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THE SUNDAY NIGHT PRODUCTIONS
WITHOUT DECOR AT THE
ROYAL COURT THEATRE,
1957-1975

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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in
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by
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I wish to thank my parents Max and Mary Bolar for their steadfast support and for their constant encouragement over the past seven years. I thank my wife, Anne Thompson Bolar, for sharing her optimism in the face of adversity during the planning and the research of this project. Most of all I thank my son, Matthew Thompson Bolar. May he read this someday and know that his life has rekindled my spirit and inspired the completion of this work.
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ABSTRACT

The Sunday night productions without decor were a series of ninety-nine fully rehearsed plays each presented with minimal scenery or costumes for one or two nights at the Royal Court Theatre, in London, from 1957-1975. This program, along with the main bill productions of the English Stage Company, staged the works of new playwrights who gave voice to the concerns and problems of the young and the working class, two groups previously ignored in the English theatre. After the success of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), the ESC, under the leadership of George Devine, was unable to accommodate many of the new scripts that arrived at the Royal Court. Devine needed a second stage also in order to test and train directors for future responsibility in the company. The productions without decor, created by Devine in 1957, satisfied both of these requirements. During the late fifties this series not only introduced several significant playwrights, such as John Arden and N.F. Simpson, but was instrumental in discovering three important directors for the ESC: John Dexter, Lindsay Anderson, and William Gaskill.

During the sixties the private club status of the English Stage Society allowed the productions without decor
to evade the scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain and played a role in abolishing censorship in British theatre. Edward Bond and Christopher Hampton were two of the major playwrights who emerged through the Sunday night series in the sixties. The production without decor of *A Collier's Friday Night* in 1966, helped launch Peter Gill's directing career and led to the discovery of D.H. Lawrence as a dramatist.

In 1969 the ESC opened by the Theatre Upstairs in the roof of the Royal Court to provide another outlet for new scripts. This space consumed a great deal of the company's energy during the seventies. Because of the loss of critical attention, the rise of alternative or fringe theatre, and increasing union scales for actors and technicians, the Sunday night series became undesirable as a means for staging plays. Although the productions without decor were terminated in 1975, the ESC has continued its commitment to developing new playwrights and young talent through the Young People's Theatre Scheme and a series of Rehearsed Readings.
PREFACE

Most of the plays seen by the public at the Royal Court were produced on the main bill and given runs of from four to six weeks, in contrast to the one-night-only practice of the Sunday night series of productions without decor. Another body of work produced at the Royal Court during these years was presented in the Theatre Upstairs, a small, flexible laboratory space established above the mainstage in 1969. This study, however, excludes main bill and Theatre Upstairs productions except in cases where the scripts, productions, artists, or the general nature of these programs relates in some way to the Sunday night series.

The Sunday night series was an auxiliary program of the English Stage Company that presented ninety-nine fully rehearsed one-act and full-length plays with minimal use of sets or costumes at the Royal Court Theatre between 1957 and 1975. The plays, staged for one or in some cases two nights, were confined to budgets of less than £300, and employed professional artists.

This study provides a record of the Sunday night series and examines the productions and operational policies employed. The record includes information about methods of selecting, producing, and evaluating scripts for Sunday
night, as well as data relevant to the financial operation of the program. Equally important are the playwrights and the artistic staff who produced the works.

The information collected for this study falls into two basic categories. The first relates to Sunday night procedures, scripts, and artists. In a larger sense this initial category includes information about the English Stage Company, the Royal Court Theatre, and the theatrical scene in London from the end of World War II until the present. The second pertains to budgets, contracts, and the general financial operation of the Sunday night series.

The writer drew information from several sources. Most important were the archives and records of the English Stage Company housed at the Royal Court. Newspaper clippings, programs, reviews, and photographs relevant to Sunday nights furnished the reactions of audiences and critics to the productions without decor. Also consulted were letters, notes, financial records, budgets, contracts, readers' reports, English Stage Society minutes, leaflets, and flyers related to the operation of the Sunday night program. These primary materials, which present a chronicle of the decision-making process affecting the Sunday night shows, helped the writer to understand the daily operation of the English Stage Company. These records would have limited value without the personal views of the Sunday night artists, critics, and the staff of the English Stage Company,
furnished in over sixty interviews conducted by telephone, mail, and in person. Also useful was the material gathered in the "Research Conference on the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre" held at Louisiana State University in October of 1981.

Stage directions, dialogue, notes, diagrams, and ground plans in the scripts themselves provided some help in determining how the original productions were staged. Twenty-four Sunday night plays have been published and are in the writer's collection. In addition, the writer viewed nineteen original promptscripts at the University of London Library.

This study has also drawn upon books and articles that examine various aspects of the English Stage Company. Especially valuable were three major works on the ESC at the Royal Court. Terry Browne's dissertation from Florida State, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre" (1970), and his subsequent book, A Playwright's Theatre (1975), include an excellent history of the theatre building, an account of the formation of the ESC, and a thoughtful assessment of the artistic consequences of government subsidy. Irving Wardle's The Theatres of George Devine (1978) provides an extensive study of the English Stage Company's first artistic director. Richard Findlater's At the Royal Court (1981) presents a collection of reminiscences and observations by many of the major directors, actors,
playwrights, and designers who contributed to the work of the English Stage Company. Furthermore, Findlater's appendices furnish an accurate and detailed record of the casts, directors, production costs, and box office takings for all plays produced by the English Stage Company through 1980.

The presentation of the material in this dissertation is chronological. Chapter I sets up a framework of Sunday night policies and practices established during the early years of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. It explores policies and practices governing Sunday night scripts, relationships with artists, contracts, budget, and the physical playing space for this program at the Royal Court. The rest of the study provides a chronological history of the productions without decor. Chapter II, for example, concentrates on the precedent-setting first two years of the program, 1957 and 1958. The third chapter follows the progress of the Sunday nights until the retirement of George Devine as artistic director in 1965. Chapter IV deals with the program during the first years of the artistic directorship of William Gaskill until 1968. With the founding of the Theatre Upstairs in 1969, the Sunday productions began to assume a different role at the Royal Court, the changing nature of which is explored in Chapter V. The waning of the Sunday night program during the seventies is noted in Chapter VI, and the conclusion examines the achievements of the program.
The study focuses on the more significant productions; no attempt has been made to describe each of the Sunday night productions in detail. Many of the Sunday night plays and playwrights had little impact upon the London stage or the English Stage Company. Several productions, however, over the course of the Sunday night series served to exemplify a particular writing style, an approach to production, or a relationship between the ESC and an artist. These productions, along with the half dozen or so Sunday shows that had a truly remarkable impact on the British theatrical scene, will be featured as guide posts by which the eighteen-year history of this program can be properly gauged. A calendar of Sunday night productions is located in the appendix at the end of this study.
This four day conference in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ESC at the Royal Court, reunited Court artists and included scholars, critics, and artists from the United States as well as from England. The purpose of this gathering was to discuss and reassess the importance of the contributions made by the ESC in such areas as design, management, and development of playwrights.
INTRODUCTION
The London Stage Prior to 1956

At the end of World War II many of the English felt a need to reevaluate the cultural, economic, and social changes that had taken place during the preceding years of upheaval and destruction, a need which was made evident at the polls with the victory of the Labour Party in 1945. A vast reordering of values and priorities was subsequently reflected in practically every aspect of English life, including medical care, education, religion, and the British colonial empire around the world. For at least a decade after the war, however, the theatre remained immune to these radical changes in English society.

While the young, the working class, the unemployed, and the disenchanted had altered the nation's course with their votes, their voices were absent from the British stage. Production opportunities were simply not available for the playwright who chose to write about the new realities of post World War II England. British theatre managers relied on marketable English romantic comedies or on proven successes from abroad. In the 1954-55 West End season as many as twenty plays were imports from America or France. American pieces in the 1955-56 season included commercial and popular
attractions such as Gigi, The Pajama Game, and The Rainmaker. Most of the British works during this season consisted of conventional revivals, such as The Rivals and Misalliance, or mysteries, light comedies and sentimental musicals. Others, like Romance in Candlelight, A Girl Named Jo, and She Smiled at Me, were a few of the trifles that filled out the 1955-56 London season.¹

Kenneth Tynan likened the barren yield of fresh native drama during part of this season to the Irish potato famine:

... there was a point at which the very survival of British drama seemed doubtful. The great winter drought, when for four months between October and February not a single new British play² opened in London, scared critics to death...

This failure to produce serious new works led Arthur Miller, in 1956, to criticize the English stage as "hermetically sealed off from life."³

"The Group," a syndicate composed of several British theatres under the control of Prince Little, was at least partially responsible for isolating the English stage from everyday English life. The potential length of the run and the weekly net income, rather than the artistic merit of a script, were the primary consideration of British producers at this time. Aspiring playwrights knew that in order to secure a production they must either write a star-vehicle or adapt their plays to fit the conventional commercial mode.
The key to this commercial approach for new plays was to entertain by writing about upper class problems in upper class settings, such as drawing rooms or country homes. Working class characters and their concerns were appropriate for comic action, but otherwise not worthy of serious consideration. Pleasing an audience through escapist fare did not necessarily exclude good writing. Enid Bagnold's high comedy, The Chalk Garden (1956), succeeded in pleasing artistically and commercially. In the words of John Russell Taylor, however, "this anachronistic play . . . could have been written almost unaltered any time since Wilde." 4 Another major commercial writer of this period, Terence Rattigan, who gained recognition with French Without Tears (1936), secured his reputation as a dramatist with The Browning Version (1948), and increased his following with Separate Tables (1955). Rattigan's many plays, which provided well-constructed, realistic psychological portraits of sensitive and engrossing characters, successfully paraded across British stages throughout the forties and fifties. His work usually dealt with the time-honored conventions and notions of love, sex, and marriage. The more immediate social, political, and economic issues of the day seldom emerged in his work. Like Bagnold and other writers of the fifties, Rattigan seemed uninterested in the common man's problems. Shortly after the revolution that swept the English stage in 1956, many critics, including Kenneth Tynan,
attacked Rattigan as the chief representative of a bygone era of playwriting. 5

Poetic drama became a fashionable draw in the late forties and early fifties because of the contributions of writers such as Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot. For example, Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning* (1949) and Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1949) helped to make poetic drama viable at the box office. The movement was short-lived, however, as the novelty of conversational verse waned.

Quality non-commercial theatre was provided during the forties and fifties by the London-based Old Vic and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford. Both of these repertory companies concentrated primarily on Shakespeare and other classics, and while they served as a training ground for many of England's greatest actors, the development of new playwrights was never a priority. For alternative stages, the serious dramatist in the postwar era had to look to a handful of small theatres, including the Mercury, the Embassy, the "Q", the Boltons, and the New Watergate, all of which produced new non-commercial works at a minimal financial risk. All had closed, however, by 1955.6 Only the creation of a new company, dedicated to the playwright, could satisfy the pressing needs of British theatre in the mid-fifties. As early as 1953 several men had begun work on a play to solve the playwrights' dilemma.
The Founding of the English Stage Company

The initial effort to form an organization for producing non-commercial drama and new plays can be traced to the aims of three men: Playwright Ronald Duncan, Lord Harewood, and James Blacksell, who joined forces in the early 1950's with hope of creating a dramatic counterpart for the musical programs at the Devon Festival in southwest England. Harewood, son of the Princess Royal and cousin of the queen, had helped found the English Opera Group, while Blacksell, master of a boys' school, had helped found the Festival itself. Duncan and Harewood wanted to produce Duncan's Don Juan and The Death of Satan, as well as new works by other dramatists. Duncan had established himself with a West End success, This Way to the Tomb (1946). Harewood could help secure money by lending his name. His reputation for furthering the arts was based on his work as director of the Royal Opera House and of the Edinburgh Festival. 7

Harewood and Duncan's plans originally included a series of Sunday night performances at Devon. Businessman Neville Blond, however, brought in as a "financial guarantor" for this group, convinced them to consider a more professional arrangement with a London theatre. This decision was made in order to secure a broader base of artistic and financial support. 8

Seeking a London theatre in 1953, Duncan's group
encountered Oscar Lewenstein, then manager of the Royal Court Theatre. Lewenstein emerged from the left-wing Glasgow Unity Theatre and had served as an organizer for a number of socially committed amateur companies throughout England. Furthermore, Lewenstein had been a producer in his own right. His interest, like that of Duncan and Harewood, was in producing new and non-commercial plays. When the English Stage Company was started in 1955, Lewenstein served on the original ESC Council, along with chairman Neville Blond, Blacksell, Lord Harewood, Duncan, and Alfred Esdaile, who held the lease to both the Royal Court and the Kingsway Theatre. Other members of the Council included Greville Poke, Lord Bessborough, and Sir Reginald Kennedy-Cox, chairman of the Salisbury Arts Theatre. The first matter of business was the selection of an artistic director. Lewenstein suggested George Devine as a candidate for the position, which Devine accepted, bringing in Tony Richardson as his associate, on January 8, 1956. Richardson, then twenty-seven, had met Devine while directing television for BBC Richardson also had several films to his credit including Momma Don't Allow, produced for the Free Cinema. Although Devine could not vote at Council meetings, he could, attend them and make suggestions. Irving Wardle notes that Devine's potential power to shape and control the English Stage Company was at first unnoticed by most of the members of the Artistic Council. According to Oscar Lewenstein, in
the early days of the ESC "not everyone realized the implications of choosing an artistic director." The selection of Devine for that post became the single most important decision made by the Council in the early years of the English Stage Company.

The Royal Court Theatre Building

After hiring Devine and Richardson, the second important decision for the Council of the ESC was the choice of a permanent home. The Council originally intended to acquire Esdaile's Kingsway Theatre, which had been damaged by wartime bombing. When renovation proved too expensive, Blond negotiated a thirty-five year lease at the Royal Court through Esdaile. Although the Royal Court also had been damaged during the war, it could be repaired more quickly and for much less than the £150,000 required to reconstruct the Kingsway.

The Royal Court building has a rich history. Initially a chapel located on the south side of Sloane Square, it was converted into the New Chelsea Theatre in 1870 and renamed the Belgravia in the same year. In 1871 the building became known as the Royal Court Theatre. During the seventies and eighties this theatre produced a number of successes including W.S. Gilbert's satire, *The Happy Land* (1871) and a series of Arthur Wing Pinero's farces: *The Magistrate*
The Schoolmistress (1886), and Dandy Dick (1887). After the first Royal Court was demolished in 1887 the present building was erected on the east side of Sloane Square the following year. The theatre prospered with plays by Pinero throughout the 1890's. In 1904 Harley Granville Barker and John Vedrenne, one of the most influential and successful management teams in British theatre history, assumed control. Barker and Vedrenne, like the management of the ESC, set out to attract new playwrights to the theatre. George Bernard Shaw remains the most outstanding example of their achievement; from 1904 to 1907, Barker and Vedrenne gave eleven of Shaw's plays their first productions, including Candida and Major Barbara. When the Barker-Vedrenne company transferred to the Savoy Theatre in 1907, the Royal Court was closed for nearly half of the following decade. After acquiring the Royal Court in 1917, the J.B. Fagan management produced Shakespearean revivals and Shaw's Heartbreak House (1921).

The last important period in the Court's history prior to the occupancy of the English Stage Company began with the tenancy of Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Company in 1924. Jackson opened his five years' stay at the Royal Court with Shaw's five part cycle, Back to Methuselah. Jackson's greatest box office success, Eden Phillpott's The Farmer's Wife, ran for three years (1924-27). The company
also achieved recognition through two modern-dress Shakespearean productions, as well as the presentation of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* in 1928. The Birmingham Repertory Company's 1928 season was significant for it brought Laurence Olivier to the attention of the critics.

Closed in 1932 after three seasons of Shaw by the Macdona Players, the Royal Court became a cinema in 1934. The blitz forced the doors shut again in 1940. By 1952 the London Theatre Guild Limited and Alfred Esdaile had purchased the Royal Court and renovated the building. They secured a public license to reopen several months later. The English Stage Company bought the lease of the theatre in November of 1955 and immediately began moving into its new home in Sloane Square.

The English Stage Society

Even before they secured the Royal Court building, the founders of the English Stage Company were concerned about developing an audience. Lord Harewood's Artistic Committee, which consisted of himself, Oscar Lewenstein, and Ronald Duncan, helped form a club of supporters to insure a core audience. This organization of supporters was known briefly as the Kingsway Theatre Club; the title underwent several changes before the group settled on as the English Stage Society.
As its inception in 1955 the English Stage Society proposed to offer advantages to subscribing members, including the right to attend Sunday night productions. One of the main purposes of forming any "closed" theatre club at this time was to permit performances otherwise prohibited by the Lord’s Day Observance Act and to escape the scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain.\textsuperscript{18} Payment of a guinea, or five shillings for students, forty-eight hours prior to any given Sunday night performance would allow a person to join and thus be admitted to a Sunday night production.

The self-proclaimed objectives of the Society were clearly in harmony with the purpose of the English Stage Company: "to encourage general interest in the writing and staging of new plays."\textsuperscript{19} In English Stage Society brochures the Sunday night productions were consistently featured as the central contribution of the Society to the Court’s "development of new talent."\textsuperscript{20} The Society could rightly lay claim to this contribution since it was responsible for financing the productions without decor. The idea for the Sunday night program, however, and the implementation of the series can be credited to George Devine.

George Devine and His Vision for the ESC

Devine and his young associate, television director Tony Richardson, had been attempting to begin a theatre
organization of their own in London. Although a competent actor and director, Devine was valuable to the ESC for other reasons. He shared the Council's interest in producing new plays, and his record of experience, especially his work with Michel Saint-Denis, made him an attractive candidate for running the Royal Court. Devine had served as a producer and manager of the London Theatre Studio in 1936; later he was appointed director of the Young Vic.21 He retained many ideas and practices from his association with Saint-Denis, including an emphasis on the physical training of the actor, comic technique and maskwork, the permanent ensemble, the repertory system, and a preference for simplicity in the scenic elements of production.22

George Devine's most exceptional talents lay in his ability to organize, inspire, and teach the artists in his theatre. Upon his arrival at the Young Vic, Devine had drawn up a list of principles which exemplify the values underlying his work with the ESC:

The basis of everything in the theatre is the dramatist. Drama is a collective art. Each person, from the man who works the tabs to the girl who designs the crown for King Lear, is an artist just as much as the producer or designer. 23

Devine's devotion to the theatre as "a religion," a "temple of ideas," and a "way of life" strongly influenced the policies of the Royal Court during his tenure and long after his death in 1966.24
The Royal Court's remarkable production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 inspired young playwrights to send their works to the ESC. Soon Devine and his staff were inundated with new scripts. Some seemed worthy of main stage productions; many were hopeless, and a few revealed a playwright's exceptional talent not yet nurtured.

For this latter group of plays, Devine implemented a special program which he called the Sunday night productions without decor. From 1957 to 1975 the series presented ninety-nine fully rehearsed one-act and full-length plays without sets or costumes. Devine's initial plans included a two-week rehearsal period and a single performance for each play.

The concept of the Sunday night productions without decor accords with the goals outlined for the ESC by Devine: "to present 'difficult' . . . and so-called unproduceable plays by established dramatists, to forswear such well-known aids to success as stunning productions and decor. . . ."^{25} Devine's emphasis upon the test over scenic elements was derived from the practice of Jacques Copeau (at the Vieux Colombier) and his nephew, Michel Saint-Denis (at the London Theatre Studio). Copeau's advocated the use of a permanent set composed of various levels, arches, steps, and doorways which could accommodate virtually any scene from any play. Copeau's predilection for scenic simplicity and utility was
shared by Saint-Denis, who posed it to Devine. Devine's version of Copeau's architectural setting was, in effect, the bare stage, which the Sunday night series used to provide "presentations that are simple but entirely adequate to show the strong points and weak ones of chosen scripts."  

The Sunday series became one of the most important strategies employed by Devine in fulfilling his goal of developing writing talent at the Royal Court. Along with main bill and other Royal Court programs, the productions without decor helped to change British theatre during the fifties, sixties, and seventies. This change was manifested not only in the way plays were staged, but more importantly in the subject matter of the plays themselves.
ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION


10. Other versions of the founding of the ESC can be found in Browne, Findlater, Wardle, and in Ronald Duncan, How to Make Enemies (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1968.)


Browne, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre," pp. 31-2.


Ibid., p. 156.

Tschudin, p. 20.

English Stage Society brochure applications for membership, from the author's collection, 1958.


English Stage Society, brochure application, 1958.


Wardle, Devine, p. 18.


Devine, Theatres Arts, p. 87.
CHAPTER I

POLICIES AND PRACTICES GOVERNING THE SUNDAY NIGHT PRODUCTIONS

A specific policy governing the Sunday night productions without decor was never officially formulated or adopted before the series began in May of 1957. But several practices gradually emerged from solving the problems encountered in implementing the program and from satisfying the needs of the artists associated with it. The concept of an auxiliary program of plays produced for little or no money predated the existence of the English Stage Company by more than a year. Its originator was the first artistic director and guiding spirit of the English Stage Company, George Devine. Devine anticipated the need for "Sunday performances" and a support group similar to the English Stage Society, which could provide not only audiences but financial backing for such series.

Devine's ideas for Sunday productions were only a small part of a larger plan. As early as 1953, when Devine and Richardson were considering renting the Royal Court for their own purposes, Devine had drafted a proposal for a "modern theatre experiment" at the Court which "could become an essential part of London theatre life." 1 Devine's initial plans turned out to be remarkably similar to the practices
eventually established by the English Stage Company upon its occupancy of the Royal Court Theatre in 1956.

Some of the more important concepts in the original proposal, which were realized under Devine's leadership, include the production of new non-commercial works; a season of ten to twelve plays, each with runs of four weeks; the formation of a "Club" for Sunday night activities such as "exhibitions, recitals, poetry and play readings; film shows;" and "training schemes" for young artists. The "training schemes" first envisioned by Devine were to involve not only actors and actresses, but also a "number of young playwrights who would be attached to the theatre." Plays by these writers "would be given rehearsed readings" on Sunday nights before the Club. In addition, these playwrights "would work on adaptations and ideas for shows."²

Devine remained committed to the training and development of young artists despite several changes in the methods he had proposed. One modification, providing full productions rather than "playreadings," was evident on May 26, 1957, when Charles Robinson's The Correspondence Course launched the Royal Court's Sunday night productions without decor. A reviewer for The Times noted that this was the first of a series of plays to be "rehearsed up to dress rehearsal" and staged "with the minimum of scenery and costume."³
Sunday Night Script Solicitation and Selection

New talent, such as Charles Robinson, was recognized at the Royal Court on the basis of the scripts submitted to the ESC or to playwriting contests, but script solicitation for the main productions and for Sunday nights was from the beginning a major consideration for Devine and his staff. The company relied on two methods to obtain scripts. Early in 1956 a small advertisement for new plays was placed in The Stage and Television Today. In addition, George Devine contacted many novelists and urged them to write for the theatre. The two plans produced mixed results. Although the Court received many scripts, nearly a thousand in the first year, most were unproducible; many were imitative of the typical West End commercial fare that Devine and his colleagues had determined to avoid.

Two standards used by the ESC to measure scripts were originality and truthfulness. For the Court truthfulness meant scripts which "were relevant to contemporary life," or "had something to say," and "could live on the stage." In George Devine's opinion neither of these qualities existed in the poetic drama of the fifties, or in the "endless blank verse shit" that Tony Richardson claimed inundated the script department during the first year.

Devine's taste in drama and production values were unique at that time. His teaching experience with Michel
Saint-Denis at the New London Studio had provided him with a conservatory situation for several years in which he could work with students on classical and non-commercial drama. Prior to the formation of the English Stage Company, Devine, along with Richardson, had worked toward the creation of an art theatre. Both men hoped that such a venture would provide them with an opportunity to continue classes and training for a company of actors. More importantly, they wished to produce new work. In his proposal of 1953, Devine outlined a repertoire that was to "include as many original plays as possible." In addition, Devine had plans to include plays from the following categories:

(a) Plays by dramatists who have had an important influence on the contemporary theatre: e.g., Eliot, The Family Reunion, Lorca, The House of Bernarda Alba, Pirandello, Henry IV, Ostrovski, Easy Money
(b) Plays of interest and importance never performed in London: Borchert, The Man Outside, Ferguson, The King and the Duke, Giraudoux, Intermezzo, Wedekind, The Marquis of Keith
(c) Short plays, made up into a double or triple bill. As there is no commercial position for them, these plays are rarely seen: Sternheim, The Snob, Supervieille, Adam ou la premiere famille, Tennessee Williams, The Last of My Solid Gold Watches
(d) One modern play each season of a spectacular nature: e.g., Buchner, Danton's Death, Brecht, Galileo, Sartre, Lucifer and the Lord
(e) Adaptations from writers whose work seems apposite: e.g., Dickens

Although the above list yields an excellent idea of the kind of modern European, British, and American drama that
Devine favored, it reveals little about the new or "original" plays to be presented in such a theatre. Devine was vague on this point and with good reason. He did not know what he was looking for until he found it. John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956) not only brought the English Stage Company international attention, but it also provided a bold example of the kind of realistic subject matter and language that the Court wanted on its stage. Look Back in Anger is a five-character play fueled by the frustration and rage of Jimmy Porter, a sweets stall operator in a large city in the midlands of England. The play gave a voice to the young, the working class, and all those outside the upper class social structure, appealing to those audiences long ignored by the English theatre. Many of the members of this new audience became aware of the play's existence through a twenty-five minute excerpt televised by the B.B.C. The successful impact of Osborne's play virtually solved the problems of script solicitation; serious writers now knew where to send their works.

After the success of Look Back in Anger, a pool of from two to eight readers was formed to peruse scripts and write brief reports. John Osborne became one of the first to perform this task. The reports were then submitted to the artistic director. If Devine concurred with a dismissive report, he returned the script to its author. A favorable report meant that the play would be given to another reader,
probably an assistant director, "clamped into a tiny windowless [room] and left to get on with script reading." 9 Devine or Richardson would then render a final decision on the scripts that had passed over these first two hurdles. Established writers like John Osborne could have their scripts considered directly by Devine without having to bother with either of these barriers. 10

One cannot easily make generalizations about the kind of scripts typically selected by the English Stage Company for performances either on the main bill or for Sundays. In 1960 Ronald Duncan charged that the ESC was committed to producing primarily plays of social realism by left-wing playwrights. Socially realistic plays were those which dealt with the social, economic, and political problems of working-class characters, usually performed in a style, setting, and language that strove to reflect the daily life of the period as accurately as possible. It was not so much the squalor of low rent flats or untidy kitchens that offended Duncan's sensibility, but rather the temporal nature of the political values in these plays. Duncan's own verse drama and the drama he espoused were, in his eyes, more elevated in style, language, and aesthetic values. More importantly, Duncan believed that his plays focused on the timeless questions that dramatist since Aeschylus have wrestled with: mortality, fate, and man's relationship with God. Duncan maintained that not only poetic drama, but the great
traditions and themes of the mainstream of Western theatre were being discarded by the ESC in favor of lesser works preoccupied by momentary concerns.¹¹

Not only did the Royal Court stage a number of socially realistic plays, including Osborne's Look Back in Anger on the main bill and Arnold Wesker's The Kitchen (1959) on Sunday night, but certainly several of the Court playwrights (Wesker, Arden, and Edward Bond, for example) had political beliefs which could be considered leftist. Oscar Lewenstein once wryly defended the Court's benevolence toward these writers by claiming that "at the time there wasn't a great deal of right-wing drama available."

¹²

The inclusion of left-wing writers at the Royal Court is undeniable. Their presence during this period, however, was balanced by a variety of viewpoints from a number of dramatists who displayed no apparent political bias, including N.F. Simpson, Carson McCullers, Noel Coward, and Angus Wilson. Still other playwrights, including Beckett, Ionesco, and Brecht, focused on many of the classical themes and questions addressed by poetic drama, but in a form and a style entirely different from that employed by writers like Duncan.

Ultimately the quality of the playwright's ideas as expressed in his writing, rather than his political bent, determined the value of his work for the ESC. Devine once asserted his belief that "all plays are plays of ideas" and

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the Court had a responsibility to reveal or to pull a
writer's ideas "out of the flesh, like a tooth." Many
passion was not worth extracting. Many angry, bitter, and
passionate writers submitted plays. Not all of them could be
produced. Edward Bond, one of the leading dramatists to
emerge from the Court, testifies for the importance of ideas
over emotion in the scripts he reported on as a reader:

There was great passion. But passion has to be
cultivated by thought and analysis . . . Passions
wither--except lusts for power and money, and these
are not a basis for art! It's only ideas that
become stronger and sharper in time.

Bond's dramatic ideas had to be defended before harsh
critics, the press, and the Lord Chamberlain. The ESC
considered Bond's scenes of violence, such as the stoning of
the baby in its carriage in *Saved*, essential to the partic­
ular vision or world view of the playwright. Ideas grounded
in the playwright's own experiences were more likely to
possess attributes of originality or honesty. Arnold Wesker,
for instance, wrote *The Kitchen* out of his own working
experiences in an environment similar to the kitchen depicted
in his play. One of Wesker's key ideas in this play finds
expression in the central metaphor which portrays the kitchen
as a microcosm of both the world of work and the world in
general. When the Court staff was fortunate enough to find a
Bond, a Wesker, or an Arden, they took great care to protect
his ideas, his vision, or his particular style, for these were the elements that made his work unique.

Devine believed that the ESC should steadfastly support any stand taken by a playwright's script once his play had been selected for production at the Royal Court. Several writers for the ESC did assume courageous stands in their works. Some of the more unpopular stands were manifested by the form in which the ideas were expressed rather than in their moral or political content. John Arden and Anne Jellicoe, whose works will be discussed later, both created forms which at first were difficult for audiences and critics to appreciate. The ESC's continued support of these two writers played a large role in the eventual acceptance of them as important voices in the theatre.

Considering the preference of the English Stage Company for plays with ideas, what then was the basis for the artistic staff's decision to produce a given play in the Sunday series rather than on the main bill? Although a single criterion cannot be identified, a few reasons can be noted for assigning plays to a Sunday night production. The lack of quality in certain scripts which, nevertheless, held some worth or potential, was a privately acknowledged reason: "Sundays were a good way of giving a not-so-good play a production." Writers who lacked artistic maturity but showed promise were allowed debuts in this program, to permit them to learn from experiences. Some profited so greatly

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that they were able to revive their Sunday scripts for main bill productions, such as Gwyn Thomas's *The Keep* (1960), N.F. Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* (1957), and Donald Howarth's *Lady on the Barometer* (1958).

No script earned a Sunday production without decor simply because the playwright required little in the way of scenery or costumes. If minimal decor had been the sole determining factor, Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, produced on the main bill in 1958, would have been quickly shuffled into a Sunday night slot. Also, with the exception of Nicholas Wright and a few others, dramatists did not submit scripts to the Royal Court with the Sunday night series in mind.¹⁷

Occasionally Sunday night slots were useful for presenting plays with large casts. The existence of an economical outlet for worthwhile scripts in this category allowed the English Stage Company the satisfaction of knowing that no play need be "turned down because it was too big or would cost too much money."¹⁸ Had it not been for the Sunday series, the lack of money and the scheduling of rehearsal time might have prevented the Court's presentation of several scripts with large casts.¹⁹ Included in this category were Kathleen Sully's *The Waiting of Lester Abbs* (1957) with a cast of twenty-seven, Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen* (1959) with a cast of twenty-nine, and Keith Dewhurst's *Pirates* (1970) with thirty-two characters.

