concepts of unity, cooperation, tolerance, mutual respect and commonality. Unfortunately, the Europe that was to emerge over the next decade was to be one based on precepts far removed from Gorbachev's idyll. While Gorbachev had spoken of an ideal – a Europe without borders – the reality was that borders, both geographical and political, as well as borders of history, ethnicity and identity, became the cause of conflicts the effects of which would be so far reaching that they would significantly contribute to the redefinition of Europe itself. Moreover, with these conflicts came a rapid increase in the numbers of those seeking economic migration and refugee status in Western Europe. Thus, through the changing demography of their major towns and cities, the nation-states of Western Europe were forced to confront the consequences of their promotion of rapid political and economic change.

With the demise of communism the peoples of Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe were left to answer questions not just about their system of political governance, but also about their cultural and political identity. The thawing of the permafrost of the Cold War, which for over forty years had frozen national borders and even ethnic identities and histories, led to a rapid resurgence in ethnic

nationalism. In many ways, perhaps this should not be surprising, as Vaclav Havel, a major playwright himself and the then president of Czechoslovakia, pointed out at a conference on security and cooperation in Europe held in Helsinki during the summer of 1992:

The sudden burst of freedom has not only untied the straitjacket made by communism, it has also unveiled the centuries-old, often thorny history of nations. People are remembering their past kings and emperors, the states they had formed far back in the past and the borders of those states . . . It is entirely understandable that such a situation becomes a breeding ground for nationalist fanaticism, xenophobia and intolerance. (see Mauthner 1992: 2)

Havel's words proved frighteningly prescient. Throughout much of the 1990s Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe experienced a period of instability and radical, and occasionally bloody, change. As Havel implies, the borders of these nations, having been previously defined and controlled by the necessities of the Cold War, could now be questioned. Ancient border disputes began to erupt as nascent nation-states began to assert their perceived rightful and historical claims to land and territory.<sup>4</sup> This makes Reinelt's suggestion that 'the idea of Europe has become a liminal concept, fluid and indeterminate' problematic (2001: 365). If the borders of contested parts of Europe were indeed being openly questioned and challenged, it is also true that these new borders were being fiercely defended in the name of ethnic nationalism. Perhaps the starkest example of the horrific confluence of ethnic nationalism and the redefinition of borders in Europe was the bloody conflict that engulfed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the early 1990s. The disturbing reality is that it only took two short years for Europe to move from breaching the Berlin Wall, thoughts of a common European home and the unification of East and West Europe, to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the destruction of Sarajevo, the massacre at Srebrenica and the events described in the chilling euphemism of 'ethnic cleansing'.<sup>5</sup>

## **Competing with history**

All of the plays considered in this chapter deal in some way with history. A concern with the theatrical representation of history was clearly uppermost in the mind of Michael Billington when he

reviewed Howard Brenton and Tariq Ali's *Moscow Gold* (1990), a play concerned with the events of the Soviet Union from 1982 to 1990. In his review, Billington writes: 'You start to wonder how theatre can compete with documentary reality. The short answer is it can't. [...] Theatre cannot compete with history: what it can do is illuminate specific moments in time and the burden of decision' (1990: 44). Billington's words, particularly his assertion of 'the burden of decision', imply a specific understanding of history as the story of decision-makers and powerful elites. The reality of any given moment of the past is that it is constructed by a plurality of experiences that generate multiple, not singular, narratives. Two plays that sought, in very different ways, to reconcile the problems of theatrically depicting historical narratives, Edgar's *The Shape of the Table* (1990) and Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1990), concern themselves specifically with the Eastern European revolutions of 1989.