In addition to large cast requirements, some Sunday
night scripts asked for detailed and elaborate sets, which, of course, could not be provided in production. Michael Hastings in the opening stage directions for Yes—and After (1957) describes the fully furnished and multi-level interior of a "small house" in Stockwell:

The front of the stage is taken up by the effect of two rooms, side by side, but there is no wall. On the left, facing, the more respectable furniture shows the mostly unused dining room. Whereas next to it on the right, you have a small sitting-room which is used every day, a settee and two arm-chairs and the usual odd things. Behind the sitting-room there is the kitchen, with sideboards and small cupboards. At the far right, at the back, there is a door leading out to the back-garden. On the far left again of the stage you can just see the start of the stairs: three steps, then a sharp turn. And still on the left side, facing directly behind the dining room, there is the main door out to the front of the house.

Now upstairs . . .

Hastings continues to describe an equally complicated second story. Without a large production budget, such a setting would have been impossible on the main bill of the Royal Court. Yet, with the help of Jocelyn Herbert as a design consultant, Hastings' play was staged on Sunday night for only £73. No mention was made in the reviews of the play's being handicapped by a lack of decor.

The work of some playwrights obviously fit into the "without decor" mode of staging more easily than others. John Arden, for instance, does not demand the realistic interiors that Hastings calls for in Yes—and After.
Arden's stage directions for *The Waters of Babylon* stand in marked contrast:

As the scenes of this play are, to some extent, unlocalized, the sets should in no way be realistic. Where it is necessary to indicate a particular locality, this must be done rather by suggestion than by outright illustration.

The sort of scenery I had in mind was eighteenth or early nineteenth century sort, which involved the use of sliding flats or drop curtains which open and close while the actors are still on stage—a method still in use in provincial pantomimes.21

Although Arden's "sliding flats" and "drops" proved too expensive, the suggestion of a "particular locality," such as the indication of an underground station could be accomplished with a London Transport signboard. In addition, a Hyde Park oratory session was achieved by the use of three speakers' stands, placards, and a group of actors. For the critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, director Graham Evans' staging of this scene "provided most of the evening's amusement."22

Arden's theatricality, supported by the use of ballads and a mixture of prose and verse in the dialogue, fosters a sense of "critical detachment" or objectivity in the spectator.23 Although this non-realistic style was not always effective or pleasing to audiences, it was consistently preserved at the Court in all productions of Arden's plays. The fact that the ESC managed to accommodate the divergent styles of Hastings and Arden, on limited Sunday
budgets, speaks highly of the company's versatility and resourcefulness.

The final reason for giving a play a production on Sunday night involves the issue of censorship. Because the Sunday night productions were available to theatergoers on a membership-only basis, the series was considered a private theatre club. Under this private club status, the Sunday night series was for several years immune from censorship, and the ESC was thus able to present several plays which otherwise might have been cancelled or altered by the powers of the Lord Chamberlain. Since this use of Sunday nights occurred primarily in the mid-sixties, it will be dealt with later in this study.

The practice of supporting and developing promising young writers by producing one or more of their works was a trademark of the English Stage Company's relationship with many of its dramatists. William Gaskill, who in 1965 followed Devine as artistic director of the ESC, summarized the Court's posture toward the work of the worthy but imperfect writer:

> [The play] may have its faults but it's worth doing and we're going to do it. When you see [it] you will be able to tell what you think isn't right about it. You will have seen it played by good actors on a good stage in front of an audience.

The ESC's commitment to writers produced on Sunday night is
best characterized with a short phrase coined by Tony Richardson: every writer has "the right to fail." To fail with critics or at the box office was, for Devine, no criteria for failure. Success was redefined by Devine in terms relevant to the special mission of the English Stage Company:

There was Success, which meant something in the Osborne class which could be exploited in other markets. There was the Royal Court Success, which meant a production that had run satisfactorily in Sloane Square but did not warrant a transfer. And there was the Artistic Success, which meant that certain expressive intentions had been fulfilled no matter how empty the house.25

Devine made it clear from the outset that neither the Court's main bill nor the Sunday series would become a "tryout theatre in the sense of putting on plays with an eye cocked on a West End production, a practice that has the drawbacks of the West End, but none of the advantages."26

This did not necessarily mean that Sunday productions would not or could not be transferred. It did, however, imply that productions without decor were by no means designed as money-making projects. The Sunday series could provide a stepping stone if the playwright was patient and continued to write. Irving Wardle once compared the structure of the London theatre scene to a ladder with the "inconspicuous cheap productions" on Sunday nights acting as the lowest rung by which a writer could grab hold.27
The English Stage Company's commitment to developing new playwrights was not limited to unknown writers. Early on, Devine had sought to encourage established novelists to write and submit plays. Kathleen Sully, the first novelist to receive a production without decor, saw her play, *The Waiting of Lester Abbs*, performed on June 30 1957. She had published three novels: *Canal in Moonlight* (1955), *Canille* (1956), and *Through the Wall* (1957). Novelist Doris Lessing's play, *Each His Own Wilderness*, also received a Sunday night production in 1957. Works by novelists produced on the main bill include Angus Wilson's *The Mulberry Bush* and Nigel Dennis's *Cards of Identity* (both in 1956).

Ultimately, Devine had little success, however, with attempts to establish an ongoing relationship with novelists produced at the Court, and critic Hobson explains that Devine eventually gave up his pursuit of them:

Just before the English Stage Company put on its first play, George Devine invited me to luncheon, and explained what the policy of the new company would be. His idea was to unite the theatre with literature. In other words he wanted to persuade established novelists to write plays. He asked me to suggest some names, and I remember mentioning Iris Murdoch. He showed no interest in discovering new people already known to the theatre. The lucky accident of *Look Back in Anger* turned Devine's eyes in other directions. This is no criticism of Devine; it is in fact a compliment.

After *Look Back in Anger* Devine was able to tap the wealth of new playwrights ignored by the English theatre.
prior to the production of John Osborne's first play. Poet and architect John Arden soon came to the attention of the ESC. Arden had recently won the B.B.C. Northern Region Drama Competition with his radio play, The Life of Man (1956), when he decided to send the ESC a play based on an Arthurian legend. Despite the rejection of this piece, Arden submitted The Waters of Babylon (1957); immediately accepted for production on Sunday night, it established his long, productive relationship with the Court.

Literary prize winners seldom escaped the attention of the Court staff. Simpson placed third in The Observer play competition of 1956 with A Resounding Tinkle. The English Stage Company produced the play on Sunday in 1957 and on the main bill a year later. The impact of Sunday productions on the careers of writers like Simpson and Arden during the first three years of the ESC quickly helped to establish the productions without decor as a fixture at the Royal Court. The increased production opportunities provided by the series did not go unnoticed by other young playwrights. Donald Howarth and Keith Johnstone were two artists who eventually secured further work with ESC as a result of their Sunday night productions in 1958.

The press became the most helpful means for spreading the word about Sunday night writers, their plays, and the entire series of productions without decor. Reviews of the productions informed readers that unknown dramatists had a
forum on a regular basis at the Court. In the early years the press gave the Sunday series attention equal to that accorded main bill productions in Sloane Square or other London openings. In part this was because the commercial houses of the West End were dark on Sundays. Being the sole recipient of critical attention on the Monday morning after an opening could give a young playwright an incentive for further writing. Although some Sunday night productions received bad notices, Irving Wardle, critic for The Times since the late fifties, maintains that the reviews were seldom harsh in their verdicts: "If something wasn't right you could usually say it without making a great deal of it. It would have been someone without exposure to the stage before and that would have been cruel."32

The authors of plays produced on Sunday could not expect to make money from only one performance; nevertheless, the ESC paid each writer whose work was staged. An established playwright received the same contract as an unknown writer. In the beginning, dramatists were paid five guineas for a single showing of their plays; in 1968, the amount was increased to £15. In return the ESC was allowed ten percent of the royalties for producing the play. The ESC was also given the right to "take up an option on the play" within twenty-eight days of the performance. If the ESC did not do so, the playwright agreed to "give the Society ten percent of his earnings in the United Kingdom for the sale of
television, radio, and film rights for a period of two years after the performance at the Royal Court Theatre." The Society was then able to use this money for Sunday nights. This was done because the ESC had to "expend a considerable sum of money" on the presentation of the writer's play. In light of the small budgets appropriated for Sunday night plays, the words "a considerable sum of money" must have seemed out of place to many of the dramatists. The relationships between the English Stage Company and its Sunday night dramatists were never meant to be binding to either party for more than one play. The only policy governing the longevity of such relationships was the understanding of mutual convenience. Ties were severed either by playwrights who found greener pastures or by the artistic staff when the growth of the writer could not be sustained at the Court.

One variation on this rule came about several years after Devine had retired from the English Stage Company. In his proposal of August 1953, Devine had called for "a number of young playwrights" to be "attached to the theatre." The exact meaning of "attached" at that time is now unclear, but a form of attachment was established in 1968 with the position of resident dramatist. Christopher Hampton was the first to be awarded the post; other Sunday night dramatists who followed him were David Hare in 1970 and Howard Brenton in 1972. But the post, of course, was not confined to Sunday
night writers. In addition to reading and evaluating incoming scripts, resident dramatists were expected to provide scripts of their own works for consideration by the ESC staff.\textsuperscript{36}

The Development of Sunday Night Directors and Actors

The Sunday night series was originally devised to develop and display the work of promising writers. Devine and Richardson soon became aware of other possibilities for this program. The English Stage Company needed to provide more in-house opportunities for Royal Court actors, and even more pressing was the need to develop and train more directors. Devine and Richardson had each directed five main bill productions during the first twelve months of the ESC's operation. Both men realized that they could not sustain this pace and meet the increasing load of administrative responsibilities.\textsuperscript{37}

Richardson and John Osborne located the majority of the young directors who began work at the Court in 1957 with the Sunday night program. Most of these artists shared a basic assumption with Devine: the writer's script is more important than a display of the director's virtuosity or directing style. During 1957, the initial year of the Sunday night series, three gifted directors emerged. John Dexter made his debut with Michael Hastings' \textit{Yes--and After}; Lindsay
Anderson followed with Kathleen Sully's *The Waiting of Lester Abbe*; and William Gaskill's uproarious production of N.F. Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* completed the Sunday night season. Each of these men eventually assumed a prominent role in directing at the Royal Court. By 1960 their combined efforts had produced eighteen plays for the ESC.

Devine had a "hands-off" policy in teaching his young directors. Their involvement in the "day to day" operation of the theatre as well as their complete control over a Sunday night production furnished their training. Directors as well as playwrights had the right to make mistakes. Devine once explained why he gave his directors complete responsibility:

> I have never said "No" to anyone. I have said "If you do this, that will happen; do you want that?" If they insist, I allow them to have their way and take the consequences on my own shoulders. I think this is the best way to bring them up. If I say "No" they will never be convinced they were wrong or I was right. 38

In 1959 two positions were established for these new artists: associate and assistant directors. Associate directors were not contracted but instead received a nominal fee approved by the artistic committee when called on to direct. Gaskill, Dexter, and Anderson were designated as the first group of associate directors. Assistant directors, on the other hand, were on salary at £10 per week and an
additional fee when they directed. Anthony Page and John Bird were among the first to be named as assistant directors. The associate directors, attached to the theatre, were by far the more important of the two groups; they exerted considerable influence upon the artistic decisions within the company's operation.

Originally, Devine had planned to establish a permanent company of actors at the Royal Court to play in repertory. Sunday night productions would have utilized salaried actors not working on the current or upcoming main stage presentations. But the idea was abandoned by the end of the Court's first season due to the financial and casting limitations of this concept. Idle actors, or those who appeared on Sunday nights, received the same rate of pay as those engaged on the main bill. Furthermore, productions occasionally transferred to a larger theatre with the entire cast. Such was the case when *The Country Wife* transferred to the West End in March of 1957. This event convinced Devine that the permanent company was unworkable since plans for the entire season could easily be disrupted.

Because the Sunday night series did not begin until the 1957 season, the productions without decor never enjoyed the benefits of a truly stable acting pool. But Sunday night directors had little trouble in finding competent artists to perform in their plays, despite the fact that actors were paid less than playwrights: two guineas per production,
including rehearsals and performances. What motivated actors to commit themselves to two or three weeks of rehearsal for this sum? One source of motivation centered around the respect that many actors had for the work that the Court was trying to accomplish. During the late fifties the top salary of any actor at the Royal Court would have been no more than £50 per week, less than one-tenth the figure that Olivier and other name stars could command in the West End. Yet, eventually, many of the best English actors did, in fact, subsidize the Royal Court by playing for relatively small fees, including Lord Laurence Olivier, Sir Alec Guinness, and Sir John Gielgud. Other talented actors, if less famous, also subsidized the ESC by performing in Sunday night productions. These artists came to the Court because they believed in the writing and in the programs designed to support that writing.

Other reasons led actors to participate in the Sunday night series. Some performers in the West End sought a change of pace from the monotony of a long run. Some wished to vary their repertoire of roles so that they would be less likely to be typecast. In addition, players who were "bored and desperate with being out of work" signed on for the experience and exposure provided by Sunday nights. Furthermore, the appeal of playing at the Royal Court became in itself a strong incentive.

Finally, many of the actors in main bill plays became so
committed to the goal of developing new writing talent that they contributed their services to the productions. During 1957 one of these young artists, Robert Stephens, practically became a Sunday night regular by appearing in three of the initial five productions: Yes—and After, The Waiting of Lester Abbs, and The Waters of Babylon.

The concept of extra work for little or no pay was widely shared among the artists and staff of the Court during the early years of the English Stage Company. Included in this group are the scenic artists and technicians who provided inexpensive and often difficult labor for the series. In the opening years of the Sunday night program, the Court's technical crews and stage managers were on a fixed salary, and the Sunday night series was included as part of the regular duties of the staff. This policy was later altered so that crews received overtime payment for labor on the day of the performance.

Michael Hallifax, a stage manager at the Royal Court from 1956 until 1958, often worked on the staging of Sunday night productions. He was aided by a technical director, a master carpenter, and one or two part-time assistants. Besides acting as stage manager for the series, Hallifax also secured properties and furniture, which were sometimes borrowed or bought cheaply at local junk shops. Door flats and window units could be pulled from stock. A scenery workshop for teaching stage-craft to apprentices provided
special odd pieces not available elsewhere. Hallifax's final responsibility was the hanging of lighting instruments and the operation of the lights during performance. 45

Finances of the Sunday Night Productions

Without financial stability Devine and his assistants would not have been able to implement their plans for an auxiliary program. By the spring of 1957, the Royal Court income from transfers and the film rights from Look Back in Anger had generated revenues to meet the theatre's overhead and operating expenses.

The initial financial support of the ESC came not from the box office but from the Arts Council of Great Britain and several patrons. The Arts Council grant in 1956 of £2,500 with a first-year guarantee against losses of £7,000 was supplemented by the donations of £8,000 from Neville Blond, and guarantees by Lord Harewood, Alfred Esdaile, and Greville Poke of £1,000. 46 Operating with such a relatively small subsidy, the ESC understood that a good box office would be essential to keep the theatre running.

On an average, box office receipts could cover all but £300 weekly running costs of a production which filled a house at fifty percent of the seating capacity. At this rate
the Company would have incurred a deficit of around £18,000 by the end of the first year had it not been for Look Back in Anger. Osborne's play allowed the ESC to end its first season with a surplus of £5,245. Profits from film rights, as was the case with N.F. Simpson's One Way Pendulum, or transfers to New York, as with Look Back in Anger, inevitably aided the ESC in meeting its financial obligations during the early years at the Court. Royalties from transfers accounted for £86,296 in extra revenue for the Royal Court from 1956-1960.

While the Sunday night productions did not present a financial burden to the ESC, they did not make money; but, of course, they were not designed to do so. The maximum budget for Sunday night was £300. The English Stage Society absorbed production expenses over the amount taken in by memberships or by box office receipts. The sale of both tickets and programs contributed to the box office total. Yearly membership fees, a separate item from ticket purchases, were a guinea for adults and five shillings for students. The price of admission varied but the most expensive seats never sold at more than thirteen shillings through the mid-sixties.

At these prices the Sunday productions rarely took in enough at the box office to meet expenses. The maximum Sunday night budget of £300 has always exceeded the potential gross for a single performance; in 1956 this figure was
£265. This gross is calculated on a house of 439 seats, at prices slightly higher than those charged by Sunday night plays. While the Society could not always count on a full house, not every production needed a budget of £300. For example, Charles Robinson's *The Correspondence Course* (1957), the first play presented by the English Stage Company on Sunday night, cost £110 and took in £62 at the door. The pattern was repeated by the first ten productions during this period. They exceeded box office receipts by an average of about £65. Because the Society presented only six to eight Sunday nights a year, annual production losses of between £400-£600 could be offset by selling several hundred new memberships during the course of each season.

**The Staging of Sunday Night Productions**

The policies and practices governing the staging of productions without decor were shaped and influenced by two factors: George Devine's philosophy and the physical plant of the Royal Court itself. Devine's preference for simplicity in staging the works of new writers has already been noted. He was joined in this attitude by others who helped found the ESC, including Ronald Duncan, who also had the idea of dispensing with "sets, furniture, and other clutter" in order to show the work more clearly and limit production costs.
In his original proposal of 1953 Devine indicated that he intended to use minimal decor in staging all the plays at the theatre he had envisioned. In doing so Devine was borrowing an idea used half a century earlier by Jacques Copeau:

>a permanent setting (or dispositif), linked with a simple forestage, would be built, sufficiently flexible to adapt, at a very small cost, to the needs of different plays and conventions.52

Although Devine had abandoned this particular plan for simplified staging of the main bill performances by the time the ESC occupied the theatre, he realized that he must make several changes in and around the stage at the Royal Court before implementing any productions with minimal scenery. His first change was to create an extension or forestage by covering the orchestra pit. In addition, flanking doorways were installed in what had formerly been an area for box seats on each side of the stage. These doorways were used as downstage exits during performances. The extension allowed Sunday productions to be staged in front of sets for shows currently running on the main bill.53

When the company acquired the Royal Court building, Devine had insisted on some sort of permanent stage masking and a new lighting system to keep expenses for regular mainstage productions at a minimum. Both of these elements were designed to save money and eliminate labor in set construction. With appropriate lighting, the surround,
developed by Margaret (Percy) Harris, could suggest any number of shapes or backgrounds. Harris, one of a trio of the Motley design firm, constructed this flexible masking by hanging two S-shaped side pieces diagonally at stage right and stage left. These were joined upstage by a third hanging panel. Devine described the entire construction of canvas and netting as "a box that flowed." It could seem as "impermanent and of the moment as the life that takes place on the stage."  

The lighting system cost £3,500 and like the surround was not only created for economic reasons, but to preserve the idea of simplicity as well. Devine considered it an absolute necessity to have a lighting system with the capability of making scenic statements by itself. George Joetschius, an intimate friend of Devine's, describes the approach to decor in the early days of the English Stage Company:

There was a canvas and fishnet surround to represent the earth and sky as an eternal backdrop to the ritual taking place on the stage. There was a wardrobe made up of a set of simple cloak-like, all purpose costumes.  

The surround and the "all purpose" costumes were not appropriate for many of the Sunday night productions or for the main bill. Both had been eliminated by the beginning of the Sunday night series. The idea of using elemental decor
or simplified staging, however, persisted within the company. One reason for the staying power of this notion was Devine's dislike for sets which "tried to cheat or deceive the audience in any way." Jocelyn Herbert, since 1957 a designer of major influence at the Royal Court, helped carry out Devine's taste for honesty and functionality with sets for Sunday night and main bill productions which were, in the words of one critic, "simple to the point of severity." Productions without decor seldom demanded absolutely nothing at all on stage. Any scenery needed for a Sunday night production could usually be positioned following the Saturday night performance of the current main bill attraction. Technical rehearsals were conducted on the main stage on Sunday afternoons on the day of the performance. Since regular rehearsals were usually held in Parish Hall, a few blocks from the Court, the technical run-through provided the cast with its first opportunity to rehearse the play on the stage itself. After the performance that night any scenery belonging to the Sunday production was struck immediately.

Although technicians, like actors and directors, were overworked and underpaid, the Sunday night series never lacked running crews. Devine had instilled in the ESC a spirit of devotion and commitment which carried over into all facets of the operation, including Sunday night productions. Though it was not official policy, the most pervasive and
significant factor affecting the productions without decor on a daily basis, was, in fact, the selfless attitude displayed by all of the Company members in placing the work of the playwright first. 59
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER I

1 George Devine, unpublished proposal dated Aug. 1953, a copy of which is in the author's collection.

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5 Oscar Lewenstein, lecture, Louisiana State University Department of Speech, Seminar on the Royal Court, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 13 June 1979.


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8 Personal interview with Christopher Hampton, 25 July 1980.

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10 Letter, received from Edward Bond, 7 Sept. 1980. (All subsequent letters cited in this study are to the author, unless stated otherwise).

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16 Personal interview with Oscar Lewenstein, 17 Aug. 1980.

17 Personal interview with Nicholas Wright, 25 July 1980.

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19 The Waiting of Lester Abbs, by Kathleen Sully, Program of a Production of the English Stage Society, 30 June 1957.


24 Personal interview with William Gaskill, former Artistic Director at the Royal Court Theatre, 15 July 1980.

25 Ibid.

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27 Devine, Theatre Arts, p. 86.


33 Wardle, interview, 15 August 1980.

34 Browne, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre," p. 104.

35 English Stage Company, contract for It's my Criminal, by Howard Brenton, from the author's collection, 18 August 1966.


38 Wardle, Devine, p. 193.

39 As quoted in Wardle, Devine, p. 195.

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English Stage Society, financial records of expenses vs. revenues for Sunday night productions, from the author's collection, 31 March 1958

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Wardle, Devine, p. 173.

Ibid., p. 172.

57  Telephone interview with Jocelyn Herbert, 12 August 1980.

58  Tschudin, A Writer's Theatre, p. 45.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST TWO SUNDAY NIGHT SEASONS (1957-1959)

In March of 1956 an editorial in a London newspaper lamented the disappearance of small non-commercial theatres producing new works:

It is an unlucky time for the young playwright. While the Mercury, the Embassy, the "Q", the New Boltons, and the New Watergate were still open he had a fighting chance of watching a play of his own in performance. He might be a little discouraged by the severity of his actual notices, but at least he could see for himself the effect of the play on successive audiences and go back to his desk for another attempt, feeling that he had made some sort of touch with the realities of theatrical production. Without this experience playwriting may become as frustrating as shooting in the dark.¹

The writer of this article, however, managed to conclude his pessimistic outlook with a hopeful note by announcing the opening of a new theatre dedicated to the playwright:

The prospects of English dramatic authorship could scarcely be darker; yet this very Easter gilds them with a ray of hope as bright as it is solitary. On Monday the English Stage Company opens at the Royal Court theatre under the direction of Mr. George Devine.²
The bright opportunities that the English Stage Company offered to writers during this first year continued to multiply. In the first season twelve new plays appeared on the stage of the Royal Court. During the second year of operation the Sunday night productions offered five additional playwrights the chance to display their works. The initiation of the productions without decor dramatically underscored the ESC's commitment to developing new writers. Devine and his staff were not content to rest on the laurels of main bill discoveries like John Osborne.

Immediate success or recognition was never a trademark of the Sunday night series. Many of the dramatists in this program had to wait months or years before a second script was produced at the Royal Court or at another theatre. Some left the ESC after a single Sunday night, while others remained and eventually made significant contributions to the English stage.

Career Patterns of Three Sunday Night Writers

Three of the writers given productions during 1957 represent totally different career patterns. Charles Robinson never had another professional production of any consequence after his Sunday night debut. Michael Hastings became an established writer with his two Sunday showings, but had a falling out with the Court management. He
eventually came back to the ESC for several important productions in the seventies and eighties. Donald Howarth not only became a well-known writer after his Sunday night, but joined the staff of the ESC as a director and later as literary manager.

The Correspondence Course by Charles Robinson launched the Sunday night series in May of 1957. This harmless and muddled comedy about two down-and-outs who decide to start a business providing spiritual and psychological advice by mail was greeted by polite but unenthusiastic notices in the press. For the company that had discovered John Osborne, Robinson's play was admittedly an inauspicious beginning to a new program for playwrights.

Robinson, like many of the Sunday night writers who followed him, had developed an interest in theatre while at Oxford. After he wrote a novel at seventeen and a verse play at eighteen, the Oxford University Dramatic Society produced his next work, a musical comedy. Although the Royal Court staged The Correspondence Course, Robinson, then a twenty-four-year-old advertising copywriter, failed to continue as either a playwright or a novelist, despite one critic's comment that his "sketchy" script displayed the "promise of good work to come." 3

When Robinson delivered a curtain speech following the performance of his play, he unintentionally underscored an important question. The Court, he said, should "go on
putting on plays regardless of whether they're good or bad." The complex issue of the quality of Sunday night scripts and productions was raised several times in various contexts during the first few years of the existence of this program. Other related issues included the value of Sunday nights as opposed to productions on the main bill, and the company's decisions to produce the subsequent works of a Sunday night writer.

The confusion over the questions outlined above was most acute in the case of Michael Hastings, the second playwright to be given a Sunday night showing. Hastings' misunderstandings with the ESC began shortly before his first play, Don't Destroy Me, was produced by the New Lindsey Theatre in London in 1956. Hastings, then seventeen, showed remarkable promise as a dramatist. The English Stage Company, always on the lookout for bright young talent, contacted Hastings with the intention of recruiting him into the fold of Royal Court writers. Hastings claims that Tony Richardson attempted to persuade him to drop Don't Destroy Me in favor of a main bill debut of Yes--And After at the Royal Court. Hastings refused this initial offer. He later submitted Yes--And After to the Royal Court under the assumption that it would be presented on the main bill. The ESC, however, unable to find a main bill slot for Yes--And After, produced the script instead on a Sunday night in June of 1957, in a production without decor directed by John
Dexter and featuring actors Robert Stephens and Alan Bates. Hastings' drama, depicting the reaction of a middle-aged couple to the rape of their fourteen-year-old daughter, was, by all accounts, given a credible Sunday night performance. The playwright was angered, however, by what he viewed as a breach of promise and the resulting "demotion" of his play to the Sunday night program.⁵

Hastings' bitter disappointment with his treatment at the Royal Court stemmed in part from his expectations of further productions of his plays. Also he believed that the benevolent attitude of George Devine before the production of Yes--And After aroused false hopes. Devine's relationship with Hastings was uncharacteristically paternal. In the summer of 1956 after the ESC had expressed a strong interest in the young writer and after Devine had given him a stern lecture on the dangers of nightly drunkenness, Hastings wrote several letters to the Court's artistic director. In his correspondence, he complained of his long hours as a tailor's apprentice and the impossibility of writing under existing living conditions at home.⁶

In an attempt to forestall a stint in the National Service should Hastings leave the apprenticeship, Devine petitioned the Drama Panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain to award the playwright a grant so that his work in the theatre might continue. The minutes of an ESC Council meeting from October of 1956 clearly indicate that the
English Stage Company and the Arts Council were willing to provide Hastings with moral support and monetary assistance:

Mr. Hodgkinson (the Arts Council representative) then reported that Michael Hastings is being offered a grant of £250 for him to write a new play for the English Stage Company.

Mr. Hodgkinson then said that the Drama Panel of the Arts Council wanted Michael Hastings to continue at his trade rather than give that up and concentrate entirely on playwriting. Mr. Esdaile suggested that Michael Hastings be given £10 per week when Mr. Devine said that Michael Hastings ought to be given a weekly amount so that he could rent a room where he could work away from family distractions.

Mr. Devine also said that if Michael Hastings gave up his apprenticeship he would be liable to be called up.

Mr. Blond said that if necessary he could ask the Permanent Secretary of the Minister of Labour and state that an apprenticeship as a playwright is as important as an apprenticeship as a tailor.

This was the first of several commissions awarded to Hastings within a few months of Don't Destroy Me. In all, the writer received "more than £1,500" which he later acknowledged was "an incredible sum of money" for him at that time. At least half of this amount was provided by the Arts Council and the ESC. Unfortunately for Hastings, the Royal Court was not obligated to produce the plays it commissioned. In 1957 Hastings submitted the script of I Am God for his part of the contract. Devine declared the play unsuitable for production. Tony Richardson feared that the play was too
much like Look Back in Anger. Instead of I Am God, the Court produced on a Sunday night the play that had originally interested Richardson, Yes—And After.  

In all probability, Hastings would have been appeased if the Court's faith in Yes—And After had led to a production on the main bill as originally promised. The script, however, was held on option and "renewed over and over again" for the next three years. Finally, in 1960 the play was dropped from consideration for a main stage revival. Hastings was angered because he believed that promises had been made for an extended run of Yes—And After:  

Devine and Richardson, from giving a reading of the play with John Osborne and Mary Ure, from inviting me to see Anne Dickens, and then Frances Cuka reading the lead part, and from going so far as to advertise the fact that the public might see a production of this play starring Frances Cuka in Vogue magazine—never for one moment stopped hinting that they'd give the play a proper run.  

After a prolonged absence from the ESC Hastings submitted another play to the Royal Court, The World's Baby (1965), which was assigned to a Sunday night slot, this time across town in the Embassy Theatre. The World's Baby depicts twenty-three years in the lives of a sexually liberated woman and three of her friends, from university days and the advent of the Spanish Civil War to the approach of middle age and the dawn of the sixties. The rebellious actions of Hastings' heroine, Anna Day, make her one of the most vivid and
memorable characters in the entire Sunday night series. After becoming pregnant at Cambridge she refuses to divulge the name of the father of her child, "the world's baby." As her life continues she is unalterable in her denial of conventional values, even at the risk of alienating her companions, her lovers, and finally her son. Vanessa Redgrave's portrayal of this remarkable central role was applauded by critics as a frighteningly accurate and powerful performance.12 Despite the favorable reviews Hastings was convinced that once again he had been denied the kind of production he deserved:

[Anthony] Page chose a Sunday night, in the middle of the Edinburgh Festival, at an old disused student theatre, the Embassy, at Swiss Cottage. The anger I felt was considerable.

I was under the impression, and not alone, that both these plays (Yes--And After and The World's Baby were remarkable contributions to the stage, and both got appalling treatment from within. Page is a little exonerated--the Court faced devastating bills that year, August 1965, and I had a play of twenty-two characters.

Essentially, I am a writer who thrives on encouragement, and tend to deflate rapidly; and it took me years to recover. Some fight back. I turn white silent.

But the ESC's efforts to develop Hastings as a writer should not be regarded as a failure. Hastings did not remain "silent" for long after The World's Baby. He produced several more plays at other London houses including The Silence of Lee Harvey Oswald (1966) and The Cutting of the
Cloth (1973). In 1977, Hastings returned to the Royal Court after a twelve-year absence. His play, For the West, produced in the Theatre Upstairs, transferred to the Cottesloe at the National Theatre in the same year. Two Hastings plays were staged in the Theatre Upstairs in 1979: Full Frontal and Carnival War a Go Hot. Also Tom and Viv, a biographical work about T.S. Eliot and his wife was presented at the Royal Court in 1984. It was the first play by Hastings to be staged on the main bill.

Another Sunday night writer during the initial years of the productions without decor experienced frustrations and setbacks similar to those of Hastings but reacted differently. Donald Howarth believed that his play, Lady on the Barometer (1958) received a better production on Sunday night than when it appeared on the Court's main bill in 1959, retitled Sugar in the Morning. Howarth preferred the Sunday night showing because of its simplified and practical set and because this production was closer to his original script.

An unsentimental comedy, Lady on the Barometer portrays the domestic problems of a group of boarding house lodgers as seen through the eyes of a young doctor, who serves as the play's narrator. Howarth's characters include a honeymooning couple, a grumbling old engineer and his unfaithful wife, and a sexually frustrated landlady. The action of the play shifts from room to room as the doctor comments on and diagnoses the health, habits, and idiosyncrasies of the
tenants.

After viewing both versions of his play, Howarth realized that the simplified boarding house setting in the production without decor was far more appropriate for the characters and the action of the play than the "full blown production" that later appeared on the main bill. Sunday night critics also pointed to the advantages of an abstract set:

... the setting of W. Donald Howarth's Lady on the Barometer seemed so familiar already that we were relieved not to have it visibly presented to us. Not seeing the rooms of this boarding house but only their occupants, we could more readily believe that these people existed in their own right, individually, and had not been collected with a view to giving a point, collectively, as dwellers in a particular place, to a conception of the author's.

The scene being unlocalized, the conception, a fairly trite one, fell away into the distance. We had the illusion of meeting these people out of doors, on neutral ground.15

Howarth describes the lodgers' movement from one "level" or floor of the boarding house to the next as an effective use of suggestion and simplification, which was lost when the play appeared on the main bill:

The set for the Sunday night production was marvelous: furniture defined it. There was a carpet used for the staircase and when you were on it you were seen as climbing the stairs. In the main bill showing there were steps and you had boundaries. It was awful.16
Howarth's second complaint about the main bill showing of *Sugar in the Morning* involves the alteration of the text by director William Gaskill, who replaced Howarth and Miriam Brickman, the co-directors for the Sunday night production. Although the original version of the play received favorable notices, several critics noted that the narrative commentary provided by the character of a young doctor, Kendrick, did not help the production. Kenneth Tynan's review, for example, foresaw a promising future for the play: "unless managers are mad, it will surely embark before long on a successful public run." Tynan, however, was troubled by the speeches of Kendrick: "His narration, a blend of *Milkwood* and *Glass Menagerie*, is delivered in a perplexing vein of suppressed hysteria. This needs clarifying..."\(^{17}\)

Gaskill shared a similar opinion regarding the Kendrick passages. He therefore removed these narrative speeches in the main bill production. Howarth objected, in vain, to this alteration as a "butchery" of his original script.\(^{18}\)

Nevertheless, Howarth's relationship with the Royal Court did not turn sour. This was due largely to the ESC's formal recognition of his talent as a writer long before the main bill production of *Sugar in the Morning*. According to Howarth the ESC expressed its confidence in him by offering both an option and a commission:

> After the Sunday night I was called into the office of George Devine. He had said before that if the
play was good I could become assistant director. He evaded this issue. Instead he told me that they wanted to commission another play. I had had a phone call from an agent; he wanted to commission me at £100. George was offering £50. When I told him of the other offer he met with the management committee and came back with another offer. They wanted to option Lady on the Barometer and give me £50 for my next play.19

Howarth, was eventually offered a Sunday night showing of his next play, All Good Children, but turned it down because he believed that the main bill production of Sugar in the Morning represented a graduation from the ranks of the productions without decor.20

A second reason for Howarth's ability to endure at the Court was his self-confidence. Howarth credits his Sunday night production with helping to establish his faith in himself as a dramatist: "Ever since those first notices I've looked on myself as a writer."21 He returned to the Court's main bill with OGODIVELEFTTHEGASON (1967) and Three Months Gone (1970), for which he was given the George Devine Award in 1971. Howarth wrote two other plays in 1971, Scarborough, and a version of Cinderella, entitled The Greatest Fairy Story Ever Told. His directing career developed during the seventies with two productions on the main bill written by Mustapha Matura, Play Mas (1974) and Rum and Coca Cola (1976). Howarth's Sunday night production of Soul of the Nation (1975) by Sebastian Clarke will be discussed in Chapter VI. Howarth also served as literary manager for the
Royal Court during the term of Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd as co-artistic directors in 1975 and 1976.

Arden, Simpson, and Owen: Beyond Sunday Nights

Two other Sunday night playwrights managed to sidestep the pitfalls that plagued Hastings and Howarth in attempting to move from the Sunday night series to the main bill. Dramatists John Arden and N.F. Simpson both received Sunday night showings in late 1957. By the end of 1960 each had three main bill productions at the Court and each had achieved an international reputation as a significant writer.

The encouragement and development of John Arden signifies the English Stage Company's loyal support of a playwright during the initial years of operation. This commitment began with the Sunday night production of The Waters of Babylon (1957) and continued through 1965. Despite the playwright's failure to attract audiences, the ESC persevered in its support of his work. Theatergoers unacquainted with Arden's unique style not only found his work difficult, but reacted with hostility or indifference to most of his plays staged at the Royal Court. Arden refused to side with any one of the various moral stances represented by his characters. Neither heroism nor villany were permitted to exist, and audiences were finally charged with forming their own opinions free from interference by the
playwright. Not all spectators were willing to accept these conditions. Arden's Sunday debut was greeted with a mixed reaction from the press. One critic called *The Waters of Babylon* a "noisy and shapeless work." Another singled out a "badly constructed" plot as the play's downfall and challenged Arden, an architect, to "take a lesson" from this own professional standards: "rich and lively decorations are no use if the main structure does not stand up."24

Although *The Waters of Babylon* left some reviewers perplexed by its plot and style, others encouraged and applauded Arden's "promise" and "vitality". Devine strongly believed in Arden's potential and within three years produced on the main bill *Live Like Pigs* (1958), *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959) and *The Happy Haven* (1960). *Live Like Pigs* was repeated in 1972 in the Theatre Upstairs. *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* was resurrected on the main bill in 1965. From 1958 through 1960 the Royal Court supported Arden in the face of consistent audience disinterest, considerable financial loss, and a "dubious to hostile" press. Devine at one point had to defend the company's faith in Arden to council chairman Neville Blond. On this occasion Devine referred to Arden as "the most important dramatist next to Osborne we have produced. . .we must support the people we believe in, especially if they don't have critical appeal."26 Critic John Russell Taylor once called the Court's championship of Arden a courageous stand which should be held
in the English Stage Company's favor "whenever and wherever these things finally come to be totted up..."."

From Arden's viewpoint the Court's production of The Waters of Babylon on Sunday night played a large part in helping him become established as a dramatist. Years later Arden recalled the importance of this production in a letter to the editor of The Times defending a Sunday night production of Edward Bond's Early Morning (1968). Bond's play had been attacked by The Times drama critic, Irving Wardle, as "muddled and untalented":

I have myself had one play, widely described as 'muddled and untalented' performed on a Sunday at the Court. This production was of enormous value to my subsequent career as a playwright. Had it been stopped I do not know what I would have done next.28

John Arden is a good example of what Devine called an "artistic success." In other words the ESC accepted his work, decided that he must be heard, and produced several of his plays regardless of box office failure. N.F. Simpson, on the other hand, represented both the commercial and critical "success" that occasionally surfaced at the Royal Court. Simpson's first professional production was the Sunday night showing of A Resounding Tinkle, which followed Arden's The Waters of Babylon as the final production without decor of 1957.

The staff of the ESC rarely urged a dramatist to change
his play substantially once the script had been accepted for production. Most managers and directors in England during the fifties did not share this trust or respect of the writer's text. Rewriting to make a work more marketable has always been a convention of the commercial theatre. Royal Court writers, however, could be confident that the integrity of the text would not be violated during the rehearsal process or in subsequent productions by the ESC. Some writers, however, welcomed rewriting. N.F. Simpson was always willing to alter his scripts; he "revised and reshuffled" *A Resounding Tinkle* for its Sunday night production in 1957. Kenneth Tynan found fault with this second version, preferring the original script which had been awarded a prize in *The Observer* Play Competition:

There were moments when I felt like the American director, who revisiting one of his old productions, found it necessary to call an immediate rehearsal "to take out the improvements." The original text began in the suburban home of Bro and Minnie Paradock, a young married couple disturbed by the presence, in their front garden, of an elephant they had not ordered. The question soon arose of how to name it. The debate was interrupted by the arrival of two Comedians, who were lodged in the kitchen from which they emerged from time to time to discuss . . . the nature of comedy. This arrangement set up a sort of counterpoint. Mr. Simpson has since decided to lump all the Comedian scenes together into his first act, while reserving the Paradock scenes for the second. I take this as a back-breaking error. And when the English Stage Company decides (as it surely must) to put on the play for a run, I hope it will amalgamate the two texts and insist on a new ending.
In 1958, when *A Resounding Tinkle* appeared on the main bill for a run with his play, *The Hole*, Simpson had revised it again, reducing it to one act. Tynan applauded both plays, calling Simpson "the most gifted comic writer the English stage has discovered since the war."

Simpson's reputation was firmly established by his major full-length play, *One Way Pendulum*. Produced on the main bill in 1959, it transferred to the West End in the following year for a profitable run, and in 1964, appeared as a film for which Simpson wrote the screenplay. But Simpson's next play, *The Cresta Run* (1965), produced at the Royal Court, drew poorly at the box office.

Since the mid-sixties, Simpson has enjoyed a successful commercial career as a writer of revues, sketches, and television plays. In 1972 Simpson's *Was He Anyone?* was directed by Nicholas Wright in the Theatre Upstairs. Simpson returned to the Royal Court in 1977 to serve a brief stint as literary manager under artistic director Stuart Burge.

Simpson's willingness to change his work, and to adapt it for the West End, television, and film, was not representative of directors and playwrights who practiced at the Royal Court. Perhaps Simpson's freedom in this area is related to the writer's plotless humor and dependence on a series of individual non sequiturs and gags. His plays are constructed with little regard for causally related incidents or common logic. In a program note to the one-act version of
A Resounding Tinkle Simpson pokes fun at the disjointed nature of his own style:

From time to time parts of the play may seem to become detached from the main body. No attempt, well intentioned or not, should be made from the auditorium to nudge these back into position while the play is in motion. They will eventually drop off and are quite harmless.

Like Simpson, Welsh playwright Alun Owen also established a successful career in writing for film and television. Several of Owen's radio scripts had been accepted by the British Broadcasting Corporation before Progress to the Park, his first stage play, gained a Sunday night production in February of 1959. A reunion in a park of four working-class young men from Liverpool, provides each of the characters with an opportunity to recall past friendships and experiences by reenacting episodes in their lives. Although plotless, the play is never static or dull. The four central characters paint a colorful and humorous picture of Liverpudlian life, including the ever-present conflict between the Catholics and Protestants. While many critics praised Owen's ear for dialogue, several faulted the writer's heavy reliance on the techniques of radio drama. Progress to the Park had, in fact, been based on a previous radio script of the same title. At the request of Lindsay Anderson, director of the Sunday night production, Owen revised the script for the stage. Owen's Sunday night debut was strong.
enough to merit the play's further run at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, and its subsequent transfer to the Saville in the West End, later in 1959.

By the time Progress to the Park was mounted for the third time, in 1959, the BBC had broadcast Owen's television play, No Trams to Lime Street. Some reviewers of the Saville production dismissed Owen as a television writer who was trying to break into the legitimate theatre. But Owen refused to distinguish between the writing styles of the two media: "I write plays. If they are in two acts or three acts they are stage plays; if they are in one-act they are television plays because what else can you do with a one-act play?"32

Owen was undisturbed by the attempts of critics to categorize him. Although the ESC never staged another of his plays after Progress to the Park, he continued to write for other theatres, producing Maggie May (the book of the musical) in 1964 and The Game in 1965. Owen's most prolific work has been for television, he has also authored several dozen screenplays, including After the Funeral (1960), The Hard Knock (1962), The Wake (1967), and Female of the Species (1970). He is perhaps best known for his screenplay of Richard Lester's A Hard Day's Night, featuring The Beatles, in 1964.

Owen, like N.F. Simpson, pursued a career in writing for other media shortly after his production without decor. Joe
Orton, Gwyn Thomas, and David Cregan are examples of other Sunday writers who supported themselves at one time or another by writing for either radio, television, or film. Because England's media have traditionally been centralized in the nation's capital, London has always been a city in which a writer could sustain a career in various forums. The development of television during the fifties added to the number of writing opportunities in London. The Sunday night series became one of the most receptive arenas to interdisciplinary experimentation in the writing profession.

The Special Character of Sunday Nights at the Royal Court Theatre

By the fall of 1958 it had become obvious, not only to the ESC, but to London theatre professionals, that Sunday nights at the Royal Court were indeed special occasions. The fact that the works of Arden and Simpson had been given subsequent productions on the main stage, launching their careers, gave the Sunday night series added prestige. Irving Wardle, described Sunday night audiences as expectant, and eager to view new work, hear new ideas and unfamiliar accents on the stage. Reviewers had become accustomed to assembling at the Court on Sundays about once every six weeks to see a serious effort mounted. While not all plays were well received, none could be dismissed without the critical
consideration given to any other opening in town.33 Audiences for the productions without decor did not reflect the typical composition of those attending West End plays or even those patronizing the Royal Court's main bill. Actors, playwrights, directors, designers from around the London area came to the Court on their one night off to see friends and associates in the latest Sunday night offering. These artists dominated the house to the extent that they sometimes seemed to determine the audience's reception of a play. Critics occasionally noted this noisy phenomenon in their reviews the next day. But the reaction of theatre professionals to Sunday night presentations was by no means always favorable. Two distinct and opposing claques once exchanged heated words during a performance of Stuart Holroyd's *The Tenth Chance* (1958). The debate continued afterwards in a local public house and on the BBC. Leftwing poet Christopher Logue precipitated the disturbance with a cry of "Rubbish!" from the house. Logue later commented that he and some friends had taken issue with the "form of expression the play's ideas took." The rival group supporting Holroyd's play consisted of writers Bill Hopkins, Colin Wilson, Michael Hastings, and Holroyd himself. Holroyd's play concerns the plight of three cellmates in a jail in Nazi-occupied Oslo. Each of the prisoners faces torture or perhaps death at the hands of his captors if he withholds information about the Resistance. The author chose
to focus on the religious dilemma of his characters in the face of extreme adversity. Holroyd and his companions maintained that the Logue contingent had attempted "to intrude a political view" on a play "concerned with the individualism of man." 34

The disturbance at the Holroyd play served to call attention to the Sunday night series as a significant forum for ideas and new forms. Edward Bond's plays, The Pope's Wedding (1962) and Early Morning (1968), were responsible for confronting Sunday night audiences with disturbing stage images of murder and cannibalism. The unique style of John Arden has been cited as an example of a radical departure from the conventional use of values in the theatre. Christopher Logue's production without decor represented a change in form with its combination of verse and music.

Within a year of Logue's outburst during the Holroyd play, the ESC offered him an opportunity to present his own unique "form of expression." A pair of Logue's scripts were performed on a Sunday night in 1959. Jazzetry, featuring a combination of Logue's poetry and live jazz, appeared first on the double bill. The second piece, The Trial of Cobb and Leach, a one-act parody of Antigone, reappeared as Trials by Logue on the main bill in the next year along with a prologue.

Like other Sunday productions, Jazzetry had to be performed on the same stage as the set for the current main
bill show (in this case, Donald Howarth's *Sugar in the Morning*). *Jazzetry* actually made use of Howarth's scenery in production. Director Lindsay Anderson observed that this "abstract-type set consisting of scaffolding and a number of different levels" was "admirably suited" for the jazz ensemble which accompanied Logue's program.35

In addition to serving as a forum for new material, the Sunday nights also provided opportunities to restage the works of previously established dramatists. In 1959, Georg Buchner's *Leonce and Lena* appeared in a new translation by Michael Geliot. Geliot directed a company of final-year drama students in an updated version of this nineteenth-century play. According to a program note, Geliot sought to show the connection between Buchner and the epic drama of Bertolt Brecht.36 In 1959 Victor Rietti adapted and directed Luige Pirandello's *The Shameless Professor* for a production without decor. A program note claimed that this production would reveal "Pirandello in a mood as yet unknown in England."

While Rietti sought to acquaint Sunday night theatergoers with one of the author's lesser known works, critics were disoriented by the uncertain tone of a weak production, described by one reviewer as under-rehearsed.38 The revival of older works on Sunday nights occurred eight times during the history of the series. This practice twice lead to subsequent productions on the main bill. The significance of these two Sunday nights, Frank Wedekind's
Spring Awakening (translated by Tom Osborn, 1963) and Peter Gill's production of A Collier's Friday Night (1965) by D.H. Lawrence, will be discussed later.

While the main thrust of the series emphasized new plays, the English Stage Society was never confined to scripted drama. From the beginning, the Society's presentations were expected to include "discussions, readings, recitals, and any other function that may be arranged for the Society." These special programs served several purposes. First, the membership of the Society could be expanded if a variety of programs was offered for the subscription price. The presentation of poetry readings by established performers, such as Dame Edith Evans (in 1958) and Dame Sybil Thorndike (in 1959), offered appealing attractions during the first few years. Secondly, the Society was not always certain that the Sunday slots would be filled with productions. Although produceable scripts were always available, the manpower to stage them was not. The special programs provided the Society with a certain amount of flexibility. If the ESC found itself hard-pressed to stage only four productions without decor instead of the usual six or seven, the Society was able to make up the difference by adding two or three offerings of its own design. These presentations could include concerts of classical and modern music, recitals, ballet, opera, jazz, films, and discussions. In the latter category the Society

Most of the special Sunday activities listed above were presented by artists from other disciplines who were not connected in any way with the ESC. A final group of special programs, however, came from the creative work of performers who were coached, supervised, or taught by members of the ESC. From time to time, Devine and his staff conducted various classes for actors from the Royal Court and other theatres in mime, mask work, clowning, comedy, and improvisation. This studio training had been Devine's central interest when teaching at the Old Vic School. While classes at the ESC never assumed a prominent public role, Sunday nights occasionally furnished Devine with an opportunity to showcase the skill and development of his actors and directors. For Devine, these dramatic exercises were the most important of all the special Sunday events.

The ESC artists first began to participate in studio work when Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page formed the Actor's Rehearsal Group in order to acquaint English actors with workshop techniques from the United States. In the early sixties the Actor's Studio developed from classes being taught by William Gaskill. Devine was more heavily involved with this second group. Although Actor's Studio catered to members of the ESC and the National, membership was open to anyone. 40
The first Sunday night performance of the studio work was *Eleven Men Dead at Hola Camp* in July 1959. This unscripted exercise was an improvised documentary, intended to comment on recent events in Kenya, through a dramatic reenactment similar to that employed by the Living Newspaper during the American depression. The actors were required to react to and elaborate upon official reports concerning the treatment of detainess suspected of collaborating with Mau Mau guerillas. The nature of the material was not only controversial but was so topical that the ESC feared intervention from the authorities on the grounds of infringing on Parliamentary debate. Consequently the program contained the following disclaimer:

This is a dramatic exercise, unscripted, which is not intended to be a reconstruction of the events that took place at Hola Camp. The actors will freely improvise around the reported facts and, in consequence their dialogue is imaginative, and will show how they themselves would speak and act in such circumstances.

The piece was devised and directed by William Gaskill and Keith Johnstone and was performed by a group of black actors, which included playwright Wole Soyinka.

The exercises utilized by Johnstone, Gaskill, Devine, and others were eventually taken up by young actors enrolled at the Royal Court theatre Studio founded in 1963. Gaskill and Johnstone participated in several other exercises.
presented on Sunday night, including "First Results" (1963). This piece grew out of a series of comic improvisations with masks. Featuring several first-year students in the Royal Court Studio, its avowed aim was to liberate the actor's imagination. "First Results" was followed by other studio recitals: "Experiment" (1965), "Clowning" (1965), and "Instant Theatre" (1966), all directed by Keith Johnstone.

Keith Johnstone and the Writers' Group

Keith Johnstone was involved in both the studio work presented on Sunday night and in the regular productions without decor. Johnstone, in fact, became one of the most prolific directors in the history of the Sunday night series, with nine scripted productions. They included Kon Fraser's Eleven Plus (1960), Bartho Smit's The Maimed (1960), J.A. Cuddon's The Triple Alliance (1961), Kon Fraser's Sacred Cow (1962), Frank Hilton's Day of the Prince (1962), Edward Bond's The Pope's Wedding (1962), and Leonard Kingston's Edgware Road Blues (1964). Johnstone also directed N.F. Simpson's The Cresta Run (1965) for the main bill and co-directed The Knack with its author, Ann Jellicoe, in 1962. Johnstone accounts for his long list of Sunday night credits by claiming to have taken on plays "that no one else wanted to direct." Because he served as the Royal Court's chief scriptreader during the early sixties, Johnstone was in a
position to know "what was floating about undirected." 45

Prior to directing and conducting classes at the Royal Court, Johnstone wrote two short plays produced on Sunday night in 1958. The first of these, Brixham Regatta, was commissioned by the ESC in 1957. This macabre one-act, slightly reminiscent of Beckett's Endgame, concerns a collection of half-human freaks kept by a fairground showman and his family. Through the actions and reactions of this grotesque menagerie, Johnstone examines the limits of kindness and cruelty. For Children, an equally bizarre piece, explores the imaginations of two children who discover a human skeleton and speculate about its origins.

During the last twenty years, Johnstone has authored over two dozen plays. The Royal Court produced The Performing Giant on its main bill in 1966 and The Hunchback and the Barber (1970) in the Theatre Upstairs. Furthermore, the ESC hosted Johnstone's group, The Theatre Machine, for two visits to the Theatre Upstairs in 1970. Johnstone's Sunday night showing was important mainly because it identified and established him as a valuable resource for the ESC. Johnstone's working relationships with other Royal Court artists such as William Gaskill, director of Brixham Regatta, and Ann Jellicoe, director of For Children, were initiated during rehearsals for his Sunday night production.46 After his departure from the Royal Court in the mid-sixties, Johnstone has primarily been known as a director and a
teacher. In the late seventies he became joint artistic
director of The Loose Moose Theatre Company associated with
the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada.

Keith Johnstone became one of the most creative and
multi-talented artists to practice at the Royal Court. Both
Gaskill and Devine recognized Johnstone's rare combination of
abilities as a writer, teacher, and director. One of
Johnstone's most important contributions to the English Stage
Company was made in his role as catalyst and leader of the
Royal Court Writer's Group. Founded in 1958 by George
Devine, this group originally had two aims: to encourage
fledgling dramatists by discussing problems and practices in
the theatre, and to help these artists feel welcome at the
Royal Court. The group was not directly connected with the
productions without decor. Many of its members, however,
later wrote plays produced on Sunday night. In addition to
Johnstone, Sunday night writers form this circle included Ann
Jellicoe, John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond, Donald
Howarth, Wole Soyinka, and David Cregan. Devine and Gaskill
selected the original members of the group. Later others
were invited to join the weekly sessions upon the approval of
the group as a whole.

Devine withdrew from the Writers' Group shortly after it
began, leaving William Gaskill in charge of the meetings.
Gaskill soon realized that Keith Johnstone was a natural
leader for these sessions due to his ability to activate the
participants. When Johnstone saw that formal discussion was unproductive, he suggested that the group quit talking and start improvising. The group agreed to "discuss nothing that could be acted out." During the next two years, until it dissolved in 1960, the Writers' Group was instrumental in helping many of its participants overcome obstacles that had otherwise prevented them from writing scripts. Edward Bond claims that for writers, the group was "the most influential and valuable" service provided by the Royal Court. In addition to learning the techniques and needs of actors, Bond discovered that drama was about relationships rather than about characters. David Cregan credits Johnstone with the ability to liberate the dramatic imagination of group members.

Johnstone believed that one of the purposes of the improvisational process he employed in the Writers' Group was to make plays "less literary." Johnstone was aware of the inherent dangers that an intellectual roundtable posed for impressionable young writers. As a play reader he had been appalled by the number of scripts submitted to the Royal Court that imitated other writing rather than life. Even after Look Back in Anger, intellectual and poetic playwrights such as Shaw, Fry, and Eliot seemed to be exerting an unhealthy influence on the creativity and originality of the emerging talent of the day. Johnstone, therefore, sought to stimulate the members of this group by getting them on their
feet and involved in exercises. Several of these exercises were eventually incorporated into plays by Jellicoe, Bond, Wesker, and Arden. In one improvisation, for example, the group "played" a set of bedsprings as if it were a piano. Ann Jellicoe drew upon this transformation in writing a scene for The Knack, (1962) in which a bed is treated like a musical instrument.

Not all of the Royal Court playwrights could benefit from the Writers' Group. Established Court writers, like N.F. Simpson and John Osborne stayed away from the circle. A few writers, such as Donald Howarth, looked upon the Writers' Group as a prerequisite for getting a play produced at the Royal Court. Howarth attended a few meetings despite his discomfort with the improvisations. After he received a Sunday night showing in 1958 he did not return to the Writers' Group. 51

One of the benefits of the Writers' Group, aside from the obvious advantages of mutual support, was the opportunity for contact with other writers and with the artistic staff of the English Stage Company. The ESC was always concerned with bringing the playwright into the center of the process of production and decision making. To help break down the barriers that had traditionally kept the writer at arm's length from the inner workings of the theatre, Devine gave members of the group free passes to performances and rehearsals. Most writers, however, rarely used them. 52
Despite occasional setbacks, George Devine never altered his commitment to provide a variety of programs and opportunities for the development of artists at the Royal Court. Although some Sunday night writers, including Michael Hastings and Doris Lessing, chose not to become Royal Court writers, others, like Arden and Simpson, remained and grew with the ESC. Neither the ESC, nor the Sunday night series was designed to accommodate the needs, whims, or personality of every playwright who submitted a script.

One of the most significant developments during 1957 and 1958 was the discovery of several artists who eventually assumed leadership at the Royal Court. Keith Johnstone, William Gaskill, and Lindsay Anderson are examples of key artists who emerged as readers, directors, teachers, and decision makers in the early years of the productions without decor. Improvements connected with the Sunday night series during the first two seasons included the offering of entertainments and programs beyond scripted drama, the restaging of older and seldom produced plays by established writers, the presentation of scenes and dramatic exercises by the studio, and the extension of invitations to several playwrights for participation in the Writers' Group. Remarkably, all of these "additions" were in some way previewed or called for in George Devine's original proposal of 1953.53 The fact that they each served a purpose, met a need, and were instituted successfully is a remarkable
tribute to Devine's administrative ability, his foresight, and his artistic imagination.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER II


Ibid.


4 Wardle, Devine, p. 192.


7 Minutes of the English Stage Company Council, 1 Oct. 1956.


9 Ibid.

Ibid.


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17 Kenneth Tynan, rev. of Lady on the Barometer by Donald Howarth, The Observer, 8 Dec. 1957.


19 Ibid. Howarth's next play was All Good Children (1960).


21 Ibid.

22 Taylor, Anger and After, p. 72.


26 As quoted in Wardle, Devine, p. 212.

27 Taylor, Anger and After, p. 72.


31 A Resounding Tinkle, by N.F. Simpson, program of a production by the English Stage Society, 1 Dec. 1957.

32 Taylor, Anger and After, p. 200.


35 Letter received from Lindsay Anderson, 24 June 1981.


37 The Shameless Professor by Luigi Pirandello, Program of production by the English Stage Society, 17 May 1959.

38 Ibid.

39 English Stage Society, brochure application, 1958.

40 Wardle, Devine, p. 200.

41 Gaskill, interview, 16 July 1980.

42 Findlater, At the Royal Court, p. 47.

44 Letter received from Keith Johnstone, 19 Nov. 1980.


48 Letter received from Edward Bond, 5 May 1980.


53 Devine, proposal, Aug. 1953.
CHAPTER III
THE SUNDAY NIGHT PRODUCTIONS DURING THE FINAL YEARS
OF THE DEVINE ERA (1959-1965)

Arnold Wesker and The Kitchen

After a brief summer respite in 1959, the English Stage Company resumed the Sunday night series in September with one of the most remarkable productions in the history of the Royal Court. The production without decor of Arnold Wesker's The Kitchen is noteworthy for several reasons. Two of Wesker's works had already been directed by John Dexter for the main bill: Chicken Soup with Barley (1958) and Roots (1959). Devine and Richardson decided to send his first two scripts to the Belgrade in Coventry for a tryout, thus avoiding taking a risk on either play. John Dexter convinced Devine to allow him to direct The Kitchen, previously unproduced, for the Sunday night series. The reluctance of the ESC to present this play had something to do with the script's large cast of twenty-nine actors. An additional deterrent was the play's length: it ran seventy-five minutes with no intermissions. Furthermore, Wesker's script introduced over two dozen characters within the first few scenes.
Several reviewers noted these potential problems, but most believed that John Dexter's careful pacing and masterful staging overcame the difficulties. He managed, said one notice, "to extract order from chaos." Another critic applauded Dexter's ability to orchestrate, juggle, and choreograph over two dozen actors during the pandemonium of the lunch-hour rush that propels the play into its first frenzied climax.

One of the more interesting features of The Kitchen was the relative ease and economy with which so large a production was adapted for the stage. The total cost of the first Sunday night presentation of The Kitchen was just over £190, while an additional performances on the following Sunday ran just over £115. In his stage directions for the play, Wesker dispenses with real food and specifies mime in the handling of kitchen utensils. Jocelyn Herbert designed a stark set that utilized a series of long tables (stacked high with white plates), and the rear brick wall of the Royal Court's stage. When The Kitchen was given a main bill showing in 1961, Herbert's set for the new production became slightly more elaborate. This is partly due to her belief that the original production was the most successful and well suited of all the productions without decor. In the latter production the wall was painted a dull and dirty white. Furthermore, the kitchen furniture, including the ovens, were
better defined, and eight strong reflectors hung from a metal frame suspended over the set to provide the brightness and heat that Wesker calls for in his text.⁵ Herbert shaped her exposed pipework grid to fit the shape of her set design and the traffic patterns onstage. Several other Royal Court productions used this conception in lighting schemes.⁶ Stage manager Michael Hallifax credited Herbert with another important innovation in her designs for Ionesco's The Chairs (1957). By setting the lights at the proper angle, Herbert created what Hallifax called "an extraordinary watered silk effect" on the gauze of the wraparound cyclorama. A discovery which also used later in subsequent productions at the Court.⁷

Herbert's set designs have been characterized by her co-workers as functional and free from clutter. Donald Howarth claims that Herbert incorporates only those elements in the text which are absolutely essential; aesthetically, her sense of design was compatible with the deemphasis on decor in the Sunday night series. Jocelyn Herbert eventually became the most respected and influential of all designers to practice with the English Stage Company. By 1980 she had designed over forty productions for the ESC, including most of the plays by Samuel Beckett, Arnold Wesker, Eugene Ionesco, and David Storey.