*The Shape of the Table* (National Theatre, 1990) considers the processes inherent in the political negotiations that took place in the countries of the Eastern bloc following the events of 1989. While concerning itself with the elites implied by Billington, *The Shape of the Table* does not seek to depict the story of one particular country, but rather explores the story of the revolutions in Eastern Europe holistically. As Edgar explains:

In 1989, I felt there was enough in common between the uprisings in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria to create a representative fictionalised narrative of the fall of Eastern European communism; the play, *The Shape of the Table*, would demonstrate a common process but also dramatise the experience of heady opportunity (on one side) and loss (on the other). (2001b: 2)

While there are undoubtedly inherent problems in extracting the generic processes that are in operation at any given moment in history – for example, the loss of the specific social and political circumstances of each particular nation and the motivations of individual players – for Edgar the task offers significant benefits:

I think that history tells what *happened*, journalism tells what's *happening* and what I try and do is tell what *happens*. My work is in the present tense, but it is more general, more generic than journalism. I've come round to writing plays about process as a development of an alternative to political theatre in the traditional polemical sense. I suppose a process play is a play that says there is a syndrome of things that

happen in the world and what happens in *The Shape of the Table* is that you take something that happens frequently, you draw out the essence and you fictionalise it; you make it generic.<sup>6</sup>

As the play unfolds the fall of the communist government of Edgar's unnamed country is shown as a *fait accompli*. Ultimately, representatives from both the new and old order are gathered in one room and tasked with negotiating the future governance of their country. To this end, *The Shape of the Table* revolves almost exclusively around the negotiating table. Indeed, Edgar uses the negotiating table itself, as suggested by the play's title, as a metaphor for the developments and political changes that were occurring throughout Eastern Europe at this time. During the negotiations, the table is revealed as not one single table but many smaller tables that can be tessellated into one whole or divided into smaller or even single units. This metaphor operates on two levels. First, it not only demonstrates the development of political and cultural plurality, but also indicates the aspiration that such plurality should be based not upon mutual exclusivity but upon the ability to act cooperatively for the greater good of all. Secondly, however, the metaphor of the table also reminds the audience that an active desire on all sides is required to make such pluralistic cooperation a reality. Edgar underscores this point at the end of the play when there are reports of a gang of skinheads beating a Vietnamese boy to death and the appearance of graffiti that reads 'Gas all Gypsies Now' (Edgar 1990: 75), elements that prophetically point towards a growing nationalism, ethnic tensions and civil war.

In contrast to *The Shape of the Table*, Churchill's *Mad Forest* (Central School of Speech and Drama, London, 1990), which considers events in Romania during the latter part of 1989, does not represent a single politician or political representative (though the dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu has a powerful implicit presence). Moreover, while Edgar's play offers an examination of the political processes at work in Eastern Europe, *Mad Forest* offers an evocation of the mood and atmosphere prevalent in Romania during the early 1990s. Asked to write a play about the Romanian revolution for the students of the Central School of Speech and Drama, Churchill's approach was to use the actors in the company to help generate the material for the play, as she had previously done for Joint Stock Theatre Company. This approach necessitated a visit to Romania, where the students interviewed a range of people about their experiences during the events of late 1989 and early 1990. As a result, as Sotto-Moretini notes, the

play focuses on the 'small vicissitudes of family life [. . .] the "micro-politics" of everyday life' (1994: 105). This process generated a play that reveals large-scale socio-political proceedings through personal, domestic and familial events, centring as it does on two unremarkable families.

*Mad Forest* is not a process play as typified by Edgar's *The Shape of the Table*; rather it offers its audience a range of voices that speak of an historical event, an experience, which, while collective in nature, is composed of a plethora of individual contributions; and in doing so the play reveals a picture that is fractured and fragmented. This fragmentation is borne out by the play's formal structure, which is segmented into vignettes of action. While most of these sections are realistic in their form, some scenes are surreal – a disturbing feature of the work's construction, which unsettles and unnerves the spectator. For example, a priest is told not to think about politics by an angel, and at the start of act three a dog begs a vampire to make him 'undead'. Even within the more realistic scenes, an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty pervades the work: a husband and wife have to turn the radio up to have an argument for fear that their house is bugged; a family can only speak openly during a power cut; and a woman arranges an illegal abortion, bribing the doctor who only appears to be refusing her request. Even at the end of the play, when the Ceaușescu regime has been removed, the change that Churchill depicts is characterized as painful and uncertain. While Edgar's *The Shape of the Table* articulates the political, philosophical and conceptual processes of the transition that occurred in Eastern Europe, Churchill's *Mad Forest* offers its audience an examination of the immediate consequences of this change. Ultimately, it is a change that leaves the characters of the play traumatized by the event itself, bewildered by its rapidity, fearful of its potential implications and deeply confused about the uncertainty it has generated for the future, a set of concerns that were replicated across Central and Eastern Europe at this time.