Since Wesker's reputation had been secured earlier with Roots (1959), his Sunday night showing of The Kitchen was
less important to the dramatist than to the series itself. After the staff of the ESC witnessed a production of this potentially difficult and cumbersome play they realized more fully the possibilities of the productions without decor. William Gaskill observed that after *The Kitchen* the artistic staff of the ESC suddenly became aware that they "could do anything" on Sunday nights.  

Wesker revised his script for the main bill presentation in 1961 based on what he had learned from the previous production. He credits his collaboration with John Dexter for many of the improvements in the subsequent longer version. One alteration that did not please Wesker, however, was the substitution of an intermission immediately after the play's noon crescendo. Robert Stephens, who played the lead, Peter, in both versions also objected to his change: "In 1959, after the first climax at the end of the first act the lights faded and came on again, which was very effective... The interval in the second production destroyed the play somehow."  

Between the two showings of *The Kitchen*, Wesker wrote *I'm Talking About Jerusalem*, staged by the Royal Court in 1960. This play completed the Wesker trilogy, which began with *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958) and continued with *Roots* (1959). The English Stage Company produced three more Wesker plays on its main bill: *Chips with Everything* (1962), *Their Very Own* and *Golden City* (1966), and *The Old Ones* (1972).
During the sixties Wesker discarded the naturalistic dialogue and settings that characterized his work in the late fifties, in favor of more poetic language and cinematic devices, such as flashbacks. He also became active in other theatres. He directed several of his own plays at Centre 42, a theatre he founded to reach working class audiences in London. When this project failed in the early seventies, Wesker withdrew from the political causes of his youth. His work became more focused on the individual, rather than on the working class. Although the popularity of his plays declined in England during the seventies, Wesker enjoyed success abroad in Scandinavia, Germany, and Spain.

The Value of the Sunday Night Process

John Anthony Cuddon is representative of the playwrights who struggled to mount a single Sunday night production but were unable to establish careers in the theatre. Although Cuddon did not attain the stature of an Arnold Wesker, a John Arden, or an Edward Bond, he was able to profit from his production without decor of The Triple Alliance in May of 1961. Cuddon became interested in writing for the theatre while a student at Oxford; and after graduating, he sent his first play to the English Stage Company.

Three months after Cuddon submitted The Triple Alliance Keith Johnstone contacted him. The two men established a
comfortable working relationship and spent several sessions analyzing the play's strengths and weaknesses. At Johnstone's suggestion Cuddon rewrote the final act, completing a satisfactory working script before the play was cast.

Johnstone involved Cuddon in all major decisions during auditions and urged the playwright to attend rehearsals. Rehearsals for *The Triple Alliance* ran from half past nine in the morning until six in the evening, daily for two weeks. Cuddon consulted the actors, as well as the director, while making alterations in his script during this period. Most of these changes involved cutting passages or shortening speeches.¹⁰

When he submitted *The Triple Alliance* to the ESC, Cuddon had no idea whether the play would be mounted on a Sunday night or on the main bill. As it turned out, the play was well suited for a production without decor, since it required only five hospital beds, a table, a desk, a few chairs, and two doors. Cuddon cites Ann Jellicoe's lighting as the most important scenic element for the Sunday night production.

*The Triple Alliance* revolves around the relationship of four deformed cripples confined to an institution. The inmates verbally torment one another by playing on fears and weaknesses. Cuddon's script examines the shifting needs for love and power within this cynical group of outcasts. Most of the reviews praised Cuddon's honest portrayal of this
grotesque assortment of characters, although a few noted stylistic problems in the play's last act. Cuddon was generally encouraged by the notices and with the overall coverage of *The Triple Alliance* by the London press.\textsuperscript{11}

Immediately following the performance, a brief discussion was held onstage in which the playwright, the director, actors, and members of the artistic staff responded to questions or observations from the audience. From time to time these half hour clinics were planned after Sunday night productions to provide the playwright with another means of gauging the reaction to his work. The sessions had the added advantage of involving audience members in the production process at the Court.

Several weeks after the Sunday night showing of *The Triple Alliance*, Cuddon again tried to rewrite the play's final act, but became dissatisfied with his efforts and never completed a draft beyond the version produced at the Royal Court. Despite his aborted attempt at a final rewrite, he remains grateful for the opportunities provided by the ESC. The conferences with Johnstone, the rehearsal process, performance, audience response, the clinic onstage, and subsequent comments of critics which furnished the writer with a set of resources for improving his script. Although he did not become a professional playwright, Cuddon later drew upon his experience at the Royal Court in shaping dialogue for his novels. His acknowledgement of the value of
a Sunday night production speaks for both novelists and playwrights: "It enabled writers to have the practical working experience about what was involved, what could be done, and what would not work. Devine was absolutely right. You could learn so much. I learned a tremendous amount." 12

The Development of Third World Writers

British playwrights were not the only writers given an opportunity to learn and profit from Sunday night showings. Devine and his co-workers solicited, accepted, and produced scripts from dramatist of diverse national origins. During the late fifties and early sixties, the ESC gave third world artists a voice through the Sunday night series. In addition to playwrights from Wales, Ireland, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, and the United States, the productions without decor introduced dramatists from Australia, Canada, Jamaica, Trinidad, Nigeria, South Africa, India, Pakistan, and Ethiopia. Several writers from abroad eventually attained national prominence within their native lands, partially as a result of their development at the Royal Court.

Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka, can be included in this category. He joined the English Stage Company as a play reader in 1958, appeared as an actor in Eleven Men Dead at Hola Camp in 1959, and made his London debut as a playwright with the ESC after graduating from Leeds University. His
one-act play, The Invention, performed on Sunday night in November of 1959, features a program of verse and songs, accompanied by drums and guitar. A science fiction satire, set in 1976, the play examines the racial policies of the South African government; it begins with the startling discovery that an American rocket has misfired and created a new world in which it is impossible to differentiate between the races. As apartheid scientists try to "remedy" this situation, their fears and their political beliefs are ridiculed by the playwright. Critics praised Soyinka's wit and command of language.

As a dramatist, actor, and play reader, Soyinka offered the ESC a valuable perspective in assessing the contributions of other black writers and dramatists from the third world, and his exposure to new drama while at the Court helped shape his own work. He returned to Africa to teach and to found his own theatre in 1960; since then he has been able to synthesize styles and ideas gleaned from contemporary writers with his personal vision of traditional Yoruba mythology. Soyinka authored half a dozen plays before the Royal Court produced his first full-length script, The Lion and the Jewel (1959) on the main bill in 1966. In the following year Soyinka's potential influence upon the people of his nation was feared by the Nigerian government. He was imprisoned from 1967 to 1969 in Lagos and Kaduna for protesting against the Nigerian Civil War. Since his release in 1969 his plays
have been staged around the world, including *Madmen and Specialists* (1970), *The Jero Plays* (1972) and his adaptation of *The Bacchae* (1973).\(^{13}\)

Other black writers from abroad who were produced at the Royal Court during the early sixties, included, from the Caribbean, Derek Walcott, Barry Reckord, and Bari Jonson, all of whom had works staged on Sunday night. Because the works of each of these writers required black actors, the Court suspended the traditional practice of auditions and casting in favor of a company secured by the author. The New Day Theatre Company, for example, presented two one-acts, *Sea at Dauphin* and *Six in the Rain* by Derek Walcott, on Sunday night in 1960.

Born on the island of St. Lucia, Walcott had taught at a university there and in Jamaica before founding the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. Of of two plays, *Six in the Rain* most interested audiences and critics. Walcott's use of the conteur, or narrator, who directs and manipulates the episodic action of the play to the accompanyment of drums and song, provided an unconventional theatrical experience. This device and the traditional folk elements employed in the play, subsequently billed as *Malcochon*, were characteristic of Walcott's style in later years. His best known work, *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, for which he won an Obie Award, appeared in New York during 1971.\(^ {14}\)
Barry Reckord had three scripts produced at the Royal Court. The first, *Flesh to a Tiger*, directed by Tony Richardson, appeared on the main bill in 1958. Ironically, Reckord left England for Jamaica before a friend discovered the play and mailed it to George Devine. The ESC production helped to persuade Reckord to return to England and to continue his writing there through the next decade.15

Two other Reckord plays, *You in Your Small Corner* (1960) and *Skyvers* (1963) both appeared at the Court on Sunday night, directed by John Bird and Ann Jellicoe, respectively. *Skyvers* drew praise for its credible character portrayals of rebellious sixteen-year-olds in a London comprehensive school and transferred immediately to the main bill for a run of three weeks. This script represented a new direction for Reckord, who had previously confined his efforts to the problems of the island of Jamaica and Jamaican immigrants in England. *Skyvers* also launched the career of David Hemmings, who acted the leading role in Reckord's play. In 1971 the play was revived in the Theatre Upstairs through a workshop for teenagers called the Young People's Theatre Scheme. The Theatre Upstairs later produced two other scripts by Barry Reckord: *Give the Gaffers Time to Love You* (1973) and *X* (1974).

Another Caribbean artist who also worked in the Sunday night series was Lloyd Reckord, Barry's brother. He directed
Walcott's double bill, and played the lead in *Six in the Rain*. Lloyd Reckord remained active in black and Caribbean theatre in London before becoming director of the National Theatre of Jamaica in the mid-sixties.

Bari Jonson, perhaps the least known of all the Caribbean artists produced at the Royal Court, made his debut on Sunday night in 1963 with *Home to Now*. An anthology of sixty-three songs, poems, sketches, and dances, the piece depicted, in Jonson's words, "the life of the Negro race from Africa through slavery to now." 16 Jonson choreographed, directed, and acted in the production. Because *Home to Now* is a collection of material from other sources rather than an original play by Jonson, it should be considered one of the special programs presented by the English Stage Society.

One of Devine's original goals for the English Stage Company had been the introduction of accomplished European and American writers unknown in England. By 1961 the works of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Edward Albee had been staged in London for the first time. All were successful debuts; however, when Fernando Arrabal's one-acts, *Fando and Lis* and *Orison* appeared initially on Sunday night, both the spectators and the critics responded negatively to the excessive violence and cruelty in the plays. One reviewer speculated that theatergoers might be growing weary of avant-garde spectacles, such as the beating to death of a paralyzed girl with a leather strap.17 Another critic
claimed that Arrabal failed to develop his characters, and dismissed both pieces as slick gimmicks with little substance. Finally, one disgusted correspondent advertised his distaste for the productions in the title of his review: "It Can't Be Really Bad Because I Wanted to Boo." With the possible exception of Edward Bond's Early Morning in 1968, no other Sunday night production was so roundly condemned by the London press.

The Sunday Night Success of Gwyn Thomas

Besides recruiting writers from abroad, the ESC actively sought playwrights from all corners of the British Isles. Alun Owen has been cited in the previous chapter as a dramatist who brought a particular flavor and charm to the Sunday night series. Gwyn Thomas, already well known for his humorous novels about the coal mining country of the Rhondda valley, was a second Welsh writer produced at the Royal Court. Thomas's first play, The Keep, received an uproarious response upon its Sunday night appearance in 1960. Critic Robert Muller noted the author's comic skills, as well as the audience's frequent and spontaneous response throughout the performance: "I haven't heard such continuous, happy, feeling laughter in a playhouse for as long as I can remember." When the Royal Court revived The Keep twice on the main
bill in 1961, for a total of sixty-seven performances, it became one of the longer running shows in the early history of the ESC. For this play, Thomas received the *Evening Standard* Award as the Most Promising Playwright of 1961. *The Keep*, a delightful domestic comedy, reveals the lives of a close-knit Welsh family still under the firm grip of a domineering mother who died some fifteen years earlier. Despite the captivating humor of *The Keep*, reviewers seemed surprised that the Royal Court, of all London theatres, would produce this play. Graham Samuel of the *Western Mail*, for instance, remarked that the comedy of the play was undampened by "the strain of playing at the Royal Court, 'Holy of Holies' of London drama purists." The critic of the *Sunday Times* suggested that the usually "earnest-minded and solemn-faced" staff of the Royal Court had somehow committed an error in allowing an entertaining and amusing family comedy to slip by and make its way on the stage.

As it turned out, these charges were not entirely without foundation. Following *The Keep*, Devine urged Thomas to try writing a play which dealt with contemporary social problems rather than with family situations. Thomas compromised and wrote a ballad drama, in the style of John Arden, based on the Merthyr Riots of 1831. But, Thomas could not resist utilizing his gift for humorous language. The result, *Jackie the Jumper*, fell somewhere between comic satire and political drama, and the play had a disappointing
run on the main bill in 1963. Although Thomas produced other scripts, his efforts since leaving the Royal Court have been directed toward radio and television.

Female Artists and Sunday Nights

Devine's commitment to nurturing writers from around the world, including black writers from Africa and the Caribbean, seemed a more passionate and conscious effort than his cultivation of female dramatists at the Royal Court. Nevertheless, the works of a few women writers appeared on the main bill at the Court during the Devine years, such as Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1957) and Shelagh Delaney's *The Lion in Love* (1960). The reputation of both dramatist had been established before their work was mounted at the Royal Court. Plays by women staged on Sunday night included Kathleen Sully's *The Waiting of Lester Abbs* (1957), Doris Lessings's *Each His Own Wilderness* (1958), Evelyn Ford's *Love From Margaret* (1958), Kon Fraser's *Eleven Plus* (1960), and *Sacred Cow* (1962).

Ann Jellicoe was the most important female dramatist to emerge from the Royal Court while Devine served as artistic director. Jellicoe had come to the attention of the ESC after winning third prize in *The Observer* Playwriting Competition of 1956. Her first play, *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, premiered in 1958 on the main bill. Devine arranged
for his name to be listed as co-director with Jellicoe so that she could have an opportunity to direct her own work. The unusual nature of the material required more than the normal amount of guidance in rehearsal from the author.

Jellicoe's script concerns the repressed sexuality of a group of teenage teddy-boys and their attempts to relate their erotic impulses to a young girl named Greta. On the printed page the dialogue of the play seems to be a series of cries in a foreign tongue. The total effect of these apparent nonsensical verbal games and chants, however, is a violent picture of the emotional inner life of a group of adolescents who cannot express their fears or passions by conventional language. Jellicoe discarded traditional forms of plot, character, and diction so that she might reach theatergoers by different means:

When I write a play I am trying to communicate with the audience. I do this by every means in my power--I try to get at them through their eyes, by providing visual actions, I try to get at them through their ears, for instance, by noises and rhythm. These are not loose effects; they are introduced to communicate with an audience directly through their senses. 24

But the main bill production of The Sport of My Mad Mother did not find audiences; the theatre emptied during the performance and the notices were extremely negative. Neither the spectators nor the reviewers were prepared for Jellicoe's daring experiment. Nevertheless, Jellicoe's
career was not damaged by this poor reception, since Devine stood by her on opening night, promising to produce her next script regardless of critical reaction. Devine could not know at the time that Jellicoe's second major play, *The Knack*, staged on the main bill in 1962, was to become the greatest success of her career and earn a handsome profit for the ESC in transfers and the sale of film rights. While such success was welcome, it was less important to Devine than Jellicoe's development as a writer.


Jellicoe left the Royal Court in the mid-sixties, and returned in 1973 and 1974 as literary manager. While serving in this position Jellicoe wrote and directed two plays for the Theatre Upstairs in 1974: *Clever Elsie, Smiling John.*
Silent Peter and A Good Thing or a Bad Thing. Later that same season she directed two plays for the Young People's Theatre Scheme.

Jellicoe's interest in working with young people predates her arrival at the Royal Court. In the early fifties she taught at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Her fascination with the behavior, emotions, and problems peculiar to adolescence is evident in The Sport of My Mad Mother as well as in The Knack. In 1960, two years after the original production of the former, Jellicoe attended Jane Howell's revival of this play, performed by a student cast at the Bristol Old Vic School. Jellicoe recommended Howell's production for a Sunday night later that same year. The audience response at the Royal Court was more favorable the second time around. According to Marcus Tschudin, audiences for the production without decor had "caught up" with the difficult rhythms and the unorthodox techniques of Jellicoe's script.

Devine shared Jellicoe's enthusiasm for Jane Howell's production and for the teenagers who performed it. Educating and involving young audiences and artists was a lifelong passion for Devine. Inviting the students of the Bristol Old Vic to the Royal Court served a dual purpose: it brought students into the theatre and it gave Jane Howell a chance to direct for the ESC. Although young people rarely acted on the stage of the Royal Court, Devine had initiated the
Schools' Scheme in 1960. This program encouraged teachers and their students to attend rehearsals and performances, tour the building, and participate in discussions or lecture-demonstrations.

Howell's company had impressed Ann Jellicoe by the credibility they brought to the difficult dialogue of The Sport of My Mad Mother. The confidence of the young players was shaken, however, upon moving to the Royal Court, for when the group from the Bristol school arrived in Sloane Square they were greeted by a marquee proclaiming the appearance of Sir Laurence Olivier in Ionesco's Rhinoceros. Jane Howell described George Devine's rather unorthodox technique for making the student actors feel at home:

The youngest member of the cast got lumbered with Sir Laurence's dressing room and came out jibbering with fear, onto the stage to warm up. Devine was puffing his pipe in the back. He saw the situation and yelled "I want you all to line up. Excuse me Jane. Now I want you one after the other to say in a very loud voice 'Piss Sir Laurence Olivier and fuck the Royal Court.'" So they did this, we got on with the rehearsal, and everything was wonderful.27

The Sunday night production of Sport of My Mad Mother provided Jane Howell with an introduction to George Devine and William Gaskill, who were impressed by her mastery of Jellicoe's difficult script. In 1965, Gaskill, then artistic director of the Court, invited Howell to be his assistant. Years later, Jane Howell recalled a brief encounter with
Devine in a darkened stairwell at the Royal Court a few months before his death. She had just entered the building on her first day as a member of the English Stage Company: "He just puffed his pipe and said 'Thought you'd get here in the end.'" Howell became one of the most capable directors to practice at the Royal Court. She directed ten plays for the ESC, including one for a Sunday night. Her two most important productions were Narrow Road to the Deep North (1969) and Bingo (1974), both by Edward Bond.

The Court frequently relied heavily on female designers, but rarely used women for directing. Along with Ann Jellicoe and casting director, Miriam Brickman, Howell was one of only three female artists to direct at the Royal Court during the Devine years. This record did not improve much until the seventies when Joan Mills, Pam Brighton, and Antonia Bird directed several productions in the Theatre Upstairs.

The Development of Edward Bond

One of George Devine's major concerns during the years that he led the English Stage Company was the addition of new talent to replace the Royal Court artists who moved on to other theatres and other career opportunities. If the ESC was to continue to be the spearhead of new British drama, as it had been in the fifties, the question of how to "keep sharpening the spear" posed a challenge as the Company
entered the sixties. The Sunday night productions, the Royal Court Writers' Group, and the studio work helped the ESC to meet this challenge. From the first wave of major dramatists who emerged at the Royal Court, only Osborne continued to produce new works in Sloane Square with any regularity after 1962. The development of a second wave of significant writers for the ESC began in December of that same year when Edward Bond's play, *The Pope's Wedding*, received a production without decor.

The Sunday night series provided debuts to several other writers in this second wave, including Christopher Hampton and Howard Brenton in 1966. Bond, however, was the first Royal Court playwright, after the establishment of Osborne, Wesker, and Arden in the late fifties, to achieve world-wide critical acclaim. No other dramatist writing for the ESC in the sixties commanded as much attention from the press, from audiences, or from the company itself. His preeminence was due not only to the power of his plays, but to the unique role that Bond's works played in the ESC's struggle for freedom of expression.

Bond was invited to join the Royal Court Writers's Group after his first play, *Klaxon in Atreus' Place*, had been rejected by the ESC. Keith Johnstone, who championed Bond's work, was given the opportunity to direct Bond's second play, *The Pope's Wedding* (1962) on Sunday night. Bernard Levin of the *Daily Mail* called the work "an astonishing tour de
force for a first play" and claimed that it would be equally as astonishing "if it were a fifty first." Bond's curious mixture of humor and menace, set within the context of East Anglican rural life, led several reviewers to compare him with other dramatists, including Harold Pinter and David Rudkin. Levin, however, placed these comparisons in perspective: "Mr. Bond is an original. We shall hear more from him."  

After The Pope's Wedding, the ESC commissioned Bond to write another work. The resulting play, Saved (1965), along with Early Morning (1968) precipitated a series of court battles and investigations which eventually led to important changes in the censorship laws governing the British stage. The court decisions and the related controversy will be discussed in the following chapter since they are closely related to William Gaskill and his role as artistic director.

The Sunday Night Productions and Censorship

The Theatres Act of 1843, an antiquated censorship law, was still operative during the mid-twentieth century. This law required the submission of new stage plays, or older works with additions, to the Lord Chamberlain and his staff prior to performance. Failure to obtain a license from the Lord Chamberlain for any plays or parts of plays previously unproduced could result in a fine of £50 and the closing of
the sponsoring theatre. The ESC encountered resistance from the Lord Chamberlain on several occasions. Objections were raised, for instance, to the language in Beckett's *Endgame* (1957) and Osborne's *The Entertainer* (1957). Although substitutions for the passages in question could nearly always be found, not all playwrights agreed to change their texts. Further complications arose on some occasions when scenes and plays were banned *in toto* due to the nature of the action or the characters. During the first ten years of the existence of the ESC, one alternative was the establishment of a private club outside the scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain, the precedence for which had long been established. In 1886 the Shelley Society formed a club theatre to produce Shelley's *The Cenci*, previously banned by the Lord Chamberlain. Since that time many private organizations had been created for similar purposes. This precedent was acknowledged and reaffirmed by Lord Cobbold, the Lord Chamberlain, in 1965 with the provision that club theatres not take advantage of the situation by giving a long run to any play refused a license. Even before Lord Cobbold's opinion, the possibility of using the Sunday night series as a means of presenting unlicensed plays did not escape the attention of the ESC.

The English Stage Society at the Royal Court officially operated as a club theatre on Sunday nights. In April and May of 1963 the Society presented two Sunday night
performances of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*. Written in Germany in 1890, this play deals frankly with the sexual awareness of adolescents and the subsequent repression of young passions by the adult community.

The ESC considered Wedekind's work important, an acknowledged influence for Bertolt Brecht and many leading expressionists. Tom Osborn's translation of *Spring Awakening* provided Sunday night audiences with an uncensored exposure to two of the more shocking episodes in nineteenth century drama: a scene in which a group of male teenagers masturbate in unison and a lovemaking scene between two young boys. The Court's production of the play drew nearly unanimous praise from the press. Eric Gillett of the *Yorkshire Post* expressed the sentiments of many of his peers: "I came away feeling that this play, written when Queen Victoria was on the throne, has stood the test of time pretty well."

After seeing *Spring Awakening* in production William Gaskill was convinced that the play should be performed in its entirety on the main bill, despite the financial burdens that a cast of twenty-four posed for an extended run. In July of 1963, when the Lord Chamberlain refused to permit a main bill showing of the scenes described above, Devine decided to withdraw the play from the repertoire. He later changed his mind, however, and in April of 1965 *Spring Awakening* was mounted on the main bill without the two objectionable scenes. Wedekind's play ran for thirty-two
performances and produced a small profit despite the large cast. The interest created by the original Sunday night production had helped to persuade Devine that a run on the main bill, with cuts, was preferable to no run at all.

The club status of the English Stage Society provided a convenient means for producing contemporary works found to be objectionable. In 1964 the English Stage Company's attempt to secure a license for John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* was foiled by extensive cuts and changes required by the Lord Chamberlain. One of the central objections was a scene in which a group of homosexual men dressed in women's clothing for a drag ball. Since neither Osborne, nor the ESC had any intention of allowing the play to be performed without this important episode, the Royal Court was converted into a private club for the duration of the run in the summer of 1965. The English Stage Society, rather than the ESC, acted as the producing organization. The Society reimbursed the ESC with the box office receipts after deducting miscellaneous expenses, including advertising. The Society was also guaranteed ten percent of the ESC's future profits from the play. The real benefit to the English Stage Society, however, was a fourfold increase in membership, to over ten thousand by the fifty-third and final performance of *A Patriot for Me*.38

*A Patriot for Me* became a significant landmark in the history of the English Stage Company, for it marked the final
contribution of George Devine's talent to the Royal Court. Despite ill health, Devine agreed to take the role of Baron Von Epp in the play so that others would be persuaded to join the cast. In 1964 agents were wary of allowing their clients to play homosexuals on the stage, for fear of damaging the actors' reputations. With Devine reigning as the queen of the transvestite ball, such fears diminished. Devine's portrayal of Baron Von Epp was described by Jocelyn Herbert as one of his best performances.39

Devine had submitted his resignation as artistic director in December of 1964, six months before A Patriot for Me opened. Not only was he suffering from a heart ailment, but he also believed that the ESC was in need of revitalization and guidance from someone younger than he. He consented to remain as artistic director until the position was filled. In July of 1965, William Gaskill assumed leadership of the Royal Court after a brief stint at the National Theatre. On January 22, 1966 George Devine died at the age of fifty-five after suffering several heart attacks.40

Many of the artists who worked with George Devine remember him for his unselfish service to the ESC and for his vision in creating a theatre dedicated to the playwright. Certainly, Devine is the most widely revered of all who practiced with the ESC. A few writers, however, did not believe that Devine was always unbiased in handling their plays. Michael Hastings has been cited as one of those
dissatisfied with Devine's treatment of his work. Another Sunday night playwright who questioned the motives and methods of Devine was a co-founder of the ESC, Ronald Duncan. Duncan had established a reputation for writing verse drama with a West End run of *This Way to the Tomb* (1947). He had also served on the original Council that hired George Devine as artistic director. In May of 1956, the two men found themselves at odds over Devine's direction of Duncan's two verse dramas, *Don Juan* and *The Death of Satan*, plays contracted for production prior to the hiring of Devine. Although they had been staged at the Devon festival as full-length plays, Devine insisted that they be shortened when presented on the main bill during the English Stage Company's initial season.

Both plays were staged during a single evening of four hours and were withdrawn after a run of only eight nights in the face of hostile criticism and audience disinterest. Devine had reluctantly mounted the two plays because he needed the financial support of Council members Neville Blond and Sir Reginald Kennedy-Cox. The latter had donated £2,000 to the ESC with the intention of seeing *Don Juan* and *The Death of Satan* produced at the Royal Court. Duncan attributed the failure of these works to Devine's insistence on drastic cuts in the scripts, his miscasting of several of the leading roles, and his unenthusiastic attitude communicated to the actors in the plays.41
In 1959, Ronald Duncan submitted *Blind Man's Buff* to the artistic committee for consideration, being under the impression that Devine had urged him to do so. Devine later denied soliciting the script. After several months of waiting without hearing a word, Duncan fired off an angry letter to Devine accusing him of not circulating the play to other members of the artistic committee. In another letter he claimed that Devine had rejected the play without reading the work in its entirety and without giving others on the committee a chance to peruse the script. Devine admitted to Duncan that he did not like the play. In spite of this, he did allow at least one other person, Oscar Lewenstein, to read it. Lewenstein believed that *Blind Man's Buff* had little merit but might have received a more thorough consideration by the artistic committee if it had come from an unknown author rather than from Duncan. This comment implies what Duncan had already inferred: his work was not taken seriously by Devine or the other members of the English Stage Company. Given the earlier debacle of *Don Juan* and *The Death of Satan*, as well as the general abhorrence of verse drama at the Royal Court, Duncan's inference was correct.

Devine's refusal to produce Duncan's work at the Royal Court was based on the failure of the writer's previous two plays and on the inability of poetic drama to address the problems and concerns of the day in language accessible to all audiences. The memorable prose tirades of Jimmy Porter
in Look Back in Anger and the eloquent self discovery of the Norfolk farmgirl, Beatie Bryant in her speech before the final curtain in Wesker's Roots, had, for most artists at this time, dealt poetic drama a death blow. Duncan's position on the council, however, made the refusal of his plays all the more difficult. Devine, not to be outdone, had an alternative for placating irate writers. A month after the rejection of Blind Man's Buff, Duncan was granted a Sunday night production of a chamber opera, Christopher Sly (1960), based on a poem anterior to Shakespeare's comedy, The Taming of the Shrew. With a libretto by Duncan and music by Thomas Eastwood, the production was announced as "a dramatized concert performance in modern dress."46

Because it was presented by the English Opera Group, Christopher Sly has as much in common with the English Stage Society's series of concerts and entertainments as it does with the productions without decor. Christopher Sly was staged on a limited budget, however, with minimal costumes, sets, and props, and accompanied by a small orchestra. While theatre critics accepted the use of modern costumes, mime, and the mere indication of stage business and locations, the music critics, who seldom attended the Sunday night series, were not so sympathetic. The correspondent from the Liverpool Daily Post, for instance, found the without decor mode of production completely unacceptable for opera:
opera under such conditions fares even less well than a play.

How, for example, does one fill in an orchestral passage except with the actual business it was designed to accompany; and how does one deal with costumes except by means of some fancy dress? Small wonder that both the production and costuming seemed both irritatingly obtrusive at times.47

Christopher Sly was Ronald Duncan's final production for the ESC, but he continued to write, even after his experience with Blind Man's Buff. He stands as one of the most prolific writers associated with the ESC, having authored over two dozen plays and half a dozen scripts for television.48

The Search for Alternate Venues and the Renovation of Existing Space

The occasional confrontations with Ronald Duncan were never more than minor irritations for Devine. One of the key problems during the sixties was the set of limitations imposed by the physical plant of the Royal Court. Not only did the building need repairs, but it was woefully inadequate in rehearsal and performance spaces.

In 1960 the Artistic Committee proposed an additional outlet to showcase new playwrights, actors, and directors. The Sunday night productions served a purpose but were limited in rehearsal time and by the minimal salary of two
guineas paid to actors. The Artistic Committee offered a formal solution to this problem under a working title of "the Cambridge Arts Scheme." Under this plan the Cambridge Arts Theatre (at Cambridge) would be used as an auxiliary space to provide a trial run outside London for new plays and playwrights. This tryout stage would also furnish an outlet for unused Royal Court actors and directors on a more regular basis than the Sunday night series.

Implemented in the fall of 1961, the scheme failed after producing three new plays due to financial difficulties. Had it succeeded the scheme might have replaced the Sunday night series by assuming its function and by expanding the capabilities of the ESC beyond the confines of Sloane Square. Several important differences can be identified between the Cambridge Arts Scheme and the Sunday night series. First, plays at the Cambridge Theatre were not staged with the severely limited budgets of productions without decor. Secondly, the Cambridge plays were not limited to a single performance, nor were they restricted to the membership of a group, such as the English Stage Society. Finally, a transfer to the main bill of the Royal Court and a financially successful run were necessary if plays produced at Cambridge were to recoup their expenses. Sunday night productions, on the other hand, often paid for themselves with a single performance.