## Fortress Europe

The state of uncertainty and flux that Europe experienced during the 1990s is the central concern of a number of plays written during this time and shortly after. While Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Credible Witness* (2001) and David Edgar's work *The Prisoner's Dilemma* (2001a)

consider the consequences of European instability during the 1990s,<sup>7</sup> two other plays, Edgar's *Pentecost* (1994) and Greig's *Europe* (1994), explore how Europe has become a site of transition, particularly in terms of the migration of people. Both these plays examine issues that centre upon national identity, borders, language and the question of Europe as a politically and economically united entity.

Following the Eastern bloc revolutions of 1989, one of the significant challenges that faced the EU, which was then comprised almost exclusively of the nations of Western Europe, was that of migration. Migrants fell into two groups, which were by no means mutually exclusive: economic refugees and those displaced by war or political change. The EU's official statistics demonstrated the scale of this challenge. Between 1989 and 1998 close to two million asylum applications were made to Western European nations by citizens of other European countries. In total, including applications from non-European countries, asylum applications made to EU countries between 1986 and 1991 rose by 481 per cent (Gregou 2005: 10). Faced with this dramatic increase in migration the response of many Western European countries, despite the implementation of the Schengen pact, was to impose stricter immigration and border controls.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this, during the mid-1990s the EU was heavily engaged in discussion over the process of enlargement – explicitly which nations should and which should not be included in the EU. It is these issues that occupy central positions in the narratives of both *Europe* and *Pentecost*.

The action of *Pentecost* (Royal Shakespeare Company, Other Place, 1994) takes place in an abandoned church in a Southeastern European country, only referred to as 'our country'. On the wall of the church is a fresco that bears a remarkable similarity to Giotto's *Lamentation* in the Arena Chapel, Padua. Gabriella Pecs, a curator at the National Museum, enlists the help of a visiting English art historian, Professor Oliver Davenport, to help her confirm the provenance of the fresco, which she believes pre-dates Giotto's work. In the opening exchanges of the first scene, as Pecs tells Davenport the history of the church in which the fresco is housed, she reveals to the audience the complex history and 'ownership' of her nation:

Gabriella: All righty, one abandoned church. As well as warehouse, church is used by heroic peasantry to store potatoes [ . . . ] And before potatoes, Museum of Atheism and Progressive People's Culture. And before museum, prison [ . . . ] 'Transit Centre'. German Army. [ . . . ] When we Hungary, it



Catholic, when we are holy Slavic people, Orthodox. When we have our friendly Turkish visitor who drop by for few hundred years, for while is mosque. When Napoleon pass through, is house for horses. (Edgar 1995: 5)

This establishes a degree of confusion and uncertainty as regards the national identity of 'our country'. Edgar constructs a country in which the idea of a national identity is unstable, and integral to this instability is the very fact that the territory, the physical landscape of 'our country', has been a border that over the past few centuries has been repeatedly questioned, claimed and reclaimed by different ethnic groups. This is why the provenance of the fresco is so important for 'our country' as a nation-state and specifically in terms of its national identity as a European state.