After the demise of the Cambridge Arts Scheme the
English Stage Society turned its attention away from producing theatre in the provinces and concentrated on finding additional permanent space in London. Although supplementary space was later created in 1968 with the opening of the Theatre Upstairs, the original problem was never remedied during the lifetime of George Devine. When the company's repeated efforts to secure other London theatres ended in failure, the ESC finally settled for some minor modifications and improvements within the building in 1964. During the remodeling period from March until September of that year, the English Stage Company assumed temporary residence at the Queen's Theatre in the West End. Because of this move no Sunday night productions were mounted during 1964.

The last Sunday night offering before the move was Leonard Kingston's first play, *Edgware Road Blues*, in December, 1963. Kingston reluctantly assumed the lead in the piece. A humorous program note apologizing for this casting decision claimed that Kingston was "shanghai'd into playing a part in his own play" by director, Keith Johnstone. Reviewers failed to see any humor in this choice; the critic for *The Stage* observed that Kingston would have been better off had he viewed the play "from a vantage point in the auditorium." Because *Edgware Road Blues* contained elements of sexual farce and situation comedy, it was not typical of the work...
usually produced at the Royal Court. The notices, however, supported the Sunday night production, and in the following year Kingston was awarded the Charles Henry Foyle Award for the best play of 1964. Under the title of Travelling Light the play transferred with a new cast to the Prince of Wales Theatre in April of 1965.

The Sunday night series was not resumed until February of 1965, six months after the ESC had returned from the Queen's Theatre. The ill health of George Devine combined with the move resulted in a suspension of all Sunday night activity for a period of fifteen months. During the first five months of 1965, the ESC under auspices of the English Stage Society staged two productions without decor. Peter Gill's The Sleeper's Den and David Cregan's Miniatures. Although they represent the last significant discoveries of talent during the Devine era at the ESC, neither of these artists realized his potential until shortly after the arrival of William Gaskill as artistic director.

Debuts in 1965: Peter Gill and David Cregan

When Peter Gill's The Sleeper's Den was produced on Sunday night in February of 1965, he had already acquired some experience with productions without decor. In 1959 he had been cast in a supporting role in Wesker's original version of The Kitchen, and during the early sixties, as an
assistant director for the ESC. Gill had become well acquainted with the staging of the plays in the Sunday night series. According to Irving Wardle, Gill's arrangement of the setting for *The Sleeper's Den* was "a model demonstration of the Sunday style" of mounting a play: "Gill specified a bare stage with the floor and door positions marked out in white tape so as to convey the impression of witnessing a final rehearsal before the arrival of scenery."\(^{53}\)

Gill's script focuses on a family of poor Irish immigrants who take refuge from their problems and from the world outside of their dingy apartment by retiring to their beds during the day. The critics expressed mixed reaction to *The Sleeper's Den*. One reviewer complained that this naturalistic drama about the plight of a working-class family trapped in squalor and inertia lacked action and dramatic cohesion.\(^{54}\) Other critics, however, wanted to see more work from Gill despite the shortcomings evident in the play: "the author is clearly to be watched."\(^{55}\) Gill made his mark in modern British theatre within six months of this review, not as a playwright, but as a director. His masterful productions of the plays of D.H. Lawrence will be discussed in the following chapter.

The final production without decor before Gaskill officially assumed leadership of the English Stage Company was David Cregan's *Miniatures*, staged on two successive Sunday nights in May of 1965. Cregan had been a schoolmaster
and a novelist prior to his initial contact with the Royal
Court in 1963, when Keith Johnstone invited him to submit a
play: the result was Miniatures. Shortly after the
invitation from Johnstone, Cregan joined the Royal Court
Writers' Group. Donald Howarth became interested in
directing this script, and initiated a series of discussions
with Cregan, along with George Devine in early 1965.56
Devine and Howarth convinced Cregan, much to his surprise,
that he had written a comedy. In Miniatures, Devine found
both physical humor and a modern counterpart of commedia del'
arre. These elements appealed to Devine since they reminded
him of the exercises he had taught at the Old Vic School and
the Royal Court Studio.57

Howarth was interested in Miniatures for different
reasons. He noted a strong, yet unintentional, resemblance
of Cregan's characters, to several of the artists who were
members of the English Stage Company. This idea was carried
over to a Sunday night production which became loaded with
in-house similarities and inside jokes. Cregan had written a
play about the faculty and students of a modern comprehensive
school. Howarth cast the play as if it had been written
about the ESC, using Devine as headmaster, Lindsay Anderson
as the second master, the Company's casting director, Miriam
Brickman, as the Tea Lady, and Nicoll Williamson as a crazed
music instructor.58

The production without decor of Miniatures was received
by a wildly appreciative packed house that revelled in this hilarious self parody by the English Stage Company's senior members. Cregan's career as a dramatist was thus launched by a play presented in a style entirely different than he had originally envisioned. Cregan wrote four other plays produced by the ESC during the years in which William Gaskill was artistic director, discussed in the following chapter.

The development of the English Stage Company from 1960 until the retirement of George Devine in 1965 was in some ways an improvement over the first four seasons in which the company struggled to establish financial stability, a reputation, and a stable of playwrights and capable directors. The gap between box office revenues and sharply rising expenses in production costs, overheads, and running costs widened from an average loss of £32,000 per year through March of 1960, to over £42,000 per year through March of 1965. The ESC was able to make up some of this difference with an increase in the size of the Arts Council Grant from £5,000 in 1960 to £32,000 by 1965. In addition, the company was able to secure a small annual grant of £2,500 from the London County Arts Council. Income from transfers, however, fell from an average £21,000 per year in the fifties, to around £17,000 during the sixties. In addition, the average size of the audience decreased slightly during the first five years of the sixties.59

The ESC had gained initial recognition in 1956 largely
through the work of a single playwright. After *Look Back in Anger*, John Osborne's second play, *The Entertainer*, featuring Olivier, had helped to secure attention for the company. During the early sixties, however, when the plays of Simpson and Wesker began to fill the theatre, it became clear to audiences and to the press, that George Devine and the ESC had succeeded in creating a program for developing and sustaining other writers who could draw an audience. At the same time, the Sunday night series, with its support of third world dramatists such as Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott, helped broaden the horizons of the ESC's international reputation for presenting untested writers with unconventional styles and ideas.

Long before he relinquished his position in 1965, Devine was aware that dramatists like Wesker, Arden, and Osborne would not write plays for the ESC indefinitely. He also knew that directors like Anderson and Gaskill might eventually leave the Royal Court. The need to keep "sharpening the spear" had not escaped Devine's attention. For this reason, the number of Sunday night productions was maintained at about the same level as during the fifties. The exception to this rule was, of course, the season of 1964, which was interrupted by the move to the Queen's Theatre. During the period from 1960 to 1965 several young artists were discovered through the Sunday night series. Edward Bond, Jane Howell, David Cregan, and Peter Gill became an important
part of the creative force at the ESC in the latter half of the sixties. William Gaskill once observed that policy is essentially "the people you are working with." Using this definition, the policy employed in the Gaskill years at the Royal Court did not change drastically from the Devine era. The people who took charge of the ESC after George Devine left were basically the same artists that he had been nurturing and encouraging all along.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER III


3 The English Stage Society, financial records in the author's collection, year ended 31 March 1960.

4 Herbert, interview, 12 Aug. 1980.

5 Tschudin, A Writer's Theatre, p. 177.

6 Findlater, At the Royal Court, p. 13.


8 Gaskill, interview, 16 July 1980.


10 Personal interview with John Anthony Cuddon, 21 July 1980.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


15 Flesh to a Tiger, by Barry Reckord, Program of a production by the English Stage Society, 21 May 1958.

16 Home to Now, by Bari Johnson, Program a production by the English Stage Society, 17 March 1963.


19 Robert Muller, "It Can't Be Really Bad Because I Wanted to Boo," rev. of Fando and Lis and Orison, by Fernando Arrabal, Daily Mail, 27 Nov. 1961.


23 Wardle, Devine, p. 251.

24 Taylor, Anger and After, p. 69.
28 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Browne, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre," pp. 173-76.
34 Browne, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre," pp. 177-78.
38 Browne, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre," pp. 183-84.
39  Ibid., pp. 131-32.


41  Browne, "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre," pp. 64-65.


45  Oscar Lewenstein, Letter to George Devine, no date, author's collection.

46  Christopher Sly, music by Thomas Eastwood, with libretto by Ronald Duncan, program of a Production by the English Stage Society, 24 Jan. 1960.


48  The only other work staged at the Royal Court by Duncan was his adaptation of Jean Giraudoux's The Appollo of Bellac in 1957.


Wardle, Devine, p. 268.

Rev. of The Sleeper's Den, by Peter Gill, Jewish Chronicle, 5 March 1965.


Personal interview with David Cregan, 21 July 1980.

Wardle, Devine, p. 269.

Cregan, interview, 21 July 1980.

Findlater, At the Royal Court, Appendix 2, Financial Tables.
CHAPTER IV
THE SUNDAY NIGHT PRODUCTIONS DURING THE GASKILL YEARS

Shortly after William Gaskill became artistic director of the English Stage Company, he announced his intention to assume "the responsibility and excitement" of carrying on the work of the late George Devine. Gaskill underscored the fact that Devine had left behind no dogma or theories to guide him, but rather "only the work itself and the need for its continuance." ¹ Gaskill had no problem in identifying and following Devine's lead in three areas: the initiative against censorship, the preservation and refinement of a Royal Court style, and the attempt to establish a repertory season and a resident company.

Censorship

Virtually from the outset, Devine had taken an active part in challenging the Lord Chamberlain and in resisting compromises in the language and actions of countless scripts. In addition to using Sunday night to elude the Lord Chamberlain's authority, Devine had risked his health in order to act in one of the Royal Court's more controversial
productions, John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me*. Under Devine
the ESC had assumed a leading role in advocating change in
the censorship laws. No other theatre during the mid-sixties
had the ability or the inclination to focus attention on this
impediment to freedom of expression. As artistic director,
William Gaskill took an even stronger position than Devine in
the struggle to diminish the powers of the Lord Chamberlain.
Under Gaskill the English Stage Society and the Sunday night
series were once again utilized to skirt the censorship laws.

The private club status of the English Stage Society had
been invoked to present several productions during the Devine
era. The ESC encountered a problem, however, when it tried
to use this method to produce Edward Bond's *Saved*. Prior to
the opening of *Saved* in November of 1965, the Lord
Chamberlain required substantial deletions from Bond's script
as a condition for the licensing of a public performance.
Not only was the language of the play considered offensive,
but the play contained a shocking episode in which a baby is
stoned to death in its pram by group of toughs. Gaskill
refused to compromise the integrity of Bond's work by cutting
this scene. Instead he decided to turn the Royal Court into
a club for the duration of the run of *Saved*. In December of
1965, a month after opening, the Lord Chamberlain issued a
summons against the ESC on the grounds that the Royal Court
was not a *bona fide* club theatre since the police had been
admitted to a performance of *Saved* without being required to
show membership cards. When brought to court, the ESC contended that its club status was intact and that it had taken reasonable measures to insure admittance of members only.2

In April of 1966, at the end of a lengthy trial, magistrate Leo Gradwell rendered a decision that surprised both the Lord Chamberlain and the ESC. He found the company guilty, but not for reasons pertaining to violating club status. Gradwell ruled that under the Theatres Act of 1843 all performances, public or non-public, were subject to the authority of the Lord Chamberlain as long as they were "presented for hire." This decision eliminated the escape valve that had previously been provided by club theatres.3

The public debate that accompanied the trial extended into the House of Commons during the following year when a bill was introduced in October of 1967 to abolish censorship. Prior to this, however, the Royal Court received another script, Early Morning, from Edward Bond. As expected, this play, which depicted a lesbian relationship between Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale, was banned in toto when submitted to the Lord Chamberlain.4

Gaskill chose to stage Early Morning on Sunday night rather than wait several months until a legal ruling on the Lord Chamberlain's powers came from the courts. Another factor influencing Gaskill's decision to produce Early Morning in the Sunday series was the Arts Council's
reluctance to support the staging of Bond's play on the main bill. The play might offend the Royal Family, turn the tide of public opinion, and ultimately jeopardize pending legislation designed to abolish censorship.  

On Sunday night March 31, 1968, the police were in attendance for the performance of *Early Morning*. Although they did not close the performance, their attendance was a point of considerable concern for the Royal Court's licensee, Alfred Esdaile. Esdaile, despite the wishes of Gaskill and the Management Committee, banned a second scheduled performance of *Early Morning* for the following Sunday night. Not to be outdone, Gaskill staged a special presentation of the play for an invited audience on April 8, only hours before the cancelled Sunday night performance was to have taken place. This resulted in the one and only "Sunday Afternoon Production Without Decor" given at the Royal Court.  

Critics and guests were admitted to the afternoon showing of Bond's play through a side door upon displaying written invitations. Because this special audience paid no admission, neither the ESC nor Esdaile was in violation of the law. In place of the cancelled performance that night, Gaskill held a teach-in on censorship. Six months later in September of that same year, Parliament passed the Theatres Act of 1968 relieving the Lord Chamberlain of all powers of censorship.

William Gaskill directed the Royal Court revival of
Early Morning on the main bill in February of 1969. In the next month two other Bond plays were presented, including a revival of Saved, also directed by Gaskill, and the premiere of Narrow Road to the Deep North. Bond continued to write for the ESC throughout the seventies; his next three plays, Lear (1971), The Sea (1973), and Bingo (1974) secured his international reputation as a dramatist. Shortly after Lear Bond acknowledged his debt to the ESC and to William Gaskill:

I couldn't have worked in any other theatre. To begin with there's no other English theatre that would have produced my plays. And there were all the censorship problems of course--but in the end we did overcome them and the Court did stage all the plays, and there aren't any other theatres in this country that would have done that.8

Edward Bond's emergence as a significant voice in twentieth-century dramatic literature justified any risks the ESC had taken in support of this writer. In the process of fighting the battle against censorship the company had developed another major playwright.

The Royal Court Style

The second area in which George Devine had established a clear direction for the ESC was the visual style of presentation at the Royal Court. In directing the company's first two productions, The Mulberry Bush and The Crucible,
Devine had emphasized simplicity. A few objects carefully positioned and lighted on an empty stage indicated place in *The Crucible*. This simplified style of staging was referred to by Devine as essentialism. One of the ESC's scenic artists once defined essentialism as: "making as few things as possible as well as you possibly could." This style was born out of economic necessity and out of Devine's preference for the beauty of the bare stage. Many plays at the Royal Court relied on other styles. Realism was preferred for plays with single set interiors, such as *Look Back in Anger*. Donald Howarth believes that the Sunday night productions were the most consistent examples of essentialism and exerted an influence on the design of plays on the main bill: "you saw plays coming over *in toto* on a Sunday night with no scenery."

As mentioned previously, Jocelyn Herbert's designs for Wesker plays were responsible for innovations in the use of exposed sources of lighting. In addition, her design for the Wesker trilogy helped to extend Devine's original idea of essentialism to plays with naturalistic situations and dialogue. Traditionally, naturalistic and realistic plays deluged the stage with props, flats, and furniture in order to recreate a room or an environment as fully and as accurately as possible. Herbert, Deirdre Clancy, and other designers for the English Stage Company selected only those items necessary to the action of the play. For instance, in
both the Sunday night and the main bill productions of *The Kitchen*, Herbert's entire set consisted of several long tables piled high with stacks of plates:

Plays may come along that demand painted cloths, or naturalistic interiors, or some definite indication of period, and these demands have to be satisfied; but they can be interpreted in terms of "poetic realism" rather than trying to create the real thing.11

The epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht and poetic realism both avoided the stage illusion that had been the cornerstone of photographic realism and naturalism. According to William Gaskill the house style of the ESC, unlike the epic theatre, was based on sensibility and good taste rather than on political theory:

it corresponded to a certain kind of puritanism in the English aesthetic, as shown by people like Jocelyn Herbert who thought it was in good taste not to be too decorated and not to have more than you need on the stage. . . . It is rather like Shaker furniture . . , which was designed for maximum austerity.12

Jocelyn Herbert maintained that she had become a designer in order to rid the stage of "clutter" and "unnecessary scenery": "There is no point in having scenery that is just there to look nice. It all has to mean something."13 Stuart Burge, artistic director at the Royal Court between 1977 and 1979, once defined poetic realism as "that concept of
Poetic realism continued as a style at the Royal Court while William Gaskill was artistic director. Christopher Morley's brightly lighted sandpaper set for Gaskill's austere production of *Macbeth* in 1966 featured a single door, set in a bare box formed by three large flats. Although the production was derided by critics, the bright lighting and the stark walls of Morley's simple surround were later adopted by the Royal Shakespeare Company for several productions.

A notable feature of poetic realism was its suitability to the writing style of the Court's leading playwright during the sixties. Edward Bond's plays are heavily dependent on visual elements specified in the playwright's text. His scripts often call for a bare stage and a few carefully selected props, as in *The Pope's Wedding*, given on a Sunday night in 1962. In this production each of the first three scenes were established by a single object: an iron railing in scene one, an apple in scene two, and a black and purple corrugated iron wall in the third scene. Three years later, in the production of *Saved*, the relationship of two lovers, Len and Pam, was depicted by seating the pair in a large clumsy row boat place in the middle of a bare stage in front of the visible back wall of the theatre. Later in the play, Bond again used a bare stage for the play's most striking visual metaphor: a long blue sausage balloon tugged at a deserted space," in "which details of scenes are used."
string tied to a carriage shortly before the infant within is stoned to death. William Gaskill, who directed Saved, Early Morning, Lear, and The Sea, believes that Edward Bond has "an extraordinary visual sense" which manifests itself in "fantastic pictures" on the stage.16

The power of Bond's brilliant visual images on the Court stage is closely related to his violent subject matter. These vivid stage pictures could not have been created without the ESC's staff of talented designers. Poetic realism enjoyed its fullest expression when Bond's writing was combined with the efforts of designers John Gunter (Saved), Deirdre Clancy (Early Morning, and The Sea), Hayden Griffin (Narrow Road to the Deep North, and Bingo) and John Napier (Lear).

The Concept of a Permanent Repertory Company

Following Devine's original ideas did not always prove profitable for Gaskill. As artistic director, Gaskill flirted briefly with a plan for using a company of twenty-one actors to produce several new plays in repertory. Devine had tried the approach during the ESC's first season and failed. After the 1965-66 season, Gaskill abandoned the concept of a permanent company for several reasons. First, not only had the ESC underestimated production costs, but the season as a whole did not draw well. The first four plays, Shelley, The
Cresta Run, Saved, and a revival of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance played to less than fifty percent of box office capacity. The four remaining plays in the season fared no better. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, a permanent company limited the ESC's production of certain kinds of new scripts. Plays requiring black actors, for instance could not be staged under this system. Finally, other problems associated with the permanent company were the lack of additional rehearsal space and the inability of the ESC to use stars in guest appearances with the company.\(^{17}\)

When he chose the season for 1966-67, Gaskill scrapped the permanent company with the hope of reorganizing the script department and devoting more time to the Sunday night productions, although in practice this program received no more attention than usual.\(^{18}\) Of the eight productions staged on the main bill during the 1966-67 season, four were revivals and four, new plays. The revivals, considered the bulk of the season, were rehearsed from six to eight weeks, while the new plays were rehearsed for four weeks and given runs of four weeks.\(^{19}\)

During the first two years of Gaskill's tenure as artistic director, the Sunday night series was not greatly affected by either the permanent company or the repertory seasons. Although a few of the actors from the permanent company, such as Ronald Pickup, Jack Shepherd, and Victor Henry appeared on Sunday nights, the casts of the productions
without decor were never restricted to this group. Nor did the Sunday night series become a feeder system or a tryout series with the purpose of readying and rehearsing new plays to move onto the main bill. Had this occurred the play selection process, the rehearsal period, and the overall nature of Sunday night program might have been drastically altered. But the ESC resisted any temptation to change the purpose of the series.

Peter Gill and the Plays of D.H. Lawrence

The first play staged during William Gaskill's service as artistic director stands as a landmark in the history of the English Stage Company and the Sunday night productions without decor. D.H. Lawrence's *A Collier's Friday Night*, mounted in August of 1965, marked the debut of Lawrence as playwright and of Peter Gill as a gifted young director. Lawrence's first play written in 1906-07 when the author was twenty-one years old, furnished the basis for his later novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1914). Because the ESC provided the play's apparent first production, the company was credited with discovering yet another major dramatist. Several critics professed surprise and delight that Lawrence had written any plays at all, and most applauded the play as well as Gill's production, especially the detailed and careful observation of life. Eric Shorter of the *Daily Telegraph*
claimed that the "acting surpassed Sunday night standards," while the production itself revealed a "true feeling for the stage and for dialogue that encourages acting."²⁰

Although Lawrence had written A Collier's Friday Night over fifty years prior to the Royal Court production, the author's ideas remained alive and meaningful. Lawrence, like many of those who founded the ESC, was openly critical of the established theatre of the day; his campaign against conventional morality made him a kindred spirit to the Royal Court artists of the sixties. Shortly after he wrote A Collier's Friday Night, Lawrence expressed his contempt for the "bloodless drama" of Galsworthy and Shaw, a contempt later echoed by the avant-garde of the post World War II era.²¹ His plays about a working-class family set in a coal mining district of the Midlands, provided the ESC with an opportunity to present a simple and honest portrait of the miners' living and working conditions at the turn of the century. Lawrence's socially realistic style has much in common with the early plays of Arnold Wesker, especially Chicken Soup With Barley. Lawrence did not expect that A Collier's Friday Night and his other early works would be acclaimed by theatergoers in Edwardian England. Nevertheless, he maintained that his plays could be appreciated under the right conditions: "I believe that, just as an audience was found in Russia for Chekov, so an audience might be found in England for some of my stuff, if
there were a man to whip them in." Gaskill and Gill also believed that an audience existed for Lawrence's work.

After *A Collier's Friday Night* had played to enthusiastic houses on two successive Sunday nights in 1967, Gaskill sought to expand the audience for Lawrence by staging another of his plays on the main bill. The production of *The Daughter-in-Law* (1911) in March of 1967, became Peter Gill's most celebrated directoral contribution while he was a member of the ESC. The production ran for twenty-five performances at about sixty percent capacity, successfully ending the 1966-67 season. Barry Hanson, a production assistant, recorded in his rehearsal logbook shortly after the season that "the interest created by these two productions [*A Collier's Friday Night* and *The Daughter-in-Law*] and the reviews they received explode the idea that Lawrence, the dramatist, may be safely ignored."

Encouraged by the reception of two Lawrence plays, Gaskill decided to stage a third play, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1911), in the following year. The entire Lawrence trilogy, directed by Gill, was selected to anchor the 1967-68 season with a run of seven weeks in successive engagements during the spring of 1968. Not since Wesker's trilogy in 1960 had the work of a single writer been given so much concentrated attention by the ESC. Although Gill's production without decor of *A Collier's Friday Night* had been confined to the typical Sunday night shoestring budget, the
entire resources of the English Stage Company were now placed at the director's disposal for mounting the trilogy. Gill and his two assistants closely examined all of Lawrence's plays, most of his novels, and a sizable body of criticism on the author. Research into mining techniques and social conditions of the period resulted in the discovery of a collection of photographs which were used in the programs distributed for the trilogy. Visits to the actual locations depicted in the scripts proved valuable in formulating authentic ground plans and in designing the plays.25 The production costs of the Lawrence plays (£8,408) made them one of the ESC's more expensive undertakings prior to 1968, but the trilogy played to 90 percent of seating capacity recouping £8,683 at the box office.26

The Sunday night production of A Collier's Friday Night in 1965 resurrected Lawrence as a playwright and established Peter Gill as a major director at the Royal Court.27 Irving Wardle credited Gill's productions of the Lawrence plays with demonstrating the essence of the Royal Court's style. Gill treated "the ordinary processes of living--walking about and washing your hands, or lighting a lamp," with beauty, respect, and dignity.28

In addition to main bill productions Gill staged three plays for the Sunday night series, including his own script of A Provincial Life, Heathcoate Williams' The Local Stigmatic and Joe Orton's The Ruffian on the Stair, all in
1966. The latter productions were responsible for the Royal Court debuts of two of the more unusual and shocking voices in the British theatre during the sixties.

Joe Orton and Heathcote Williams

Although Joe Orton made his debut at the Royal Court in August of 1966 with the one-act, The Ruffian on the Stair, his writing prior to this production was not unknown in London. The Ruffian on the Stair had been written in 1963 as a radio play and broadcast by the BBC in 1964. Orton's second play, Entertaining Mr. Sloane (1963), premiered at the New Arts Theatre Club in 1964, and transferred to the West End in the same year.

Despite a favorable reception from radio critics, The Ruffian on the Stair underwent substantial revisions before it reached the stage of the Royal Court in 1966. Orton had rewritten his play for television, but was informed by ITV that it was not fit for family viewing. This verdict served to solidify Orton's determination to secure a production for the revised version of his play. While vacationing in Morocco, Orton received word from his agent, Margaret Ramsay, that the English Stage Company was interested in The Ruffian on the Stair. Orton wrote to her forbidding the Royal Court to use the BBC version of the script, insisting that his revision was "much funnier" and "a more Ortonish play" than
the original. The ESC agreed with Orton and produced the revision on Sunday night in 1966.

While the second version of *The Ruffian on the Stair* proved to be "funnier," as Orton had predicted, it was also more shocking and brutal. Orton's play explores the tenous relationship between a small-time crook, Mike, and his live-in girl friend, an ex-prostitute. The love nest of this twosome is invaded by a third party, Wilson who is out to get even with Mike for the murder of Wilson's brother. Wilson's motive for revenge is complicated by his apparent incestuous relationship with his late brother. Instead of following through with his plans, Wilson goads Mike into killing him. The cynical tone of this black farce is best exemplified by the play's final line, spoken by Mike after shooting Wilson and shattering a nearby goldfish bowl: "I'll fetch the police. This has been a crime of passion. They'll understand. They have wives and goldfish of their own." Some years after the 1966 production, Peter Gill recalled this piece as a "powerful" and "upsetting" work: "Orton never wrote another play with emotions of this kind. It's the only play where he tried to write about genuine homosexual emotions." In Orton's biography, *Prick Up Your Ears*, John Lahr identified the two year interval (dating from the 1964 BBC broadcast of *The Ruffian on the Stair* until the production without decor at the Royal Court in 1966) as a critical period of maturation for Orton: "Between the
drafting of these two scripts, Orton became a playwright."

In 1967 the English Stage Company produced a double bill of Orton plays: *The Ruffian of the Stair* and *The Erpingham Camp*, both directed by Peter Gill under the inclusive title of *Crimes of Passion*. Shortly after this production, Orton was murdered by his live-in companion, Kenneth Halliwell. In 1975, the ESC, under the artistic direction of Oscar Lewenstein, paid tribute to Orton by reviving three of his plays: *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, *Loot*, and *What the Butler Saw*. Each of these productions ran for forty performances or more and played to over seventy percent of the seating capacity. The Orton festival drew both enthusiastic reviews and strongly favorable audience response.

The first play of Heathcote Williams, another innovative Sunday night writer, was staged by Gill in a production without decor in 1966. Williams' *The Local Stigmatic* (paired with Leonard Pluta's *Little Guy Napoleon* at the Royal Court) had previously been produced at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Williams' play was one of several Sunday night productions during the sixties and seventies to be exchanged between the Traverse and the Royal Court.

In *The Local Stigmatic* two apathetic youths, bound to one another in a self-destructive homosexual relationship, vent their frustrations by stalking and killing a famous actor. The climactic scene, in which one of the assailants
directs the attack and the beating of the victim while his companion coolly carries out the orders, is a measured and carefully calculated study in violence. On the strength of this work the ESC commissioned Williams to write another play. Nicholas Wright directed the result, AC/DC. It premiered in the Theatre Upstairs in 1970, then moved to the main bill in the same year. Not only did this play startle audiences with its cavalcade of striking visual images, it also introduced a new computer language to describe these images.

The leading character of AC/DC is portrayed in the play as a terminal schizophrenic. He lives in a darkened room surrounded by banks of video monitors, flashing pictures of movie stars, singers, and other entertainers. This environment is a representation of Perowne's inner cranium, bombarded by a constantly changing barrage of images from Madison Avenue and Hollywood. The central action of the play is Perowne's attempt to reclaim his mind and escape from the mental pollution of popular culture. Although AC/DC often tested the limits of the audiences powers of endurance and comprehension, the play firmly established Williams as one of the most bizarre dramatic imaginations to surface at the Royal Court. He followed AC/DC with Remember the Truth Dentist (1974) and Playpen (1978), both produced in the Theatre Upstairs.
More Work from David Cregan

During the Gaskill regime, writers were usually limited to one Sunday night production each. Nevertheless, David Cregan, mentioned earlier for his production without decor of *Miniatures* in 1965, was given a second Sunday night showing in 1966 with a double bill of *Transcending* and *The Dancers*. *Transcending*, a short farce about a school girl who has failed her "A" Level exams, received favorable reviews while its companion piece, *The Dancers*, was criticized as slow and clumsy. The same reviewers maintained that *Transcending*, in contrast, had succeeded on the basis of its humor and Jane Howell's "jaunty" direction.35

Cregan agreed in principle with at last part of the critics' analyses. He believed that Jane Howell understood the style of *Transcending* but misjudged *The Dancers* by drawing it out with "great slow moving rhythms" which extended the running time beyond the length intended by the author. Also its position on the bill weighed against it. The play had originally been scheduled by the ESC to occupy a Sunday night double bill with an Ionesco play. When Cregan refused to follow Ionesco with *The Dancers*, the ESC relented and allowed him to write a curtain raiser, *Transcending*. The opening moments of *Transcending* brought down the Sunday night house, and Cregan immediately concluded that the fast pace of the first play would undermine the audience's appreciation of
the more deliberate humour of the second half of the evening's entertainment.\textsuperscript{36} What lesson had Cregan learned from watching the Sunday night performances?

Transcending depends on speed. At the Royal Court the actors ran to their places between scenes like automatons... Transcending strikes me as an obvious joke, and The Dancers is an obvious struggle. At its simplest, this struggle can be said to twitch and snarl among The Certain, The Uncertain, and The Effete. However, a director, and his audience should concentrate on the people and the pace rather than the abstractions. I wrote Transcending as a curtain raiser to The Dancers, intending both plays to have the same cast, which I think is possible. Experience indicates that, if the plays are done as a double bill, The Dancers should actually be played first.\textsuperscript{37}

After receiving two Sunday night productions, Cregan's work moved to the main bill in 1966. Transcending appeared on a double bill with Keith Johnstone's The Performing Giant. Cregan's next two plays, Three Men for Colverton (1966) and The Houses by the Green (1968) were also featured on the main bill. In 1968 Cregan's A Comedy of Changing Years became the first play produced in the newly established Theatre Upstairs. Since leaving the Royal Court, Cregan has authored over a dozen plays produced by fringe theatres and children's theatre companies.

The Meteoric Rise of Christopher Hampton

The English Stage Company discovered several young
writers in the Sunday night series who achieved artistic, commercial, and critical success. Christopher Hampton was only eighteen when he wrote *When Did You Last See My Mother?* Two years later, as a student at Oxford, he entered the script in a play competition, and won. Hampton then sent the play to theatrical agent Margaret Ramsay, who represented many of the writers associated with the Royal Court, including Donald Howarth, Edward Bond, John Arden, Ann Jellicoe, and David Cregan. After Ramsay brought it to the Company's attention, the ESC engaged *When Did You Last See My Mother?* for two Sunday nights in June of 1966. The play drew flattering notices from the press and transferred to the Comedy Theatre in July with no changes in the sparse setting which had served for the Sunday night production. By virtue of his production without decor, Hampton emerged from the obscurity of Oxford into the limelight of the West End within a period of less than four months.38

Hampton's road to success, however, had not been free of obstacles. Upon arriving at the Royal Court, Hampton found an unfavorable reader's report attached to his script: "I see no reason why we should do this play." Fortunately for Hampton, Robert Kidd, then a stage manager for the ESC, rescued *When Did You Last See My Mother?* from the out-tray. Kid, who had been looking for an opportunity to direct his first play at the Royal Court, persuaded Gaskill that the play was worthwhile and, despite his lack of experience, he
was the man to direct it. 39 Thus the Sunday night premiere of *When Did You Last See My Mother?* provided a debut for both playwright and director.

Hampton's play deals with the homosexual relationship of two young men. In this instance, however, the relationship is complicated by heterosexual tendencies in both parties. Ian, brilliantly portrayed in the Sunday night version and in the West End by Victor Henry, is the sardonic spurned lover, trying to revive a now defunct schoolboy romance with his flatmate, Jimmy. Out of desperation and revenge, Ian seduces Jimmy's mother, who in turn commits suicide upon discovering her son's former relationship with Ian.

In 1968 Gaskill summoned Hampton to join the ESC as its first literary manager. The position paid a salary of only £7.10s a week. After a few months of sifting through forty scripts a week, Hampton complained to Gaskill that he had no time to write plays. Gaskill gave him a small amount of money to hire an assistant, David Hare. Hare eventually assumed the position of literary manager when Hampton decided to devote all of his attention to writing. 40

Hampton was considered one of the most important Royal Court writers during the late sixties and early seventies by both critics and the artistic staff. He received six ESC productions between 1968 and 1976 including *Total Eclipse* (1968), a new version of *Uncle Vanya* (1970), a revival of *When Did You Last See My Mother?* (1970), *The Philanthropist*...
(1970), *Savages* (1973), and *Treats* (1976). With the exception of *Total Eclipse*, all of these plays transferred to the West End. An interesting footnote to the remarkable progress of Hampton's first play demonstrates the protection that the Sunday night series provided for controversial scripts during the mid-sixties. Prior to the Oxford production of *When Did You Last See My Mother?*, the Lord Chamberlain required several cuts due to the play's language and its frank treatment of homosexuality. Hampton was able to restore all of his original text for the private club showing on Sunday night. The Lord Chamberlain, however, reinstated all of his former demands for the public performances in the West End, and Hampton's script was once again riddled with cuts when it transferred to the Comedy.\(^41\)

International Dramatists During the Late Sixties

In addition to using the Sunday night series to produce scripts deemed unacceptable by the Lord Chamberlain, the ESC staged works banned in other countries. Plays by Nigerian dramatist Wole Soyinka have been noted earlier in this study. Another instance occurred in 1967 when the Royal Court produced Partap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness* on Sunday night. This play about a young prostitute in a brothel of modern Bombay had been twice banned in its native land by the Indian government because of its "highly undesirable" subject
matter. In 1965 Indian officials prevented a scheduled performance of *A Touch of Brightness* at England's Commonwealth Arts Festival by impounding the passports of a troupe from the Indian National Theatre. In Sharma's words the government of India did not want the nation's image tarnished abroad by a representation of "the infamous localities of Bombay." 42

The ESC learned about Sharma's play through George Devine. Shortly before his death, Devine, apart from his duties at the Royal Court, had sat on the panel that selected *A Touch of Brightness* for presentation at the Commonwealth Festival. Two years after the initial incident, the English Stage Company mounted the play on Sunday, March 5, 1967. In November of the same year, the BBC broadcast Sharma's play on radio with music by Ravi Shankar. Shortly thereafter, Sharma challenged the Indian ban that the Stage Performance Scrutiny Board had imposed on his script years earlier. In 1972 the Bombay High Court revoked the original ban and permitted *A Touch of Brightness* to be performed in India. 43 Once again the Royal Court's Sunday night series had been in the vanguard of a successful fight against censorship laws.

During the Gaskill regime, the ESC continued to mount the work of foreign playwrights in productions without decor; the works of two American writers, Ronald Ribman and Adrienne Kennedy, appeared on Sunday night in the late sixties. Ribman's *The Journey of the Fifth Horse* was shown on a Sunday
night in October of 1967; the play, based on Turgenev's "Diary of a Superfluous Man", had previously been awarded an "Obie" for the best Off-Broadway play of the 1966-67 season. Because Ribman was an American dramatist already established on the New York stage, the lackluster reception for the production without decor of The Journey of the Fifth Horse had little effect on his career in the United States.

Ronald Ribman's inability to attend rehearsals for The Journey of the Fifth Horse may have prevented director Bill Bryden from realizing a more "cohesive" production of an admittedly complicated script.44 Bryden, engaged to stage the play immediately upon his appointment as William Gaskill's assistant, had directed plays at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, but lacked production experience with the ESC. Gaskill, however, suggested that Bryden "go in at the deep end" and direct The Journey of the Fifth Horse as his initiation into the company. Bryden managed to weather this experience, despite bad notices from the critics.45 He directed two other Sunday night performances, Michael Rosen's Backbone (1968) and a production of Brecht's The Baby Elephant in the Theatre Upstairs in 1971. Bryden eventually left the Royal Court to become director of the Cottesloe Theatre at the National.

Adrienne Kennedy became the second American playwright to make a Sunday night debut at the Royal Court during the Gaskill regime with A Lesson in a Dead Language and
Funnyhouse of a Negro, mounted as a double bill in April, 1968. The latter script had won an "Obie" as "The Most Distinguished Off-Broadway Play of 1964." Kennedy, the only black American female dramatist produced on Sunday night, had begun her career by joining Edward Albee's Playwriting Workshop in New York. Funnyhouse of a Negro, her first play, resulted in a Guggenheim fellowship for Kennedy. After the Sunday night production of this play, the Royal Court commissioned Kennedy to write A Rat's Mass, staged by the ESC as part of the Cafe La Mama Season in the spring of 1970.

The work of Irish playwright Thomas Murphy, another foreign dramatist produced on Sunday night in the late sixties, was already familiar to London audiences. A Whistle in the Dark, Murphy's alarming study of a family of Irish hooligans, had engrossed West End theatergoers during a run in 1961. Famine, presented in the Sunday series in 1969, had been produced in Dublin in 1966. The play depicts a small Irish village in the grip of the potato famine of the 1840's, and delivers a strong indictment of nineteenth-century British policies. Consequently, both Murphy and the ESC wanted the play to be seen in England. Although the ESC had expressed an interest in staging more of his plays, Murphy failed to submit any further work for consideration.

Reviewers criticized the production of Famine as ponderous and technically beyond the limitations of the Sunday night series. Part of the problem centered around a
large and unwieldy cast of twenty actors that one critic claimed was under rehearsed. According to director Clifford Williams, however, the play was warmly received by its audience.

The Sunday Night Series and the Youth Movement at the ESC

Although George Devine was in his mid-forties when the English Stage Company was founded, he never relinquished his commitment to seek out and develop young talent. During the ESC's initial year he engaged young directors like Richardson, Gaskill, and Dexter, and devised and encouraged workshops at the ESC for the training of young writers and actors, just as he had for the students in his classes at the Old Vic Studio. As the older or more experienced artists left the ESC, Devine usually replaced them with younger men and women who had demonstrated their abilities in programs such as the Sunday night series or the Writer's Group. William Gaskill, like Devine, did not hesitate to trust qualified young writers, actors, or directors with major responsibilities in the operation of the Royal Court. Both Christopher Hampton and Peter Gill, for example, displayed remarkable artistic maturity and sound judgement despite their youth. The youngest dramatist staged by the English Stage Company prior to 1970 was Charles Hayward, a fourteen year-old schoolboy. His play, Dance of the Teletape, was
selected for a production without decor in 1967 on a double bill with Ann Jellicoe's *The Rising Generation*. Hayward wrote the twenty-minute piece as a homework assignment. Because the script had been written to be performed by his fellow students, the ESC allowed Hayward to direct twenty-five of his classmates in the single Sunday night performance.

*The Rising Generation*, Ann Jellicoe's brief one-act play, had originally been commissioned by the Girl Guides Association in the late fifties, but the organization found the script unsuited for its membership. In many ways Jellicoe's pageant, about the extermination of the male population by an Amazon ghoul and her army of cleaning ladies, was one of the most unusual presentations of the Sunday night series. Directed by Jane Howell, the piece employed a cast of one hundred and fifty school children and used the entire auditorium of the Royal Court as its stage.49

The Hayward-Jellicoe double bill brought hundreds of youngsters into the Royal Court during the summer of 1967 fulfilling but one aspect of the ESC's plan for developing and educating young audiences. One of George Devine's most important initiatives, the School's Scheme, had been renewed in 1966, financed by a grant of £5,000 from the Arts Council. Over eleven thousand students attended regular Court performances and special matinees from 1966-68. Jane Howell, who coordinated this program in the mid and late seventies,
staged an "act-in" during 1969 on the theme of revolution. One hundred and forty students were invited to join in two weeks of discussions, lectures, and rehearsals, culminating in a performance of the students' script, Revolution. This production, like The Rising Generation, stressed educational values, rather than the artistic merits of the final product onstage.50

Discoveries of the Late Sixties: Antrobus, Wright, and Rosen

After Bond's Early Morning 1968, no further outstanding productions without decor appeared for the remainder of the decade. Nevertheless, several capable artists were given opportunities through the Sunday night series in 1968 and 1969. During the Gaskill years the English Stage Society sponsored adaptations, revivals, and translations of older works on Sunday night, as it had done previously while Devine was artistic director. In October of 1966, for example, Massimo Manuelli scripted and directed Bartleby, a modern adaptation of Herman Melville's short story, and in 1968, Brecht's adaptation of Jacob Lenz's The Tutor appeared at the Royal Court. Barry Hanson made his directing debut at the Court with this eighteenth-century play about the conflict between instinct and rational convention. The play had a common thematic bond with an earlier Sunday night revival of another German work, Spring Awakening.51 Hanson later directed the Sunday night version of Captain Oates' Left Sock
by John Antrobus, and The Enoch Show which he staged in the Theatre Upstairs during the same year.

The Sunday night production of Captain Oates' Left Sock provided additional recognition and success for the author. He received the George Devine Award in 1970 and subsequently produced a two character radio version of the original script for the BBC. In turn, the radio adaptation won the Writer's Guild Award for Best Drama in 1971. Prior to the Sunday night production of Captain Oates' Left Sock, originally conceived as a television play, was produced unaltered, on the Sunday night series. The play revolves around the efforts of a doctor and his collection of mentally disturbed patients to find a cure through group therapy sessions. The initial version takes place both in a reception room of a psychiatrist's clinic and in various locales on the moors, where the doctor and his patients have fled to seek a more isolated environment for their attempts at recovery. In the latter scenes, special lighting effects simulated the mood of night on the moors. For the second version, produced upstairs, Antrobus deleted the scenes on the moors, confining the action entirely to the waiting room. A further alteration in the visual style and the staging is suggested in the Author's Note to the playscript produced in the Theatre Upstairs:

It is most important that there are no lighting effects for this play. For instance, if you came
to a public meeting you would not expect lights to dim. . . . To let the significance of this play come through it must be staged in a very unearthly way. If possible, stage the play in the round—a circle of chairs in the middle—with the audience sitting all around. Let the cast make their entrances in the same manner as the audience, so that one may well ask "who are the sick?"53

Obviously the differences in the playing areas for the two productions of Captain Oates' Left Sock had an effect on each of Antrobus's versions of the script. The proscenium house of the Royal Court is more conducive to creating special mood effects and illusions, than is the Theatre Upstairs. Furthermore, the relationship between an actor and the audience is much more formal in the main house, due to its size, and its inflexible seating. The atmosphere described in the passage above would not have been feasible on a proscenium stage. Lured by the possibilities of the Theatre Upstairs Antrobus changed his script to take advantage of this new space.

Nicholas Wright, who directed the second Court production of Captain Oates' Left Sock in 1973, suggested using the Sunday night text in the Theatre Upstairs. Antrobus could not be dissuaded, however, from altering his script. After seeing both versions of his play staged at the Royal Court, Antrobus concluded that he preferred the Sunday night production, because the theatricality of the scenes on the moors created a more appropriate experience for the audience. Antrobus decided that he had made a mistake by
cutting these scenes and revising his material for the Theatre Upstairs. 54

Although the second production of Captain Oates' Left Sock was not completely successful, Antrobus had no complaints about Nicholas Wright. Because he was intimately familiar with the capabilities of the space, Wright had been appointed as the first director of the Theatre Upstairs when it opened in 1969. Wright soon became one of the ESC's most prolific and creative artists. During the next eight years he directed sixteen productions, including Heathcote Williams' AC/DC, Caryl Churchill's Owners (1972), and Michael Hastings' For the West (1977). Not all of his work was produced in the Theatre Upstairs. Wright also directed three main bill productions and an equal number of Sunday nights. In 1975 Nicholas Wright assumed the position of co-artistic director of the ESC with Robert Kidd.

Wright's directing career with the Royal Court was made possible, at last in part, because of his writing ability. The ESC produced Wright's first play, Changing Lines, on Sunday night in 1968. His ulterior motive for writing this play, however, was to secure a directing opportunity at the Royal Court. He correctly assumed that a production without decor would be the quickest and surest means of achieving this objective. In order to disassociate himself from a previous and unsuccessful acting audition at the ESC, Wright submitted Changing Lines under a nom de plume. 55
Although the script received positive reports from its readers, Gaskill was not pleased when he discovered Wright's attempted deception. A few months later in 1968, however, Wright landed a job as a casting director for the Royal Court, thus getting his foot inside a door that was often impossible for outsiders to open. Within half a year Wright became one of Gaskill's assistant directors. Later that same year Gaskill gave him a chance to direct Changing Lines, in a production without decor. For Wright, this presented an ideal opportunity to prove himself both as a writer and as a director:

It was in many ways the easiest production I've ever done because I was a completely inexperienced director. Because I'd written it I knew exactly how the play ought to be done and I conveyed to everybody what it ought to be like. They did it and it worked. It was a combination of the confidence of having written it and the confidence of it being my first production. As you get more experienced as a director the work becomes much more difficult. 56

Changing Lines, a one-act parody of the thriller genre with Pirandellian overtones, received performances at 7 and 9 p.m. on August 4th, 1968. Although reviewers were largely unimpressed with the script, they praised Wright's direction of the play. 57

Wright's heavy directing schedule did not allow him time to develop as a playwright until he left the English Stage Company in 1977. Eleven years after Changing Lines, Wright's

Several dramatists and directors, including Hampton and Wright, established long and productive working relationships with the ESC as a result of the Sunday night series. Others, however, chose not to accept an invitation to practice at the Royal Court despite demonstrated success in the series. Although Michael Rosen gained considerable attention for his play, Backbone, staged on Sunday night and on the main bill in 1968, he produced no further material for the Royal Court. Backbone told an amusing story of a love affair between a Jewish boy and an upper middle class coed trying to break free of her domineering family. After his script won the Sunday Times National Student Drama Festival Award in 1968, the ESC encouraged Rosen, then twenty-one, to submit Backbone for a production without decor. Backbone ran two consecutive Sunday nights in February of 1968, and had an engagement of two weeks on the main bill in May of the same year. Although William Gaskill urged the author to write another script for the ESC, Rosen refused.

Rosen admits that he was satisfied with the ESC's
staging of *Backbone* and with his role in the production process. Why then did he reject an opportunity to develop his career at one of the world's most respected theatres? Rosen claims that his reluctance to continue with the ESC was based on a belief that the Royal Court was not the kind of theatre in which he wanted to practice. More specifically Rosen asserted that the theatergoers who frequented the Royal Court were not his kind of audience:

I think what has happened with a lot of writers, especially some of the radical writers from the Caribbean and Asian communities, is that they go on writing plays that are seen by white audiences at the Court . . . the points and arguments that they are making are ones they should be telling kids about in Brixton. But the vehicle for their ideas is with a white liberal intelligentsia. And yet they want to abuse the white liberal intelligentsia while they are doing it. I've exorcised all that. I say do it in front of thirty kids in Brixton and see if you can entertain them.58

Rosen left the Royal Court after *Backbone* completed its run on the main bill in May of 1968. He continued to write and to perform outside the confines of traditional theatre, staging one-man shows in the streets, parks, and schools. He also collaborated with several small alternative theatre touring companies, including Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST) and The Critic's Group during the seventies. Rosen's lack of enthusiasm for the work of the ESC and the general composition of audiences attending the Royal Court was shared by other young British playwrights, actors, and
directors in the late sixties and early seventies. The desire to establish new theatres and to reach new audiences was a motivating force behind the fringe movement in England from 1968 until the late seventies.

The English Stage Company continued to produce new work of high quality during the Gaskill years despite a changing economic and artistic climate towards the end of the decade. The annual Arts Council Grant to the ESC ceased to increase, and for the first time, in 1969, actually decreased by £6,000. Many smaller portable companies vied for the attention that was once solely focused on the English Stage Company. These alternative companies presented new opportunities for playwrights, actors, and directors. Partly in response to the growing fringe movement Gaskill decided to open another theatre within the Royal Court building. Although it was not designed to do so when it was opened in 1969, the Theatre Upstairs eventually replaced the Sunday night series as the primary auxiliary program at the Royal Court.
CHAPTER IV


3 Ibid. p. 192.

4 Ibid. p. 198.

5 Ibid. pp. 201-02.

6 Michael Billington, "Royal Court Play Stopped by Clash," *The Times*, 8 April 1968.

7 Personal interview with Christopher Hampton, 24 July 1980.


11 Findlater, *At the Royal Court*, p. 86.


15 Ibid.


18 Minutes of the joint meeting of the Artistic and Management Committees, 2 June, 1966.


23 Findlater, At the Royal Court, Appendix 2, Financial Tables.

24 Barry Hanson, "Royal Court Diary: Rehearsal Logbook by Barry Hanson of the Three D.H. Lawrence Plays in Repertoire at the Royal Court till April 20," Plays and Players (April 1968), p. 47.

25 Ibid.
26 Findlater, *At the Royal Court*, Appendix 2, Financial Tables.


32 Ibid., p. 129.

33 The Traverse Theatre began as a private club in 1963, producing British, European, and American premieres and commissioning British dramatists. Inviting companies from England and from abroad as well as touring Traverse productions had been a regular feature of Traverse policy. A London Traverse was established by Jim Haynes in 1966 at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre.


Cregan, interview, 21 July 1980.

David Cregan, Transcending and The Dancers (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1967), Author's Note.

Hampton, interview, 24 July 1980.

Findlater, At the Royal Court, p. 139.

Hampton, interview, 24 July 1980.


Letter received from Bill Bryden, 16 Sept. 1980.

A Lesson in a Dead Language and Funnyhouse of a Negro, by Adrienne Kennedy, program of a production by the English Stage Society, 28 April 1968.

48  Personal interview with Clifford Williams, 14 July 1980.


52  Personal interview with John Antrobus, 11 July 1980.


54  Antrobus, interview, 11 July 1980.


56  Personal interview with Nicholas Wright, 25 July 1980.


58  Personal interview with Michael Rosen, 28 July 1980.
CHAPTER V

ALTERNATIVE THEATRE, THE THEATRE UPSTAIRS, AND THE SUNDAY NIGHT SERIES

Alternative theatre, or theatre other than that of the established commercial and non-commercial houses in England, became a popular art form in England during the latter sixties. Alternative troupes engaged audiences in spaces that ranged from street corners to underground railway stations. New writing, directing, and acting talent during this period was often drawn to the alternative theatre since these groups were apparently free of the rules which encumbered conventional companies.

By late 1968 the English Stage Company realized that the main bill and the Sunday night series furnished limited opportunities for new writers when compared with the growing number of venues in and around London. William Gaskill and his staff knew that the ESC must somehow provide its own platform or risk isolation from an important current in British theatre. The Royal Court, as it existed before 1969, was not attractive to a large segment of young artists, who tended to view the ESC operation as an exclusive club,
difficult to join, dedicated to developing and establishing house writers such as Edward Bond, John Osborne, and Christopher Hampton. Secondly, most of the artists in alternative companies were interested in playing to audiences who were not necessarily regular theatergoers. Finally, the facilities of the Royal Court presented a major obstacle to many alternative groups. The Court's proscenium stage was not compatible with many of the needs or the goals of alternative theatre. This last consideration played a major role in Gaskill's decision to secure a new and more flexible space for performance. While the Theatre Upstairs was available for the engagement of alternative groups, the main objective in opening this space was to draw artists and create works at the Royal Court. The ESC's relationship with fringe or alternative theatre cannot be fully appreciated without an examination of the history of this movement and the Theatre Upstairs.¹

The term "fringe," which applies to a number of British theatrical experiments since the early sixties, originated at the Edinburgh Festival in 1960 as a way of identifying irregular performances around the city that were not officially part of the Festival itself. Gradually during the sixties, "fringe" became virtually synonymous with the larger, more inclusive category of performances and groups known as "alternative" theatre.² Both the "fringe" and the "alternative" theatres represent companies or artists who
place themselves outside of the mainstream of traditional theatre.

Several important contributors to the British fringe in the early sixties came from America. Jim Haynes converted a former Edinburgh brothel into the Traverse Theatre Club in 1963. Haynes used minimal lighting and bare sets to stage the first works of Fernando Arrabal and David Storey. The Traverse hosted avant garde troupes from around the world throughout the decade, including the Cafe La Mama Experimental Theatre Club from New York in 1967 and Jerzy Grotowsky's 13-Rows Theatre in 1968.

Charles Marowitz, also an American expatriot, directed several plays at the Traverse between 1963 and 1966. Of greater significance was Marowitz's partnership with director Peter Brook on the Theatre of Cruelty Season at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in 1964. They staged a series of workshop productions with members of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Brook's version of Peter Weiss's *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat As Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade* (1964) was the most important theatrical event of the LAMDA season.3

The watershed year for the fringe is commonly acknowledged to be 1968, not coincidently the year in which stage censorship was abolished. In 1968 important international events such as the student riots in Paris,
anti-war protests at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia polarized political thought and activated a generation of young people around the world. Traditional forms of creative expression were challenged and in many instances discarded. In England this revolution was led by the fringe.

The English theatre was exposed to two visiting American companies in 1967: Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre and Ellen Stewart's La Mama Experimental Theatre Club. Peter Ansorge has compared these visits and their impact with the visit of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to London in 1956. The American troupes infected fringe groups like Pip Simmons with "an image of theatrical excitement" while Brecht's company "played a formative role" in the careers of key artists within the English Stage Company. Pip Simmons, inspired by the Open Theatre's America Hurrah! at the Royal Court in 1967, created a series of frantic cartoon-like representations of American culture and society, including Superman (1969) and Do It! (1971). Several other young artists, including Max Stafford-Clark, at the time a director at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, were inspired by Cafe La Mama's method of scripting shows in rehearsal through the combined efforts of writers, actors, and musicians, as opposed to the traditional method of isolating a writer from his producing company. In 1968, one year after his London encounter with Cafe La Mama, Stafford-Clark formed the
Traverse Theatre Workshop.

Stafford-Clark copied the idea of group collaboration and created several scripts, which he produced. The text for *Dracula* (1968), for instance, was the result of eight writers working with a company of actors over a rehearsal period of several months. Howard Brenton, David Hare, and Snoo Wilson, three writers associated with the Traverse Workshop, later became involved in two group collaborations staged at the Royal Court: *Lay By* (1971) and *England's Ireland* (1972). These three, along with Tony Bicat (who also contributed to *England's Ireland*), were also members of the Portable Theatre. This highly mobile company toured several controversial productions, including Chris Wilkinson's *Plays for Rubber Go-Go Girls* (1971) and Snoo Wilson's *Blow Job* (1971). Unlike many other political fringe troupes, such as Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre, Portable Theatre was a writer's theatre rather than a performer's theatre.

If the Royal Court's Sunday night writers in 1969 expected a focus of critical attention comparable to that enjoyed by their predecessors in earlier years, they were sorely disappointed. Within a year of the abolition of stage censorship dozens of alternative groups were listed and reviewed on a weekly basis in *Time Out*, a new publication covering London entertainment. By the end of the decade, the barrage of plays produced by the fringe made it possible to see a different new work nightly. The Arts Council of Great
Britain officially recognized the importance of the contribution made by fringe artists when it allocated £15,000 among a handful of troupes for the 1969-70 season. By the end of the seventies this sum had increased to over £2 million, and was shared by some sixty companies.⁷

One reason for the rapid rise in the popularity of fringe theatres was the willingness and the ability of alternative theatre companies to perform in non-traditional spaces, for little or no money, and to play before a public previously disinterested in or alienated from theatre. Included in this category were children in neighborhood youth centers, workers in factories, and students in universities throughout England. Alternative troupes like the Portable Theatre, Ken Campbell's Road Show, Pip Simmons Group, and Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre organized their audiences into networks. Although these groups often had no permanent home, some occasionally played conventional houses in London.

In order to underscore the ESC’s recognition of the importance of alternative theatre and to encourage alternative artists to utilize the facilities of the English Stage Company, Gaskill undertook a project that brought several troupes to the Royal Court over a three-week period. The Come Together festival in October and November of 1970 was financed by the New Activities Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain with the purpose of showing the best work from regional festivals around the nation. In addition,
the project provided for a cross pollination between artists at the Royal Court and fringe artists, and for stimulating the future work of these theatre practitioners. Gaskill described Come Together as a chance to look at a sampling of fringe theatre and "assess its importance and relevance to the work of traditional theatre."9

Over twenty groups participated in Come Together, playing on the main bill and in the Theatre Upstairs. Several major alternative companies, such as Ken Campbell's Road Show and the Pip Simmons Group performed in the Theatre Upstairs for the first time during this festival, and returned later in the seventies to share new work or to launch tours. Gaskill made the downstairs playing area of the Court more flexible by extending the stage and removing the stalls. A large projecting apron was thus created and surrounded by a pit in which audiences for many of the performances were able to stand and move about like groundlings in Elizabethan public theatres.

Irving Wardle believed this temporary rearrangement of the main stage freed the event from "portentousness."10 In a review of Come Together Wardle applauded the festival, as well as the efforts of the many artists who represented the alternative movement:

... what really banishes the usual solemnity is the extra-theatrical origin of the contributing companies. It is that deadly blinkered attachment to "the theatre" that generally turns avant-garde
rallies into such joyless occasions. The companies gathered at Sloane Square would probably not be much bothered if every theatre in Britain collapsed tomorrow, as this would leave their own infrastructure intact. They would still have their audiences in pubs, colleges, and street corners. And seeing them together makes you realize how much original and talented work is going on outside the officially publicized sector.

The festival succeeded in spotlighting alternative theatre and in helping to improve the image of the Royal Court for fringe artists.

Within three years of the *Come Together* festival, seven visiting companies played in the Theatre Upstairs. These groups included the Theatre Machine, the Traverse Workshop, Portable Theatre, Freehold, the People Show, Pip Simmons, and Hull Truck. Most important, however, were the individual writers, such as Howard Brenton and Snoo Wilson, and directors such as Max Stafford-Clark, who returned to work with the ESC.

The Founding of the Theatre Upstairs

Although the founding of the Theatre Upstairs coincided with the rise of alternative theatre, the need for additional space had been a problem for years. During the early sixties George Devine made several attempts to secure another stage for the presentation of new plays. The Company's efforts to expand its operation were consistently hampered by a lack of
funds. But the frustrating search came to an end in 1968 when the Management Committee accepted a recommendation from William Gaskill to utilize the club room in the upper reaches of the Royal Court building for staging a limited number of experimental productions before small audiences. Gaskill and Peter Gill conceived of this small thirty by forty foot upstairs space as a laboratory for the rehearsal, development, and performance of new works. They had no idea that the popularity and success of the Theatre Upstairs would eventually make it an important part of the ESC's contribution to world theatre during the seventies.\(^\text{12}\)

From the early fifties this room had served as a private club under the operation of several managements, including Alfred Esdaile and the English Stage Society. The club had always been open to the members of the Society as an extra benefit of joining this organization. In addition to providing drinks and entertainment for its clientele, the club had also been used intermittently as a rehearsal room. Gaskill's original request in 1968 did not propose an immediate alteration of this facility. It did, however, provide an opportunity to explore the possibilities of the space through "informal presentations".\(^\text{13}\)

By the fall of 1968, when it became obvious that the club had the potential to serve as a permanent performance area, the ESC made plans to convert the room into a theatre. A set of stringent safety regulations by the Greater London...
Council called for the construction of fire escapes and additional exits, requirements which were largely circumvented when the Management Committee decided to turn the space into a private club with a membership to be known as the Theatre Upstairs Society. This body was similar in terms of rules, organization, and purpose to the English Stage Society.

Alterations for the Theatre Upstairs were financed by a £4,000 interest free loan from the English Stage Society and a £5,000 subsidy from the Arts Council. In applying to the Council for this capital grant, Gaskill argued that the ESC would be able to stage more works for less money. Furthermore, Gaskill suggested that a studio theatre would allow the ESC to act as a point of contact for artists in both traditional and experimental theatre.

Sunday Nights vs. the Theatre Upstairs

To suggest that either the Sunday night series or the Theatre Upstairs existed as totally separate systems from the main bill would be misleading. After the Theatre Upstairs opened, most of the directors, designers, writers, and actors at the Royal Court were involved in at least two of these programs, and several artists, including Howard Brenton, Nicholas Wright, Peter Gill, Jocelyn Herbert, and William Gaskill worked at one time or another in all three areas. In
addition to utilizing a pool of talent, all of these programs shared the same casting office, literary department, press office, accountants, and janitorial staff.\textsuperscript{17}

Although both the Sunday night series and the Theatre Upstairs were meant to encourage new writing and provide an opportunity to view the work of new playwrights, directors, and other artists, the two programs differed in many ways. The physical shape and size of the main auditorium has been outlined previously. A key to the success of the Theatre Upstairs was its unique adaptability to a number of actor/audience relationships and performance configurations. This flexibility was necessary for two reasons: first, to accommodate transfers to or from the primarily non-proscenium alternative theatre spaces which blanketed England during the late sixties and early seventies; second, to present an attractive venue for writers who did not want their plays staged on the main bill or on Sunday night.