If Pecs's research and some educated assumptions are correct, then the fresco in the church was painted close to one hundred years prior to Giotto beginning work on the painting in Padua. As Giotto's painting is considered one of the founding works of the Renaissance, the importance of establishing the provenance of 'our country's' fresco becomes clear as it potentially calls into question the geohistorical location of Southeastern Europe. If Pecs is correct, the genealogy of 'our country' is moved to a more central position within the cultural, philosophical and historical order of that which is considered 'Europeanness'. If this fresco turns out to be what Pecs and Davenport believe it is, then the cultural geography of Europe for the past six hundred years has been wrong. The birthplace of the Renaissance and therefore the cultural development of Europe was not northern Italy, but the southeastern Balkans. However, before the provenance of the fresco can be confirmed the church is invaded by a group of refugees, who take the occupants hostage and insist that the authorities meet their various demands for asylum or the hostages will be killed. This startling *coup de théâtre* initiates the second act of the play.

Through these refugees Edgar is able to evoke the vast ethnic diversity of contemporary Europe. These refugees hail from a very wide range of countries, backgrounds and ethnicities and their presence successfully represents the diversity of the post-Cold War diaspora, including Kurds fleeing Turkey and Iraq, Bosnian Gypsies escaping persecution in Croatia, Palestinians, and refugees from the former Soviet Union. Reinelt has argued that the *concept* of Europe has become 'fluid and indeterminate' (Reinelt 2001: 365), but the reality so accurately depicted by Edgar is that the borders of Europe, specifically

between old and 'New Europe', are anything but. By bringing these refugees into 'our country' – the threshold of Europe – Edgar foregrounds the plight of those seeking to enter Western Europe.

The most significant feature of act two is the fact that the cultural centrality of Western Europe is challenged and placed firmly on the periphery, while the marginalized 'other', in this case the refugees, takes centre stage. Theatrically, Edgar explores this in two ways. First, large sections of the act are spoken in a cacophony of European and Near and Middle Eastern languages. Sometimes an English translation is offered, but often the audience, like the characters on stage, are left to interpret what is being said through gesture, actions and the reactions of others, thereby removing the linguistic supremacy of English. Significantly, however, during this act, all the characters, both refugees and hostages, manage to communicate and do make themselves understood, most notably by sharing stories – the universal themes of which are recognized by all present. Secondly, it is revealed that the fresco was painted not by a Western European, Christian painter, but by a Muslim Arab. Both of these elements, while displacing the cultural centrality of Western Europe, also suggest that it is possible, if the desire is strong enough, to develop mutual understanding across borders of culture, history and language. Ironically, this optimism is destroyed when a Special Forces team smash through the wall on which the fresco is painted to recapture the church, killing a number of refugees and Davenport in the process. This violent intervention signals that the political will to defend the borders of Western Europe is undoubtedly stronger than the desire to foster acceptance and understanding across them.

The theme of crossing borders is further considered in Greig's *Europe* (Traverse Theatre, 1994). Set in a defunct railway station, in a generic blue-collar European town, *Europe* examines, through the use of analogy and metaphor, the political and economic condition of migrancy in the 1990s.

The consideration of the movement of people across borders is first presented by some of the geographically inspired names that Greig gives his characters, namely Morocco, Berlin and Sava. Morocco is the gateway between Europe and Africa, Berlin was a city that sat at the heart of a divided Cold War Europe and was itself a divided city, and Sava is the name of the river that acts as most of the northern border of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, as well as flowing through Slovenia and Serbia. Between them these three names mark out the borders of Europe, both old and new, and act as a reminder within

the play of the borders and boundaries that define and problematize the notion of Europe.

At the beginning of scene three Greig's stage directions state that:

*The station's architecture bears witness to the past century's methods of government. Hapsburg, Nazi and Stalinist forms have created a hybrid which has neither the romantic dusting of history, nor the gloss of modernity. The predominant mood is of a forgotten place.* (Greig 2002: 7)

Here Greig is keen to foster the idea that the work is set in a location that has, like the church in Edgar's *Pentecost*, a layering of historical impositions. If not an area that has been openly contested then it is at least an area that has been subjected, over the last century, to domination by a number of superior powers. Ultimately, the whole play is pervaded by a sense of helplessness in the face of superior external forces, such as the inexorable march of global capitalism and the divisions that this creates, and the complications of living on the geographical and political periphery of Europe.

Greig explores the notion of Europe and Europeanness partly through the metaphor of trains and travel. The image of the train and the railway system as a whole, on the one hand, binds the play's central characters together and, on the other, facilitates the play's discussion of Europe as a site of change and transformation. At the beginning of the second act, the main concern of Fret, the stationmaster, is the fact that the new timetable does not make sense. For Fret the timetable represents order and stability; it is a temporal map on which the places of Europe are charted relative to each other, not in terms of distance, but in terms of time. Greig uses this metaphor to signal that the cities and places of Europe are not only connected by physical lines of communication – roads, railways etc. – but also, and just as significantly, by shared historical connections. The railway system, the 'muscles and arteries' of Europe (53), is held in place by this map, maintaining its smooth operation and continuity, and thus, by implication, ensuring the continued function of Europe as a whole. Therefore Greig uses the image of a railway system, which without an adequate timetable will quickly descend into chaos, as a metaphor for a Europe that without moral and political consensus will rapidly fall into conflict, xenophobia and violence.

Within the play the train also represents a vision of Europe that is not a common European home but very much divided, quite literally within the play, between those who are going places and those who

are denied or who deny themselves freedom of movement. This operates at an individual level, but is representative of the economic and political divisions between what would become known, during the early years of the twenty-first century, as Old and New Europe.<sup>9</sup> Greig employs movement as a thematic framing device for the play as a whole, and through it the personal motivations and situations of each character can be read within the larger context of Europe during the mid-1990s. Adele dreams of travel and adventure, but can only watch passing trains from the roof of the station, whereas for Katia and Sava travel is an enforced necessity: as refugees it is for them a means of survival – an escape from bloodshed and imprisonment. Similarly, for Billy travel is a means of escape, but for him this escape is economic in that he is leaving his closing factory and home town in order to find a better life. For Morocco travel is an essential part of his working life, as he makes an illicit living by the movement of goods, money and services across borders, or as he calls it ‘the magic money line’ (33). Thus Greig, through the theme of movement, manages to encapsulate much that is indicative of mid-1990s Europe – the migration of refugees, escaping both persecution and economic decline, and the issues of cross-border trade, tariffs and implicitly a single European currency.

In the final moments of the play, Greig draws together the strands that he has explored throughout the work. Here the themes of travel, the plight of refugees, the tensions that exist between national identity and a nascent European identity, and the dangers of ethnic nationalism are conflated and examined as a whole. Katia and Adele, both escaping their pasts, travel by train to an undisclosed destination. While travelling, they recite excitedly the names of European cities, cities in which, as stateless persons, they will undoubtedly be denied immigration rights. Simultaneously, Berlin talks of how in an act of ethnic hatred he firebombed the station, killing Fret and Sava, and how this act has been widely reported and discussed. Finally, as the speeches converge, the implications of the brutal realities of implementing the concept of a unified Europe in the face of bitter ethnic nationalism become chillingly clear:

- Berlin: For one day, for one week . . . maybe even for a month.  
Everyone knew the name of our town. And now they know.  
They know that even as they travel to some older . . .
- Adele: Salzburg.
- Berlin: Or more beautiful . . .

Katia: Sarajevo.

Berlin: Or more important place.

Adele: Just imagine.

Katia: Shh . . .

Berlin: They know that, in our way, we're also Europe. (89–90)

## Never again?

I will now turn to two plays that explore the distressing consequences of the tensions articulated by *Pentecost* and *Europe*: Nicholas Kent's *Srebrenica* (Tricycle, 1996) and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, 1995). Both plays offer salient warnings about ignoring Europe's nationalistic and ethnic tensions and concern themselves intimately with the conflict that followed the break-up of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a horrific conflict that marked the nadir of European transition and change during the 1990s and confronted the EU with one of its sternest challenges.