Within a year of the opening of the Theatre Upstairs, many playwrights and directors considered the Sunday night series to be restricting in terms of both space and the number of possible performances. Since the Upstairs operation did not have to share its stage with the main bill, it could accommodate runs of from two to six weeks or twelve to thirty-six performances. For this reason playwrights almost always preferred the Theatre Upstairs. Agents, managers, critics, friends, and other theatre artists were
permitted to attend plays more easily on a schedule that included performances every night of the week except Monday. Since the productions without decor only rarely were given a second performance, the exposure was abrupt and unattractive for artists. On the other hand, the extended runs in the Theatre Upstairs allowed productions to grow and mature from performances given to several audiences. But Sunday nights became regarded by many as a hit or miss proposition. The playwright was sometimes left wondering whether the response of an audience was due to an exceptional performance, to the composition of the house that night, or to his script.

Another area of comparison between the Theatre Upstairs and the Sunday night series involves the financial operation of each. The productions in the Theatre Upstairs, like the Sunday nights, were far less costly than the main bill presentations. In 1969 an average run of three weeks in the Theatre Upstairs cost £1,550, of which running costs were £1,200, and the balance of £350 represented various production costs. This figure is only slightly higher than the average of £200 required to stage Sunday night presentations during the same year.

Each production in the Theatre Upstairs was allowed from £50 to £100 for scenery, costumes, and props, compared with the £15 to £30 expended for Sunday night presentations. Despite its small scenic budget, the Upstairs operation never had a "without decor" policy. A variety of sets could
be constructed quite easily and with little expense by arranging and rearranging platforms, ramps, railings, and other structural elements in and around the audience.

Nicholas Wright, the first director of the studio, described the 1969 season and some of the discoveries that he and other artists made about the scenic possibilities of this new space:

We very quickly started going in for very lavish designs which were still very cheap by other standards, but which could cover the whole auditorium and be rather spectacular. From the word go it was thought that the seating should be flexible, not in the sense of having a neat module of seating, but in the sense of having lots of chairs that you could paint or cover with grass or pebbles. The idea was the more sophisticated the arrangements, the more flexible they would be. And so all it really cost was a small amount of money and a great deal of labor, which in those days was not expensive. This scenic element was quite important to the need to write for small environments.

By comparison the Sunday night productions seemed pale and drab. In addition the Sunday series faced a recurring problem: a full scale proscenium stage had to be either left bare or covered with the stock flats, door frames, and furniture borrowed from the prop room. After directing several Sunday night plays in the late sixties, Nicholas Wright finally came to the conclusion that the monetary limits placed on this series precluded any serious attempts at design or decor:
You were much better off just having the bare stage and doing it with nothing because you always ended up using your fifteen quid for taxi fares. It was ridiculous to try and use any decor. Some people did, but it always looked tatty and bad. You were better off to have nothing at all. Just have the stage looking swept.21

Consistent with Royal Court policy, commercial success was not a factor for either the Theatre Upstairs or the Sunday night productions. The Upstairs space usually seated between fifty and one hundred people who were charged between 25 and 50 pence in the early seventies; about £1.25 in the mid-seventies; in 1984 about 75 pence. The difference between a hit and a flop was, therefore, negligible. At the beginning of 1969, the ESC projected a budget for the Theatre Upstairs anticipating £15,000 in expenses for the twelve show season of 1969-70. With £3,000 expected in earned income from the box office, the ESC planned to secure an additional £12,000 from an Arts Council Grant and income from rights and transfers. Royalties from transfers, however, fell off drastically during this season, and the company missed balancing its budget by £10,000.22

Debts continued to mount over the next five years, until 1975, when the Theatre Upstairs had incurred a total deficit of £47,000.23 To make matters worse, income from the main bill fell by £13,000 in 1975, and income from transfers declined £20,000 from the previous years. Although a £35,000
increase in the Arts Council Grant for 1974-75 helped offset this financial crisis, the ESC's dilemma was compounded by a rise in production expenses of over £10,000. Artistic directors Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd were forced to consider drastic reductions for the 1975-76 season. With England's economy facing a crisis of its own in mid-seventies, Wright and Kidd reluctantly closed the Theatre Upstairs in October 1975 in order to save £20,000 and allow productions in the main house to continue. This measure was announced as a temporary solution to the Court's financial problems.

Despite expenses, the Theatre Upstairs had always represented a laboratory where experimental productions could be staged more cheaply than was possible on the main bill. The real value of the Theatre Upstairs could not be measured in dollars. The wealth of writing and directing talent produced by the Sunday night series during the fifties and sixties was matched by the cavalcade of new young artists who practiced in the Theatre Upstairs during the seventies. Major British dramatists whose plays were staged in this space include Caryl Churchill, Howard Brenton, Heathcote Williams, David Hare, and David Edgar. Their plays are discussed elsewhere in this study. Among the non-British writers were the Trinidad poet, Mustapha Matura, with As Time Goes By (1971), and Black Slaves, White Chains (1976); South African dramatist Athol Fugard, with Boesman and Lena (1971),

A final difference between the Theatre Upstairs and the Sunday night series involves the relationship of each to the main bill. William Gaskill observes:

> The Sunday nights were conceived to be a kind of stepping stone to the main theatre. It was quite clear that they were a sort of training ground. The Theatre Upstairs, like all of the fringe theatres, has become almost self-sufficient. That is, it is not really seen as a medium stage towards the main theatre. It tends to coexist.25

Each program, therefore, contained its own particular expectations regarding the work it produced.

The first set of expectations relates to transfers of plays from the Theatre Upstairs and the Sunday night series. Productions in the Theatre Upstairs, with a few exceptions, were not transferred to the main stage because the artists who worked in this program preferred to remain relatively independent. Sunday night plays, on the other hand, frequently graduated to the main bill and both programs transferred productions to the West End. *When Did You Last See My Mother?*, for example, transferred from the Sunday night program, while *The Rocky Horror Show* (19730) represents the most notable transfer from the Theatre Upstairs.
The Royal Court style and tradition created a second set of expectations associated with the Sunday night series. Since the start of the productions without decor in 1957, this program, like the main bill, emphasized simplicity in staging and quality of writing. The ability of a text to succeed without extraneous decoration, tricks, or gimmicks has always been highly valued by the ESC.

A different set of expectations emerged in the Theatre Upstairs. Some artists, especially those associated with visiting companies such as Pip Simmons, aimed to shock and provoke their audiences with bizarre spectacle, cartoon characters, and propaganda. For this group, audience response had more importance than a strong script. Other artists, especially the writers associated with the Traverse Workshop and the Portable Theatre Company placed greater emphasis on the text; nevertheless, they shared, with Pip Simmons and others from the alternative theatre, an appreciation for the bizarre, the grotesque, and the theatrical. In Howard Brenton's *Hitler Dances* (1970), for example, a group of children playing on a World War II bombsite conjure up a dead soldier, Hans, who is transformed from a corpse into a caricature of Frankenstein, then finally into a "ghastly but grinning Nazi."26

Because fringe subject matter was often related to topical events or current political figures, some fringe scripts became outdated as quickly as yesterday's newspaper,
while their creators moved on to more recent headlines. Pip Simmons' *Do It!* (1971), for example, was based on Jerry Rubin's book about student unrest in America during the late sixties. The emphasis on immediacy by the fringe often defied the time-tested notions of craftsmanship by traditional playwrights. Dramatists associated with alternative theatre considered it essential to write about current topics. The right to protest or demand swift change in the perceived injustices of the day was a rallying point for the fringe. A playwright's patient vigil at a typewriter for months or years might produce a script that would be irrelevant by the time it reached an audience. David Hare, who authored several plays produced at the Royal Court and served as literary manager for the ESC, reflected the sentiments of many fringe artists who came to work in Sloane Square during the late sixties and early seventies:

> At the time my sole interest was in the content of a play. I thought the political and social crisis in England in 1969 so grave that I had no patience for the question of how well written a play was. I was only concerned with how urgent its subject matter was, how it related to the world outside.  

Hare's statement should not be interpreted to suggest that quality was absent from alternative theatre or from the Theatre Upstairs. Although many "well written" plays were staged in the Theatre Upstairs during this period by fringe dramatists, the quality of a script was no longer the sole
criteria for producing works.

Several members of the ESC balked at allowing fringe artists in the Theatre Upstairs. Lindsay Anderson, co-artistic director of the ESC with Anthony Page and William Gaskill from 1969-1972, became a particularly outspoken critic of several fringe writers who sought to place politics before craft while working at the Royal Court. Anderson epitomized the attitude of the ESC's older generation around 1970. He once defined what he believed to be the essence of the so-called Royal Court play and its style of production:

The play itself had dignity and even a certain pathos because it was, above all, serious. It was a play of ideas, not very profound and not perhaps particularly original . . . it was seriously written and seriously presented. There was a blessed absence of that "desire to divert". . . . The playing was natural, civilized, unforced. And the presentation was similarly lucid and economic. The settings were realistic, but not fussily or extravagantly naturalistic; they stood out with elegant clarity against a pure, white surround. There was no bowing or scraping to us, the audience; and there was no bullying either.

Anderson's example is his description of the inherent production values for The Mulberry Bush (1956), the first play presented by the ESC. Nevertheless, this passage indicates an aesthetic still shared by many of the ESC's older generation during the early seventies. The criticism levelled at the fringe was that aesthetic aspects of theatre were ignored in favor of a social message: theatre, as an

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artistic product had been relinquished in favor of a political product. For alternative theatre, the "serious" often gave way to the satirical and the ludicrous. "Realistic" settings with "elegant clarity" had been discarded because of economic necessity. The virtues that Anderson thought were inherent in the words "natural," "civilized," or "unforced" were no longer cherished by the fringe, and the "bullying" of audiences was a frequent feature of alternative theatre.

The George Jackson Black and White Minstrel Show, staged by Pip Simmons in the Theatre Upstairs during 1973, represented a total disregard for beauty, simplicity, and taste in driving home its social and political message. In the first half of the play, minstrels in black face were auctioned off and chained to the wrists of audience members. During the second half of the play, the story of George Jackson, a black American shot in an alleged prison escape, was told as a series of circus acts. After boxing a white gorilla, Jackson was tied and placed in a sack for his "great escape." Peter Anscorge vividly describes the shocking scenario that followed:

A spotlight focused upon the red sack in which Jackson was struggling to escape—the sack was raised upwards on a pulley. The sack throbbed, vibrated with activity until, suddenly, a hand emerged to signal to the audience. It was the fist of the Black Panther salute. Immediately shots were fired at the sack and, inside, the body stretched in its death spasm. The show was over.
Although not all the performances in the Theatre Upstairs were this blatant, enough of them occurred to warrant serious scrutiny by the three artistic directors.

David Hare perhaps best exemplifies the younger generation of the ESC at this time. Working within the Royal Court during the early seventies, Hare was in a position to observe the obstacles confronting many fringe playwrights at the Royal Court:

Every project had to be lobbied for by a medieval series of trials, which became more complex and severe in 1969 when a triumvirate of directors—Lindsay Anderson, William Gaskill, and Anthony Page—took over the theatre, and developed an attitude to new work which made the championship of new scripts so arduous and humiliating that it's a wonder people stuck their necks out at all.33

Hare described this ongoing confrontation as a struggle between "those who wanted the Court to be a socialist theatre and those who wanted it to be a humanist theatre."34 While freely admitting that the humanists won, Hare contended that the Royal Court ultimately lost the loyalty of many alternative artists who sought to produce their work elsewhere in the seventies.

By 1973 much of the stridency and political dogmatism in the fringe had diminished. Many of the original fringe troupes, such as Pip Simmons, had either disbanded or were
fragmented by in-fighting. Playwrights who had previously been affiliated with alternative groups, such as Portable Theatre, began to work independently during this period. Several of these dramatists, including Howard Brenton, David Edgar, and David Hare, had works commissioned by the Royal Court, the National, or the RSC.35

An important development of the mid-seventies was a more serious approach to the text by alternative artists. The Joint Stock Theatre Group, an alliance of playwrights, directors, and actors, formed in 1974, is the most notable example of this shift in attitude. This touring collective emphasized a longer more intensive period for creating and rehearsing a script than was possible in either an established theatre, like the Royal Court, or in most other fringe companies between 1968 and 1973. The production process began with a three-week period of improvisations, research, and discussion between a writer, a director, and six or seven actors. The writer then retired for two months to produce a working script while the actors were temporarily dismissed from the company to work on other projects. The group then reassembled several weeks later to amend, alter, and rehearse the script for production.36 Many of the members of Joint Stock, including founders William Gaskill, David Hare, and Max Stafford-Clark, worked extensively with the ESC. Joint Stock productions staged in the Theatre Upstairs include Stanley Eveling's Shivvers (1974), Barry

In response to the metamorphosis in the nature and quality of alternative theatre during the mid-seventies, the English Stage Company reevaluated its own position in relation to the fringe. While the Theatre Upstairs continued to produce plays by writers who had their origins in alternative theatre, this space was used less frequently by visiting companies after its first four years of operation. In 1974, Nicholas Wright, then director of the Theatre Upstairs, underscored this shift in attitude during an interview with Peter Ansorge:

My feelings about this have changed a bit since the Theatre Upstairs opened. Five years ago it was very important to give the fringe groups some kind of recognition. It was very good for them to play at the Royal Court and it was very good for us to have them working there as we always learned something from each other. At the moment my own feeling is that we should give priority to our own people, to scripts which we've commissioned, to working with writers whom we want to develop.37

These writers included Caryl Churchill, who also worked with Joint Stock; David Lan, with Bird Child (1974), Paradise (1975), Homage to Bean Soup (1975), and Winter Dances (1977); and Michael Abbensetts from Guyana, whose Sweet Talk was staged in 1973.

Gaskell's original objective of attracting new artists to the Royal Court by opening the Theatre Upstairs had
clearly been achieved by 1975 when this space was temporarily closed. The contacts established with artists from the alternative theatre during the first six years of the upstairs operation provided many of the ESC's leading writers and directors during the late seventies and early eighties. Max Stafford-Clark, Caryl Churchill, Howard Brenton, Howard Barker, David Edgar, and Snoo Wilson were among those who returned to the Royal Court after working Upstairs.

Despite Lay By, England's Ireland, Pirates, and one or two other Sunday night pieces staged Upstairs, the productions without decor had few ties with the alternative theatre. Without the flexibility of time or space, the productions without decor were never able to respond to the flurry of new activity that occurred between 1969 and 1975. Isolated from the mainstream of new work in the English theatre, and overshadowed by the Theatre Upstairs, this program never regained the status that it had enjoyed prior to the late sixties.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER V

1. The terms "fringe" and "alternative" will be used interchangeably in this study.


5. Ibid. p. 47.


11. Ibid.


16 Browne, The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, p. 230.

17 Peter Ansorge, "Upstairs, Downstairs: Nicholas Wright, Director of the Theatre Upstairs, Talks to Peter Ansorge," Plays and Players, Jan. 1975, p. 29.


19 Budget for the Theatre Upstairs, year ended 4 April 1970, from the author's collection.


21 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 Findlater, At the Royal Court, Appendix 2: Financial Tables, n.p.


26 Ansorge, Disrupting the Spectacle, pp. 50-1.

27 Ibid., p. 76.


32 Ansorge, Disrupting the Spectacle, p. 34.

33 Hare. "Time of Unease," in At the Royal Court: 25 Years of the English Stage Company, p. 41.

34 Ibid. p. 142.


37 Ansorge, Plays and Players, p. 28.
CHAPTER VI
THE DECLINE OF THE SUNDAY NIGHT SERIES

With the possible exception of Stephen Poliakoff, the Sunday night series introduced no important new English writers during the seventies. Although twenty-five plays were staged in the series from 1970 to 1975, as many as in any other comparable period of time, the quality of the program was obviously below what it once had been. When it became clear that both the impact of the series and the attention it received had diminished, many playwrights began to question the usefulness of the productions without decor.

Lindsay Anderson and other members of the English Stage Society's Executive Committee had become aware by 1970 that Sunday night productions no longer seemed "special" since the opening of the Theatre Upstairs and the proliferation of alternative theatre.¹ In addition to these developments, the English Stage Society faced the prospect of entering the seventies with a small deficit of £1,600.² This financial dilemma, heretofore a rare problem for the Society, was blamed on the large production budget for Famine, the last offering of 1969, as well as on a dwindling organizational membership.³

At this important juncture the Executive Committee
considered several changes to rectify the overall decline of the Sunday night program, only a few of which were actually put into practice. Some were minor improvements, such as serving coffee to Society members at the intermissions to create a warmer atmosphere. Other suggestions had a stronger potential for impact on the series, Private sponsorship of specific productions was encouraged to offset production costs. Robert Thornton's The Big Romance (1970), for example, was underwritten by a Ms. Margaret Rawlings. Private donors remained rare, however. Another initiative, that of utilizing the Theatre Upstairs for Sunday nights as the schedule permitted, allowed members of the Society to feel at home in this new space. But the scheme was never completely successful, due to the limited seating upstairs. The pertinent recommendation by the Executive Committee was the commitment to a second performance, whenever possible, for Sunday night productions, a plan attempted previously, but never on a regular basis.4

Further changes in the program and in the Society were considered during 1970 but never carried out. Lindsay Anderson proposed that the English Stage Society change its name to Friends of the Royal Court to dispel any perception that the organization might be a club for the elite and therefore closed to the general public. Other considerations involved offering one free Sunday night per year for new members, and plan to expand the organization's audience.
through a reciprocal membership arrangement with the Mercury Theatre. But apparently no action was taken on these matters. The committee could identify the problems that plagued the Sunday night series, but it seemed to have little power to solve them.

The Establishment of a Resident Dramatist

Prior to 1969 William Gaskill and Gaskill and George Devine had each played an active role in soliciting or developing new writers at the Royal Court on both Sunday night and on the main bill. Each had placed himself at the center of a group of directors, and exerted his own particular standards, values, and artistic vision in the running of the Court. While neither used his power dictatorially, each strongly influenced the selection of plays produced. Before he stepped down as sole artistic director of the ESC in 1969, however, Gaskill made a change that slightly altered the responsibilities of this position for choosing scripts.

In 1968 Gaskill created the position of resident dramatist at the Court; the appointee eventually was to play a role in the process of script selection. Financed by a grant from the Arts Council, this post had no definite duties when Christopher Hampton became the ESC's first resident dramatist, and in fact, the first in London. Hampton was
given the task of reading, evaluating, and recommending plays as supervisor of the script department. Part of his job involved visiting other theatres and companies to seek out new plays and playwrights. Hampton's successful Sunday night production, When Did You Last See My Mother?, led him to regard the series as a viable alternative to main bill productions.7

By the time David Hare took over Hampton's position one year later, the theatrical climate had changed. In addition to the formation of a triumvirate of artistic directors, the Theatre Upstairs had opened and a host of young fringe artists appeared on the horizon. As a resident dramatist with roots in a fringe company, Hare believed the Sunday night series had little to offer the new playwrights. He favored the Theatre Upstairs as a space for new work because of its intimacy, its flexibility, and its potential to provide an extended run. Hare, therefore, sought to persuade the artistic directors and other members of the ESC to produce the plays of fringe writers and groups in the Theatre Upstairs. Although he had neither the authority nor the power to get plays produced, he could decide which scripts would be circulated, read, and discussed.8 Hare worked closely with Nicholas Wright, director of the Theatre Upstairs, to find and encourage new work for this space. Although the script department received between twenty and forty new plays a week around 1970, most of the work mounted

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upstairs at this time came from solicited scripts or commissioned material, such as Heathcote Williams' \textit{AC/DC}.\footnote{9} Hare believed that the role of the Sunday night productions had been taken over by the Theatre Upstairs as soon as it opened its doors in 1969. He therefore recommended his best scripts for the Theatre Upstairs and viewed the Sunday night series as a kind of consolation prize for writers in whom the Court "did not have full confidence."\footnote{10}

Aside from reading and recommending the plays of other writers, Hare submitted several works of his own. He later maintained that not only were his plays rarely accepted at the Royal Court during his tenure as resident dramatist, but also that "all resident dramatists had their plays rejected" as virtual "feature of the job."\footnote{11} Although neither of these assertions is entirely accurate, resident dramatists were frequently frustrated by lack of time to write and by the ESC's lack of interest in their works. Hare did see two of his plays produced at the Court while serving as resident dramatist: in the Theatre Upstairs, \textit{What Happened to Blake?} (1970), and on the main bill, \textit{Slag} (1971), which had premiered at the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1970. \textit{Teeth 'n' Smiles}, his account of the deterioration of a rock musical star, was staged on the main bill in 1975.

After Hare left the post of resident dramatist in 1971, E.A. Whitehead was appointed in his place. Whitehead, seldom seen around the Royal Court during his term, spent most of
his time writing rather than pursuing or recommending new scripts. In 1972, his replacement, Howard Brenton, was, like Hare, interested in alternative theatre and thus preferred the Theatre Upstairs as a venue for new work.12

During the three years in which the Royal Court was led by the triumvirate, the attention of audiences, the press, and the ESC became focused primarily on new works in the Theatre Upstairs or on revivals on the main bill. Although the Sunday night series continued to function, its impact, had greatly diminished. Although by 1970 the ESC no longer considered productions without decor a major source of new talent, a few bright young artists did continue to appear in this program.

Group Authorship on Sunday Nights

On rare occasions the productions without decor featured fringe companies or artists associated with alternative theatre. Two notable examples of this were Lay By (1971), a product of the Portable Theatre Company and Traverse Theatre, and England's Ireland (1972). Both plays were written by a team of dramatists, and both were staged on Sunday nights in the Theatre Upstairs. Prior to the seventies playwriting at the Royal Court was generally viewed as a solitary activity, except in studio exercises such as Eleven Men Dead At Hola Camp (1959). In contrast, the Portable Theatre Company
created several scripts through the combined efforts of writers. One attempt at group collaboration took place in 1971 when David Hare suggested that several of those attending a writers' conference at the Royal Court pool their talents and produce a script, given the guarantee that it would be staged at the Royal Court.

Howard Brenton, Brian Clark, Trevor Griffiths, David Hare, Stephen Poliakoff, Hugh Stoddart, and Snoo Wilson agreed to participate, although not all were members of the Portable Theatre Company. Trevor Griffiths suggested that a current news story reporting an alleged rape on a motorway and the ensuing scandal involving a schoolteacher, truck driver, and school girl form the basis of the collective effort. After Griffiths' suggestion was approved, Howard Brenton spread rolls of wall paper and some crayons on the floor so that each of the participants could observe what his fellow dramatists were writing. By this process the artists hoped to develop a "public language" in their group response to the event described in the newspaper.\textsuperscript{13}

Upon reading the finished script the trio of artistic directors withdrew their original guarantee of a Royal Court production. Shortly afterwards, \textit{Lay By}, directed by Snoo Wilson, was produced by the Traverse Theatre Workshop in association with the Edinburgh Festival. The sensational nature of the play's subject matter drew considerable attention. Finally, on September 26, 1971, the Traverse
Theatre's production was given Sunday night performances at 7 and 9 p.m. in the Theatre Upstairs.14

A second group project of Portable Theatre, England's Ireland, was mounted Upstairs on a Sunday night in October of 1972; its authors include Brenton, Clark, Hare, Wilson, Tony Bicât, David Edgar, and Francis Fuchs. As the title indicates, the script focused on the perceived injustices perpetrated by British military involvement in Northern Ireland. Although reviewers criticized both Lay By and England's Ireland for a lack of continuity, David Hare believed that these two projects were unique and successful, since the playwrights were able to concentrate on content rather than on form and other conventional critical expectations.15

Lay By and England's Ireland were supported by the ESC because they provided an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and the encouragement of future working relationships between each of the artists involved and the Royal Court. While a few of the dramatists subsequently collaborated on other group projects with the Portable Theatre Company and other fringe groups, all of the participants continued to write plays on their own. Fuchs, Stoddart, Griffiths, and Clark produced no further work at the Royal Court. Each of the six remaining artists, however, including David Hare, returned to work with the ESC during the seventies.

Howard Brenton was easily the most visible and
controversial writer from this group. Brenton's checkered relationship with the English Stage Company began several years before Lay By (1971). His debut piece with the ESC, the Sunday night production of It's My Criminal in 1966, appeared on a double bill following Joe Orton's riotous hit, The Ruffian on the Stair, but was largely ignored by audiences and reviewers. Brenton returned to the Royal Court in 1969, when Revenge, his first full-length play, was mounted in Theatre Upstairs. Because of Brenton's emphasis on political content and because of his apparent disregard for craft, Lindsay Anderson and other members of the ESC staff resisted producing Brenton's works. Even so, the Royal Court continued to stage his work throughout the seventies. Christie in Love and Fruit, were both directed by David Hare in the Theatre Upstairs in 1970; Hitler Dances (1972) and A Fart for Europe (1973), the latter co-written with David Edgar, were also produced upstairs. During his last months as resident dramatist Brenton received his first main bill production, Magnificence (1973). Although Brenton remained a political writer during the seventies, he displayed remarkable growth and maturity in creating the complex female lead in Plenty (1978), produced at the National Theatre. In the summer of 1980, the Royal Court staged his political lampoon aimed at the Thatcher government, A Short Sharp Shock! for the Government on its main bill. Later that year, Brenton's The Romans in Britain opened in the Olivier.
auditorium of the National Theatre and provoked as much harsh criticism and heated debate as any play since *Saved* (1965). The production depicted male homosexual rape on stage and compared this action to modern day British colonialism.

Snoo Wilson's first two projects at the Royal Court were *Lay By* and *England's Ireland*. Wilson had established a reputation as a fringe writer with *Pignight* (1969) and *Blow Job* (1971) prior to his arrival at the Court. On the strength of these works and his Sunday night contributions, the ESC commissioned Wilson to write a play for the Theatre Upstairs. The result, *The Pleasure Principle*, was directed by David Hare in 1973. Five years later on the main bill, Max Stafford-Clark directed *The Glad Hand* (1978), for which Wilson received the John Whiting Award.

David Edgar became one of the most prolific major dramatists in British alternative theatre, by authoring over forty scripts for radio, television and the stage. Prior to coming to the Royal Court, Edgar had written half a dozen plays produced by a relatively obscure fringe company, General Will. A few weeks after *England's Ireland*, the Theatre Upstairs produced Edgar's *State of Emergency* (1972), a one-act industrial political documentary. During the following years his work was performed by several alternative companies, such as the 7:84 Theatre Company and the Monstrous Regiment of Women. In 1978 Edgar's *Our Own People* appeared in the Theatre Upstairs by the fringe group, Pirate Jenny.
Edgar's major work at the Royal Court, *Mary Barnes*, received a main bill presentation in 1979 after transferring from Birmingham Rep Studio. In the next year his most notable project was his adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* for the RSC.

Tony Bicât and Stephen Poliakoff, like most of the other collaborators on the group projects, returned to the Court stage for subsequent productions. Bicât wrote the lyrics for David Hare's *Teeth 'n' Smiles*, directed Hare's *What Happened to Blake?* and presented his own play, *Devil's Island* (1977) in a Joint Stock production at the Court. Young Stephen Poliakoff caught the attention of Christopher Hampton (then seeking out new talent for the Court) with his first play, *Granny* (1969), running at Westminster School in London. On the strength of *Granny*, the ESC commissioned Poliakoff to write a second script, *Bambi Ramm* (1970); but the Court did not produce it. Nevertheless, Poliakoff responded positively to the ESC's interest and continued to write.17

After the Traverse Theatre produced *A Day With My Sister* (1970), Poliakoff came to the Royal Court in 1971 for the collaborative effort on *Lay By*. In June of 1972, Poliakoff's *Pretty Boy* (the author was only eighteen) was given a Sunday night production.18 Critics for *Pretty Boy* noticed the author's lack of control over the material as a mark of inexperience, but praised Poliakoff's creation of engaging characters.19 Poliakoff had no less than a dozen other works...
produced in London during the seventies, including Clever Soldiers (1974), Hitting Town (1975), and City Sugar (1975). After the Theatre Upstairs staged his play Heroes in 1975, Poliakoff received the 1976 Evening Standard Award.

Many of the writers associated with Lay By and England's Ireland, especially Brenton and Hare, held opinions which occasionally resulted in controversy or descention within the ESC during the early seventies. Their continued involvement at the Royal Court, however, was ultimately beneficial. Not only did their presence enhance the credibility of the company among members of the alternative theatre, but these artists also produced some of the most significant contributions to the English theatre during the seventies and the eighties on the stages of the Royal Court.

Other Major Sunday Night Writers During the Early Seventies

Several playwrights with previous professional experience were given productions without decor from 1970 through 1973. One of the more promising at this time was Keith Dewhurst, whose work was not unfamiliar to the ESC prior to his arrival at the Royal Court. Dewhurst had written over thirty scripts for television, many of them for the Z Cars series during the sixties; his only stage experience was a dismal production of his first play, Rafferty's Chant (1967) at the Mermaid. George Devine
contacted Dewhurst during the mid-sixties asking him to adapt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Dewhurst refused the offer but on the invitation of William Gaskill submitted another script, *Pirates* (1970), based on stories by Daniel Defoe.

Presented on Sunday night, *Pirates* was given an epic production with nineteen actors and musicians. Dewhurst recalls that opening (and closing) night as a "pressure packed" evening, of great importance to the careers of himself and the cast: "You had one shot. If you succeeded you got a real foothold in a very important door. If you didn't you were out. The prestige of the Royal Court was greater then. You couldn't get in. You could only be asked in."20

Dewhurst discovered that the most important benefits of a Sunday night production were the introductions to other artists. Dewhurst established a long and productive relationship with the director of *Pirates*, Bill Bryden, who also directed Dewhurst's musical *Corunna* (1971) in the Theatre Upstairs and for a tour of the universities of England. Bryden, Dewhurst, and several actors from the original production of *Pirates* collaborated on a number of projects at the National's small auditorium when Bryden became director of the Cottesloe in the late seventies.21

Dewhurst was enormously pleased to have *Pirates* presented on Sunday night. A play with such a large cast would have been difficult to mount elsewhere in London.
because of the prohibitive costs. Fortunately Dewhurst liked the unusual, yet simple scenic arrangements provided by the Royal Court:

The play . . . on the main bill at the time was Wedekind's Lulu, which had a set like a black cast iron cage at the zoo. It was a folding set. So we did Pirates with that set pushed to the sides of the stage. On two sides we had these great iron cages. The only thing we had for our set was the sightlines drawn on stage as white lines, which as sort of emblematic, because the play was set on a ship.22

Christopher Wilkinson, a Sunday night dramatist also produced by the Royal Court in 1970, had, like Dewhurst, demonstrated writing talent prior to arriving at the Royal Court. Wilkinson's fourth play, Strip Jack Naked (1970) was spotted by the ESC's assistant director, Roger Williams at the Sheffield Playhouse. Although several members of the Sheffield audience were offended by one scene (in which a coffin containing a live corpse was cut open with an electric saw), the ESC nevertheless invited the Sheffield company to perform the play at the Court on Sunday night.23 Wilkinson subsequently worked with David Hare and Howard Brenton on several Portable Theatre projects but produced no further work at the Royal Court. Some of Wilkinson's more controversial scripts, including Plays for Rubber Go-Go Girls (1971) and I Was Hitler's Maid (1971), have been described as excessively violent and pornographic. In the first of these
two plays women are represented on stage by life-sized inflatable dolls which are kicked and stabbed repeatedly by male characters.