As Aston notes '*Blasted* captured a feeling of the Bosnian war' (2003: 81), and in a number of interviews given by Kane, she repeatedly returns to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, especially the Bosnian conflict, as a means of establishing *Blasted's* political and ethical engagement within contemporary European events (Langridge and Stephenson 1997; Saunders 2002). While much of the initial critical commentary on the play considered the work's content,<sup>10</sup> Kane herself states that the form of the work is an expression of her concerns about Bosnia. The first section of the play can be seen as a piece of social realism, being realistically depicted in the urban, English setting of a hotel room in Leeds. The second section of the play, after the explosion and the unexpected arrival of a soldier, is set in the remains of this room, now part of a war zone, in which the formal properties of time and action have collapsed. In an interview with Stephenson and Langridge, Kane clarifies this:

The war [within the play] is a direct parallel of the war it portrays – a traditional form is suddenly and violently disrupted by the entrance of an unexpected element that drags the characters and the play into a chaotic pit without logical explanation. In terms of Aristotle's Unities, the time and action are disrupted while unity of place is retained. Which caused a great deal of offence because it implied a direct link between domestic violence in Britain and civil war in the former Yugoslavia.

*Blasted* raised the question 'What does a common rape in Leeds have to do with mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia?' And the answer appeared to be 'Quite a lot'. The unity of place suggests a paper-thin wall between the safety and civilisation of peacetime Britain and the chaotic violence of civil war. A wall that can be torn down at any time, without warning. (Langridge and Stephenson 1997: 130-1)

Thus, *Blasted* represents a desire to interrogate social relationships across Europe. Furthermore, Kane does not consider this exploration within the abstract context of society in general, for, as she clearly states above, this is a play about contemporary English society and its relationship to the atrocities being committed in Bosnia. As she highlighted in an interview with Clare Bayley, the connections that *Blasted* makes between England and Bosnia are deliberate and calculated:

Just because there hasn't been a civil war in England for a very long time doesn't mean that what is happening in Bosnia doesn't affect us [...] My intention was to be absolutely truthful about abuse and violence. All of the violence in the play has been carefully plotted and dramatically structured to say what I want about war. The logical conclusion of the attitude that produces an isolated rape in England is the rape camps of Bosnia. And the logical conclusion to the way society expects men to behave is war. (Bayley 1996: 20)

In addition to this, Kane also noted with regard to the hysterical reaction that the play's original production received:

The representation of violence caused more anger than actual violence. While the corpse of Yugoslavia was rotting on our doorstep, the press chose to get angry not about the corpse, but the cultural event that drew attention to it. That doesn't surprise me. Of course the press wish to deny that what happened in Central Europe has anything to do with us, of course they don't want us to be aware of the extent of the social sickness we're suffering from – the moment they acknowledge it, the ground opens up and swallows them. (Langridge and Stephenson 1997: 131)

Thus, Kane draws a clear line of ethical responsibility from the Bosnian war to the rest of Europe. For her, the Bosnian crisis was not an event being experienced by foreigners in some distant land, but by Europeans, her neighbours. The role of the media in these events, particularly the tabloid press, is ridiculed in the play by one of its central characters – the diseased and abusive Ian, a hack journalist

who is only interested in covering salacious local stories. Through his callous disregard for those around him, his rape and sexual abuse of Cate, and indeed the rape and physical abuse that he himself suffers, the mutilation of the soldier's girlfriend and the need for Cate to sell herself for food, Kane creates an image of a dysfunctional world. Coupled with Kane's darkly pessimistic view of European events and the potent warning they hold for all civilized European society, these images invest the play with a disturbing challenge to Western Europe's moral complacency.

In a similar way, ethical accountability for the Balkans was also an important factor in Kent's *Srebrenica*, which reconstructs, using verbatim transcripts, the Rule 61 hearings<sup>11</sup> undertaken at the Hague to investigate the massacre that took place at the UN 'safe area' of the town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia in July 1995.<sup>12</sup>

*Srebrenica* forms part of the Tricycle theatre's tradition of 'tribunal' plays, which collectively Chris Megson has termed 'forensic documentary "replays"' (2004: 5). This evokes the idea that while *Srebrenica* is a factual account, specifically a verbatim re-enactment, it is an edited and theatricalized version of the original trial. This displacement of the original testimonies into a theatrical context allows *Srebrenica* to be seen as evidence within itself and thereby represents an important contribution to the debates generated by the EU's response to the Bosnian conflict.

Originally, *Srebrenica* was played as a prologue to the revival of Norton-Taylor's *Nuremberg* (1996). Clearly, the function it serves by this positioning is to demonstrate a chilling continuity in European history; a point reinforced by Kent when he talks of visiting the Rule 61 hearings at the Hague:

[and] listening to [that] horrifying evidence I was appalled that so little media coverage was being given to it in this country. I mean, here we are, 50 years after the war that we vowed must never happen again, the Holocaust and the gas chambers, and it's all been going on a 90 minute flight away. (Kingston 1996: 1)

Moreover, Jane Edwards speaks for many critics and commentators when she observes that the work provides a moral touchstone for Western Europe's involvement in the Balkans:

We are used to reading news that has been sifted, *Srebrenica* forces the theatregoer to listen very hard. Sitting in an audience in a theatre

enhances one's sense of being part of a society and the responsibilities that that entails. There are no theatrical judgements to be made, but the inescapable conclusion of these disturbing extracts is that history will judge us harshly if Mladic and Karadzic are not brought to trial. (1996: 24)

*Srebrenica* successfully drew attention to the events in the Hague, not simply by revealing the magnitude and importance of the crimes committed in eastern Bosnia, but also by attempting to generate a sense of responsibility within its audience. This is particularly salient when one considers that one of the founding principles of the EU was that by uniting the countries of Europe the atrocities of war could be avoided.

Although Kent's desire for objective re-enactment is laudable, it does raise the question of whether such a venture is actually required. While, as Billington points out in his review of *Srebrenica*'s performance at the National Theatre the following year, 'theatre can both activate the memory and attack the conscience' (1997: 12), the *Observer*'s Tom Lubbock takes a more critical stance with regard to the reproduction of verbatim testimony as a viable dramatic form:

If one can judge these edited reconstructions as drama, this is a far more low key affair [as opposed to the Scott Inquiry or Nuremberg]. The criminals do not appear, nor are there any famous faces to impersonate. The witnesses are people we don't know: a UN observer, a colonel, a conscript. Their stories are everything. This makes the form even more puzzling. What exactly is added by those 'authentic' touches – headphones that don't work, the stumbling over words? Why shouldn't the events themselves be dramatised? Is it just the stage's love of trials, the chance to play forensic formality against the massacres described? Or is the stage's self-denial an attempt to honour the legal fiction that only in court can the truth be established? (1996: 11)

While it is possible to feel a certain degree of sympathy for Lubbock's position, it is important to be aware that what is lost through the work's lack of explicit theatricality is compensated for by the play's wider remit with regard to Kent's desire to put actual witness testimonies on stage. What the reconstruction of these events adds, complete with stumbles over words, or headphones that do not work, is the human voice and, more importantly, the human presence. Kent's reconstruction has the effect that it does upon its audience, as proved by the critical response that it received, not just because of the words that the people spoke, but because people speak them. Kent, through



this reconstruction, stops this story being reduced to mere maps and statistics, elements that can be readily printed within newspapers or turned into computer-generated graphics on the television news. *Srebrenica* foregrounds the human beings involved and in doing so helps to deny the total construction of the Srebrenica massacre as an organizational catastrophe, helping to maintain the event, at least in part, as a human atrocity.

Collectively, the plays discussed within this chapter represent a theatrical response to a changing Europe. Ultimately, when considered as a whole, these plays tell the story of a period in which the people of Europe strove to come to terms with a world that was altering rapidly; a changing world in which some were compelled to renegotiate not only their borders and land, but also their national identities and their histories. These plays are not utopian works and, while they deal with the difficulties experienced by Europe during the 1990s, nor are they dystopian. Rather they articulate the often complex and problematical questions posed by this period of transition and change – questions of mutual responsibility, interdependency and cooperation, but also questions of territoriality, ethnic nationalism and identity. The EU has undoubtedly made significant attempts to resolve these issues in order to create a Europe that is more politically stable and economically integrated, particularly through the continuing expansion of its membership. However, the fact remains, as these plays attest, that economic and political divisions still exist – between Old and New Europe, between member nations and non-member nations, and even between member nations themselves. While the ideal of political and economic integration still drives the project of a united Europe, the reality is far from ideal.

## Notes

- 1 Reinelt (2001) considers Theatre de Complicite's *Mnemonic* (1999), Edgar's *Pentecost* (1994) and Greig's *Europe* (1994).
- 2 For example, see: Raymond L. Garthoff (1994). *The Great Transition: American–Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution; Walter LaFeber (1993). *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945–1992*. New York: McGraw-Hill; Timothy Garton Ash (1990). *We The People: The Revolution of '89*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; Don Oberdorfer (1991). *The Turn: How the Cold War Came to an End*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- 3 This notion of a common European home was proposed by Gorbachev in his book *Perestroika*, first published 1987.

- 4 For more detail about the development of the new Eastern European states post-1989 see: Julie Mostov (1996). 'The Surge of Nations and the Making of New States' in Gerasimos Augustinos (ed.), *The National Idea in Eastern Europe: The Politics of Ethnic and Civic Community*. Lexington: D. C. Heath.
- 5 For detailed accounts and analysis of the demise of Yugoslavia see: Laura Silber and Alan Little (1996). *The Death of Yugoslavia*. Harmondsworth: Penguin and London: BBC Worldwide; David A. Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda (1996). *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation Despair and Rebirth*. Harlow: Pearson Education; Christopher Bennett (1998). *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course and Consequences*. London: Hurst.
- 6 David Edgar, unpublished interview with author, 11 May 2004, Birmingham.
- 7 This is particularly true of Edgar's work, which examines the complexities inherent in the process of negotiating peaceful settlements to bitter and in some cases ancient border disputes. See: Janelle Reinelt and Gerald Hewitt (2003). 'The Prisoner's Dilemma: Game Theory, Conflict Resolution, and the New Europe', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13:2, 41–55.
- 8 The Schengen pact, introduced in 1995, saw the relaxing of internal border controls within the EU.
- 9 The origin of this expression is attributed to US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld during a press conference in Prague, 24 January 2003, in the build-up to the second Gulf War. For further reading, see: Tom Lansford and Blagovest Tashev, eds. (2005). *Old Europe, New Europe and the US: Renegotiating Transatlantic Security in the Post 9/11 Era*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- 10 For example, see: Nick Curtis (1995). 'Random Tour in a Chamber of Horrors', *Evening Standard*, 19 January, 46; Michael Billington (1995). 'The Good Fairies Desert the Court's Theatre of the Absurd', *Guardian*, 20 January, 22.
- 11 The Hague's Rule 61 hearings allows for the presentation of evidence against suspects who have been indicted by the court but who have yet to be apprehended. The purpose of these hearings is to reaffirm the indictment against the suspects and to allow the judges to issue an international arrest warrant.
- 12 For a full account of the massacre at Srebrenica, see: David Rohde (1997). *Endgame. The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica: Europe's Worst Massacre Since World War II*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

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