Criticism of a different kind was leveled at William Gaskill for a controversial production of *Life Price* (1969) by Michael O'Neill and Jeremy Seabrook. This documentary, based on an incident in which a small girl is murdered, ran for several performances before empty houses. After Gaskill announced that the general public would be admitted free, *Life Price* began playing to capacity. Gaskill's actions provoked a running debate in the press and on television. Several critics, as well as the Arts Council of Great Britain, questioned the wisdom of Gaskill's experiment and cited a possible negative effect on London box offices and the payment of artists if a trend of free tickets were to materialize. The controversy over Gaskill's policy helped to focus more than the normal amount of attention on the authors of the play.

The ESC produced no further work by O'Neill and Seabrook on the main bill, but did present three other scripts by this writing team in the Sunday series and upstairs. *Morality* (1971) and *Millenium* (1973) were both directed in productions without decor by Roger Croucher. The latter was staged in the Theatre Upstairs, as was *Sex and Kinship in a Savage Society* in 1975.

During the years of the Gaskill-Page-Anderson
directorship, several other new writers received showings on Sunday night, but none subsequently produced a significant body of work. Robert Thornton showed promise with *The Big Romance* (1970) and *Johnny* (1974), but has not had any material produced since. Jonathan Hales had first made his mark at the Royal Court by directing a highly acclaimed production of E.A. Whitehead's *The Foursome* (1971) for the Theatre Upstairs. After becoming literary manager during the following year, he wrote *The Centaur* (1972), produced on Sunday night. Hales wrote only one other play for the Royal Court, *Brussels*, which he directed upstairs for the Young People's Theatre Scheme in 1972.25

The Sunday Night Series Between 1972 and 1975

Upon William Gaskill's resignation from the English Stage Company in 1972, the triumvirate directorship was dissolved, and Oscar Lewenstein became artistic director. Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page continued as associate directors. Lewenstein invited Albert Finney to join the ESC as a third associate director. At the time of his appointment Lewenstein could claim the longest continuous service of anyone affiliated with the English Stage Company. He had co-founded the organization, and served as council member of the Company since 1955. Prior to this he had served as general manager of the Royal Court Theatre from
Lewenstein can be credited with several significant accomplishments as artistic director. In 1974 he arranged a season of South African plays, which included Athol Fugard's *The Island*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*. In the following season, Lewenstein offered three Joe Orton revivals, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, *Loot*, and *What the Butler Saw*. Perhaps Lewenstein's most important achievement was the unity he brought to the Company. He sought to keep the Court's associate directors working and satisfied, while providing the younger artists in the Theatre Upstairs with a free reign to create new work.\(^{27}\)

While playwrights did not always profit greatly from the Sunday nights during the Lewenstein years, the actors and directors associated with the series sometimes did benefit. Buzz Goodbody directed David Caute's *The Fourth World* at the Royal Court in 1973, which provided her with an opportunity to showcase her directing ability. Although Caute's career was not greatly affected, Goodbody became one of the leading directors for the Royal Shakespeare Company within a year of her production without decor.\(^{28}\)

One of the highlights of the 1974 season was the production without decor of David Storey's *In Celebration* (1969). While Sunday night revivals of previously successful main bill productions were rare, the re-staging of *In Celebration* served a dual purpose. The original cast had
reassembled for a film of Storey's play under Lindsay Anderson's direction. In order to help the actors regain their characters, *In Celebration* was given a single performance. Furthermore, the membership of the English Stage Society was treated to an opportunity to view one of the most popular offerings of the 1969 season. ²⁹ A full house assembled in hopes of seeing the success of the earlier production repeated. This audience was not disappointed. ³⁰

Two important writers, Mary O'Malley and Caryl Churchill, were produced on Sunday night during Oscar Lewenstein's final year as artistic director of the Royal Court. O'Malley's *A 'Nevolent Society* was staged in the Theatre Upstairs on Sunday night in 1975. This surrealistic comedy centered on the bizarre antics and sexual fantasies of three Jewish brothers in the East End. The play had previously opened to a poor reception at the Open Space. Despite the second chance for her script, O'Malley had doubts about the value of a Sunday night production. She believed that reviews were meaningless for a "one night only" performance, and that audience response could be discounted when the house was composed mostly of friends and theatre artists. The general public simply could not be reached by a production without decor. Nevertheless, O'Malley needed the £50 offered by the ESC. A secondary incentive was the opportunity to recast one of the leading roles. The play's director, Henry Woolf, replaced one of the weaker performers
from the original production by assuming the part himself.

Prior to the Court production of "Nevolent Society" O'Malley had written Superscam, produced at the Soho Poly in 1972. She had also established a contact with the ESC in the person of Howard Brenton, whose writer's workshop she attended. He encouraged her to submit her scripts to the Royal Court. After the Sunday night performance, Ann Jellicoe and Nicholas Wright commissioned another work for a run in the Theatre Upstairs. The resulting play, Once A Catholic (1977), caught the attention of Oscar Lewenstein after his retirement as artistic director, and he produced a transfer of the play to Wyndham's Theatre in 1978. O'Malley's introduction to Lewenstein was thus, for her, the most significant benefit of a Sunday night production.

A second female dramatist, Caryl Churchill, needed no introduction to the Royal Court staff by the time her play, Moving Clocks Go Slow (1975), was mounted in the Theatre Upstairs on Sunday night. Churchill claimed that this play was "not important" to her career, because she had already written and produced a series of radio plays and half a dozen stage plays, including Owners, staged Upstairs at the Royal Court in 1972. After Owners, the ESC presented several more Churchill scripts including Objections to Sex and Violence (1975), Cloud Nine (1980), and Fen (1983) all on the main bill. Light Shining in Buckinghamshire (1976) and Three More Sleepless Nights (1980) were produced in the Theatre
Upstairs.

International Dramatists During the Seventies

While English playwrights during the seventies preferred the Theatre Upstairs or the fringe to a production without decor, many writers from abroad, including three dramatists from Australia, were eager to have their plays staged on Sunday night. Alexander Buzo, one of Australia's leading playwrights during the late sixties, had two Sunday night showings of The Front Room Boys in 1971. While serving as resident playwright at the Melbourne Theatre Company, Buzo had gained recognition with Norm and Ahmed (1968), a one-act piece depicting obsessive nationalism in Australian society and its devastating effect on a Pakistani student. His second play, Rooted, was produced in Canberra in the following year. The Front Room Boys, in the Court's production without decor, had a successful critical reception enabling Buzo to receive several London productions in theatres other than the Royal Court.

Another Australian dramatist, Gordon Graham, made his debut with the terrorist farce, Innocent Bystanders, given two performances in the Theatre Upstairs on the first Sunday night of January in 1975. Graham submitted a second play, All of the People, All of the Time, to the Royal Court but did not receive a production. In February, David Throsby, a professor of economics at Macquarie University, Sidney, the
third Australian writer at the Court on Sunday night, received a Sunday night production on the main stage with *Number One Rooster*, a satire on political corruption. Although the reviews were encouraging, critics noted that the Australians in the audience, best able to catch Throsby's allusions and jokes about his native land, supplied most of the laughter.34

Gordon Porterfield, the only American writer produced on Sunday night during the seventies, did not fare well with either audiences or reviewers. One critic described *Under the Clock* (1975) as a "pseudo pornographic melee" featuring a cavalcade of bizarre sexual images. Porterfield's play, similar in situation to Albee's *The Zoo Story*, received an unusually hostile press for an untested Sunday night writer.35

Two plays by an Israeli writer, Michael Almaz, were presented as a double bill without decor on Sunday in 1975. Both pieces, *The Port Said Performance* (1972) and *Sand* (1975), set in the Middle East, dealt with the theme of Zionism. Almaz, the co-founder of the Artaud Company, had written and produced half a dozen scripts for the fringe prior to his Sunday showing at the Royal Court. In the next few years Almaz wrote several plays staged at the Traverse, in Edinburgh, including *The Friend* (1976), *Diary of a Rat* (1977), and *F&H Play* (1979).

Productions by a pair of black playwrights concluded the Sunday night contributions of non-British dramatists in 1975.
Sebastian Clarke submitted *Soul of the Nation* to the Royal Court upon the recommendation of Mustapha Matura, a fellow Trinidadian author. Clarke's agit-prop drama depicts the courtroom shooting of an unarmed black prisoner by a brutal and corrupt British judge. Clarke insisted that this scene be staged realistically, but director Donald Howarth refused to do so, maintaining that such an incident had no basis in reality and should, therefore, be stylized when presented on the stage. Howarth won out despite protests from the author. Clarke believes that the lack of cooperation by Howarth caused his script to fail. *Soul of the Nation* was one of the few Sunday night showings detrimental to a writer's career. Clarke claims that an editor for *Plays and Players* refused to print his articles after seeing the play at the Royal Court.

Gegre Yohanse Asefaw's *A Tale of Three Cities*, produced Sunday, December 14, 1975, marked the debut of the only Ethiopian playwright staged at the Royal Court. Asefaw wrote this scathing satire on his country's military leaders in English rather than in his native language. Despite this handicap the ESC decided to mount the play because of the author's wit and his ability to depict the social values of a primitive nation in the twentieth century. *A Tale of Three Cities* became the final production of the Sunday night series.
The Termination of the Productions Without Decor

After the Theatre Upstairs closed in the fall of 1975, the English Stage Company could no longer justify supporting the Sunday night series. Notwithstanding the small budgets for sets and costumes, the productions without decor had become a financial burden by the mid-seventies. Salaries accounted for the largest increase in Sunday night costs during this period.  

When the series began in 1957, the ESC could depend on free Sunday labor from the stage management and the stage staff for the price of regular weekly salaries. During the mid-sixties, however, contracted union workers at the Royal Court were paid overtime for Sundays, and the overtime rates continued to increase sharply in the late sixties and early seventies. By 1975, the cost of opening the theatre on Sunday had become prohibitive. Likewise, skyrocketing Equity scales for actors helped to price the productions without decor out of existence; the minimum weekly salaries tripled between 1968 and 1975. Without extended runs, the Sunday night performances had no way of compensating for these increases.

Although co-artistic directors Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd found the money to reopen the Theatre Upstairs in May of 1976, the ESC did not appropriate funds to extend the Sunday night productions beyond December of 1975. The Theatre Upstairs offered several advantages over the
productions without decor; first, it was not subject to the stringent union contracts and overtime rates applicable to the main stage; secondly, it could provide extended runs and larger production budgets for scenery and costumes; and finally, the flexibility of the space in the roof of the Court could not be matched by the proscenium theatre downstairs. 42

With the Theatre Upstairs in operation, the ESC was able to remain competitive in a changing artistic climate throughout the seventies. Playwrights in this decade were not attached to theatres out of loyalty, as they had been in the fifties and sixties, for an array of options for producing their scripts had emerged, ranging from the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, to lunchtime and alternative groups.43 By reopening the Theatre Upstairs, the ESC attracted more new artists to the Royal Court, and secured the return of previous Royal Court writers like Michael Hastings and Heathcote Williams. David Hare attributes the ESC's continuous success in this area to the theatre's willingness and ability to accommodate the dramatists' needs: "the only reason that writers return to a theatre is that they feel comfortable there and the reason they feel comfortable . . . at the Royal Court is because it pays attention to their requirements." 44 The ESC discontinued the productions without decor because they were artistically and economically inadequate to meet the needs
and requirements of playwrights during the mid-seventies.

Alternatives to the Sunday Series

The idea of a low-cost program of short-term engagements for presenting and developing scripts did not die with the termination of the Sunday night series in 1975. The ESC utilized two other methods for producing new plays during the seventies and early eighties. A series of rehearsed readings was implemented while Stuart Burge was artistic director in 1978.

Burge assumed leadership of the ESC in 1977, shortly after the resignation of Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd. He resisted suggestions that the ESC again close the Theatre Upstairs in order to concentrate the resources of the company on the main bill. Not only did Burge keep the upstairs space open, but his rehearsed readings initiated a new plan for producing the work of relatively inexperienced playwrights. The readings were staged in the Theatre Upstairs on selected weekends between regular production. Actors were paid the minimum equity salary for a week and rehearsed for three or four days to present readings before the general public on Friday, Saturday, and sometimes Sunday nights. Props were mimed or suggested during these readings, and actors were usually dressed in street clothes. Actors not involved in a scene were often seated upstage so that "entrances" could be
made by merely rising and moving forward. Blocking and
business were kept to minimum since the performers were bound
to their scripts.⁴⁶

The first rehearsed reading, Bukharin, by Andy McSmith,
was directed by Les Waters in August of 1978. In March of
1979 the ESC produced three rehearsed readings in a single
evening: A Question of Habit by Jackie Holborough, and two
plays by David Stephens, The Irish Soldier, and Old Ed'll Fix
It. Altogether the Royal Court staged nine rehearsed
readings during Burge's three year tenure at the Royal Court.

Max Stafford-Clark continued the rehearsed readings
after he became artistic director in 1979, staging seven
plays in this series during his first year at the Royal
Court. The most notable of these was Paul Kember's Not Quite
Jerusalem in 1980. On the basis of the audience response to
the reading, Kember rewrote his play which received a
successful production on the main bill in 1980, followed by a
revival in 1982.⁴⁷

One unusual feature of the rehearsed readings was the
cooperative effort between the ESC and the Royal Shakespeare
Company in producing four plays during the summer of 1980. A
program for one of the readings noted that this project
marked the first time that "both companies have worked in
association." The program continued by underscoring the
common interest of both organizations "in developing the work
of new writers."⁴⁸ The cost for several of the rehearsed

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readings, including those jointly produced by the ESC and the RSC, were partially underwritten by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.  

A second program designed to develop new material during the seventies was the Young People's Theatre Scheme. After Jane Howell left the ESC and the Schools Scheme, Pam Brighton took charge of the newly formed YPTS in 1970. Brighton's group staged revivals of Royal Court standards, including *Live Like Pigs* and *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, with casts of teenage actors. The YPTS also presented collective creations such as *Show Me the Way to Go Home*.  

Joan Mills became director of the Young People's Theatre Scheme in 1972 and helped to initiate an important contest for scripts by young dramatists. The winning playwrights in this competition received a professional production at the Royal Court in the Theatre Upstairs. In 1974 the first annual Young Writer's Festival presented six plays to enthusiastic audiences and reviews. Between 1974 and 1980, this festival produced over twenty different plays by writers under eighteen. Several of the scripts were given extended professional engagements in the Theatre Upstairs. The most outstanding play to emerge from the Festival, *The Arbor*, by Andrea Dunbar, ran for three weeks on the Royal Court's main bill in 1980.  

After Gerald Chapman was appointed director of the YPTS in 1976, he secured a Gulbenkian Foundation grant of just
under £10,000 to assist the discovery and encouragement of young writing talent. Chapman was particularly successful in developing plays by urban minorities, including Africans, Bengalis, and West Indians. Chapman acquired an unused garage as a rehearsal and performance space for his young artists in 1977. The Garage, located around the corner from the Royal Court Theatre, became important to the identity of this program. Nicholas Wright, placed in charge in 1979, formed the Young Writer's Group to provide workshops for school age dramatists.

Like the Sunday night series, the rehearsed readings emphasized the script over sets and costumes, as did the Young People's Theatre Scheme which has a great deal in common with the productions without decor. The YPTS focused primarily on developing talent for the future, always an important goal for the Sunday night program. While the productions without decor presented plays dealing with the subject matter of third world countries, the YPTS, under Gerald Chapman, produced scripts by the children of immigrants trying to adjust to a new home in England. The YPTS, therefore, picked up where the Sunday night productions left off. Finally, during the late seventies, the Young People's Theatre Scheme became a popular program with many of the writers who began their careers with productions without decor. Edward Bond, Heathcote Williams, Nicholas Wright, Christopher Hampton, and others who had
participated in the Sunday night series, returned to the Royal Court to write plays involving students, to conduct workshops, or to assist in group discussions. By giving of their time and talent these Sunday night writers provided an important link and point of contact between two generations of Royal Court artists.

The English Stage Company never lost sight of George Devine's original goal of developing young artists for the English stage. This commitment was grounded in the practical necessity of "sharpening the spear" or replenishing the pool of talent and the staff at the Royal Court. In the fifties and sixties the Sunday night productions were the most effective means of finishing the training of new directors and writers. During the seventies and eighties the Theatre Upstairs, the YPTS, and the rehearsed readings assumed this role. These three programs are an indication of the company's vitality, flexibility, and resourcefulness in meeting challenges that George Devine could not have foreseen.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER VI

1 The other members included Mrs. Neville Blond; Nicholas Wright, director of the Theatre Upstairs; Helen Montagu, general manager of the ESC; Jon Catty, business manager; and Lois Sieff, chairman of the committee.

2 Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting for the English Stage Society, 7 Jan. 1970.


7 Hampton, interview, 24 July 1980.

8 Letter received from David Hare, 7 Dec. 1983.

9 Ansorge, Plays and Players, p. 28.

10 Hare, letter, 7 Dec. 1983.

11 Hare, "Time of Unease," in At the Royal Court: 25 Years of the English Stage Company, p. 141.

12 Browne, Playwright's Theatre, p. 100.

13 Ansorge, Disrupting the Spectacle, p. 51.
14 Hare, "Time of Unease," in At the Royal Court: 25 Years of the English Stage Company, p. 141.


20 Personal Interview with Keith Dewhurst, 4 Aug. 1980.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


24 "Freeing the Theatre," The Times, 1 March 1969.


Goodbody's brief but brilliant career ended with her suicide in 1975.


Letter received from Oscar Lewenstein, 8 Dec. 1983.


Personal Interview with Mary O'Malley, 7 Aug. 1980.

Personal Interview with Caryl Churchill, 8 Aug. 1980.

"Royal Court Number One Rooster," rev. of *Number One Rooster*, by David Throsby, *The Stage*, 20 Feb. 1975.


Several of Matura's plays were staged by the ESC during the seventies including *As Time Goes By* (1971), *Play Mas* (1974), and *Black Slaves, White Chains* (1975).
Personal Interview with Sebastian Clarke, 16 July 1980.

English Stage Company's Reader's Report, dated 1975, from the author's collection.

Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd were appointed as co-artistic directors in the fall of 1975, after Oscar Lewenstein resigned.

Letter received from A.C. Penn, Director of Statistics, Department of Employment, United Kingdom, 2 July 1984.

Letter received from C.R. Lacy Thompson, Secretary, The Society of West End Theatres, 9 Aug. 1984.


Letter received from Stuart Burge, 14 March 1984.


48  Not Quite Jerusalem, by Paul Kember, Program of a production by the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs Rehearsed Readings, 25 July 1980.

49  Ibid.

50  Findlater, At the Royal Court, p. 191.

51  Ibid.
CONCLUSION

George Devine had originally envisioned the Sunday night series as one of several "training schemes" for young artists at the Royal Court. The most useful aspect of the productions without decor was, in fact, the training ground and the showcase that it provided for playwrights, as well as for the company's own directors and staff. Among the more important ESC artists who benefited from this program were resident dramatists Christopher Hampton, Howard Brenton, and David Hare; and directors John Dexter, Keith Johnstone, Peter Gill, Lindsay Anderson, William Gaskill, and Nicholas Wright. The latter three eventually served as artistic directors for the company.

For playwrights, the productions without decor represented an additional opportunity to display their works before the London theatre community. Prior to the opening of the Theatre Upstairs, the Sunday night series presented seventy-three new plays by sixty-three playwrights during a period when non-commercial productions had few stages. Furthermore, at least six of these plays could not have been presented on either the main bill or in other British houses because of restrictions by the Lord Chamberlain. A few writers, such as Edward Bond and Michael Hastings, believed

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their Sunday night scripts deserved a slot on the main bill. Most of the Sunday night dramatists in the fifties and sixties, however, found the series useful, as a learning experience, or helpful in furthering their careers.

One aspect of the program difficult to measure is the incentive the Sunday night productions offered for writers who otherwise might not have submitted their scripts to the ESC. The number of scripts received by the Royal Court increased dramatically during 1957, the first year of the Sunday night series. Probably this phenomenon can be attributed more to the aftermath of Look Back in Anger than to the program of productions without decor. But the Sunday series was an integral part of the ESC's service to dramatists, and they ultimately played a role in increasing the quantity and the quality of writing for the English Stage. This auxiliary program augmented the thrust of the main bill productions in a positive, innovative way, especially, in the early years, when critical attention to the Sunday night series was unstinted and fresh with the excitement of a new direction in theatrical practice.

Despite the program's contributions in these areas, it could not have been sustained if it had disturbed the day to day operation of the company. Practical considerations, including space, storage, and rehearsals for the series, were seldom disrupting, however, since it was understood from the outset that the productions without decor would be scheduled

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around main bill productions. The budget and the manpower of
the ESC were not taxed by the Sunday night series until the
seventies, when rising costs made the program impractical.
During the Devine years and during the first two years of the
Gaskill regime, actors and directors who were not employed in
main bill presentations generally welcomed the opportunity to
participate in classes, studio work, or productions without
decor. The benefits of the series diminished when more
desirable alternatives for these artists surfaced beginning
in 1969.

Some questioned, especially in the late sixties, the
usefulness of a program which furnished limited sets and
costumes and provided only one, or at most two showings for
new plays. Of thirty-six Sunday night directors, actors, and
playwrights contacted in person and by mail, only Michael
Hastings, Edward Bond, David Hare, and Mary O'Malley believed
that the productions without decor failed as a useful means of
presenting plays. Each of these writers cited the restricted
number of performances as a reason for their lack of
enthusiasm about the series. The other thirty-two artists
considered the program a useful way of staging a play,
despite the lack of decor and limited performances. Of the
thirty-six artists contacted, twenty-four were playwrights.
Three dramatists, Donald Howarth, John Antrobus, and Keith
Dewhurst, believed that the bare stage actually enhanced the
presentation of their scripts.
While the Sunday night series could be useful to many dramatists, the staff of the English Stage Company recognized that the productions without decor were not appropriate for every writer. Dramatists who had previously been staged on the main bill, for instance, might not benefit from Sunday nights. Arnold Wesker, with his requirement of a large cast for *The Kitchen*, was an exception. William Gaskill believed it inappropriate to give Sunday night writers a production without decor for a second play. The dramatists who profited most from the Sunday night presentations generally fell within three categories: (1) artists from abroad, previously unknown or unproduced in England, (2) writers from other media, such as television, radio, or film, (3) young or aspiring playwrights, displaying talent but lacking maturity or development in their craft. These artists viewed the Sunday night series as an appropriate arena for a debut and were happy to have their scripts assigned a production without decor.

What was the appropriateness of the series in terms of the alternatives to the productions without decor and to full-scale mainstage productions? Any professional theatre producing new scripts on a regular basis has several options in presenting new material. The cheapest and most expeditious method is a cold or unrehearsed reading of the play before a small, usually invited audience. For a slightly larger sum of money and a few days invested in rehearsal, a theatre can
hold a staged or rehearsed reading of a script, or a series of readings as the Royal Court did during the late seventies and early eighties. A third option is a workshop in which a writer collaborates with a director and a cast in creating a script for production. This process was typical of the work of Joint Stock at the Royal Court during the seventies. A final option for staging new work is the full production in a small house, similar to the Theatre Upstairs. With the exception of the unrehearsed readings, each was practiced at the Royal Court after 1969. Except for the Theatre Upstairs, these alternatives were always available to the staff of the ESC should they choose to implement them. Nevertheless, the company remained convinced, at least until the late sixties, that the Sunday night series was the most appropriate means for staging new work.

During the fifties and sixties the productions without decor were never viewed by the ESC or by playwrights as an inferior or second-rate forum. Instead these presentations generally were treated by the staff, the artists, the audiences, and the reviewers as works by developing writers, which deserved a professional production and the attention of the public and press. This benevolent attitude inevitably resulted in an atmosphere that was relatively free from financial and critical pressure. Most writers welcomed the chance to learn from the experience, and a few were able to launch careers due to the exposure they received.
In examining the quality of the Sunday night productions at the Royal Court, one should keep in mind several differences between this program and the main bill. First, the productions without decor were rehearsed for only two weeks as opposed to the four, six, or eight weeks allowed for plays on the main bill. Second, while the actors for Sunday nights were paid, their salaries were only a fraction of those received by performers on the main bill. Finally, the Sunday night productions, unlike those on the main bill, had no chance to grow over the course of several performances.

According to many of the artists involved, the series maintained consistently high standards. None of the twenty-four playwrights contacted believed that his Sunday night production suffered from a lack of talent or energy on the part of actors, directors, or technical crews. Only David Cregan and Sebastian Clarke quarreled with the "interpretation" of the director. Occasionally reviewers faulted the artists: Leonard Kingston, acting in his own play, and the cast for Thomas Murphy's *Famine*, are examples of this. Generally, however, the actors, directors, and technical crews devoted to the Sunday night productions the same care and artistry accorded the main bill despite the adverse factors of limited time and money. Many of these actors and directors had, of course, either worked on the main bill, or were being tested or trained for further responsibilities with the ESC.
The artistic merit of the Sunday night series during the eighteen years of its existence is best exemplified by the quality of the writing. The series produced at least twelve works: Wesker's The Kitchen, Bond's The Pope's Wedding, and Early Morning, Orton's The Ruffian on the Stair, Hampton's When Did You Last See My Mother?, Lawrence's A Collier's Friday Night, Arden's The Waters of Babylon, Simpson's A Resounding Tinkle, Rosen's Backbone, Thomas' The Keep, Hastings' The World's Baby, and Thomas Osborn's translation of Wedekind's Spring Awakening. With the exception of Early Morning, all of the above plays won critical acclaim.

The critics' reactions, however, were not always an accurate means of assessing the quality of writing at the Royal Court. Far more important in determining the ESC's opinion of a writer and his script was the support or commitment of the staff. The ESC displayed its confidence in most of these playwrights by producing a significant body of their work. The eleven dramatists listed above accounted for no less than forty-six different runs of plays either on the main bill or in the Theatre Upstairs. The legacy of the series is in fact not only the Sunday night play's themselves, but the quality of the subsequent material produced by Sunday night writers who were encouraged and sustained by the ESC.

After 1969 the quality of the plays themselves, as well as the usefulness and the appropriateness of the series
became questionable in the opinion of many members of the ESC staff, including David Hare, Nicholas Wright, and Howard Brenton. The decline of the program has been attributed to the rise of the fringe and the opening of the Theatre Upstairs. The continuance of the Sunday night series until 1975, in light of the drastic changes in the late sixties and early seventies, is, perhaps, more difficult to account for. One explanation lies in the solid record of achievement compiled by the productions without decor during the fifties and sixties. Several of the Court's artistic directors, including Gaskill, Anderson, and Nicholas Wright, had been given their first opportunities to direct on Sunday night. Numerous actors, directors, and playwrights, previously cited in this study, had either been discovered or had made their Royal Court debuts as a result of the productions without decor. Because the Council and the artistic staff could never be certain that the productions without decor would not produce more new talent, the program remained intact for six years beyond what many artists believed should have been its natural life span.

In addition to its usefulness, appropriateness, and quality, the Sunday night series also helped fulfill long-range objectives of the ESC. The Sunday night program was initiated to offer more new plays for less money. The ESC achieved this goal not only by reducing production expenses for sets and costumes, but also by presenting plays
for one, or in some cases two performances, thus avoiding running costs, particularly actors' salaries. After the Theatre Upstairs opened, the lack of additional performances rather than the lack of decor limited the appeal of the series for many playwrights and actors.

Although the series succeeded in producing an average of six additional new plays per season for a small amount of money, one of the ESC's goals related to the Sunday night series was not realized: drawing a broad popular audience. Sunday night audiences, like those of the main bill and the Theatre Upstairs, were limited to a small segment of the population, usually young, educated, liberal in political thought, and often active themselves in London theatre. Although the English Stage Society sought to expand support for the ESC, the audience size for the Sunday series was restricted by several factors: a limited amount of seats for a one-night showing, a minimum age of eighteen, and a requirement for advanced purchase of membership. Several attempts to involve young audiences or artists failed. Productions like Jellicoe's *The Rising Generation* were often onetime events, as opposed to the more fully developed Schools Scheme or the Young People's Theatre Scheme.

Despite the fact that the ESC had several clearly defined goals, it apparently did not develop any consistent means of evaluating and recording the progress of specific strategies for achieving these goals, particularly the Sunday
night series. Records of annual budgets were kept, of course, as well as minutes of various ESC and English Stage Society committee meetings. These records indicate that the group discussed specific productions without decor. Usually these discussions related to a transfer of the production or to extending performances for a second Sunday night. The Executive Committee meeting of the Society in 1970, mentioned at the beginning of Chapter IV, does address the decline of the Sunday night series and possible alternatives or improvements. But this consideration of the value of the program is the exception rather than the rule. While the quality of a writing program for fledgling dramatists may be difficult to assess in concrete terms, other areas of the Sunday night series could have been routinely monitored and measured. Nowhere in the annals of the Society or the ESC is there any indication that the company regularly evaluated the manpower, space, or time devoted to the program. Only the financial records relevant to the series were maintained regularly. Had the Artistic Council of the ESC initiated a comprehensive evaluation of the Sunday series, the program might have evolved differently during the seventies.

Several explanations can be offered for the absence of internal evaluation of the productions without decor. First, the Royal Court, like many arts organizations during the fifties and sixties, was not extremely sophisticated in arts administration. The artistic director was often trusted by
the council of the ESC to make a number of administrative as
well as artistic decisions. Keeping the theatre afloat
financially and maintaining a quality product on the main
bill of the Royal Court were the two major concerns of the
artistic director and his staff. Since the Sunday night
series contributed quietly and efficiently until the
mid-seventies, it was not closely questioned or scrutinized.
Because the English Stage Society was technically responsible
for the productions without decor and because the series was
not supported by a grant from the Arts Council, the Council
of the ESC in the early seventies was not inclined to alter
or improve this program.

Although the ESC closed the productions without decor
because of increased salaries, the company could have sought
outside sources of funding for the series if it had so
desired. The Gulbenkian Foundation money, for example, was
secured for both the Young People's Theatre Scheme and for
the rehearsed readings. In 1975 the ESC finally recognized
that the time had come to support other means of presenting
new plays. The Sunday night series was not missed, mourned,
or eulogized by any of the artists, past or present, at the
Royal Court. Because the Sunday nights were not associated
with any one person, but rather with an idea that had
undergone transformation, the passing of the series went
virtually unnoticed by the ESC. Understandably, the company
itself has been too occupied with new plays, projects, and
programs to reassess the role of the productions without decor. This study has, therefore, attempted to reconsider an important chapter in the history of the English Stage Company.
Other Sunday night writers who also made significant contributions include Derek Walcott, Barry Reckord, Peter Gill, Adrienne Kennedy, Nicholas Wright, John Antrobus, Keith Dewhurst, Stephen Poliakoff, Wole Soyinka and Mary O'Malley.

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## APPENDIX

A Calendar of Productions Without Decor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Director</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26 May</td>
<td>The Correspondence Course</td>
<td>Charles Robinson</td>
<td>Peter Coe</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 June</td>
<td>Yes--and After</td>
<td>Michael Hastings</td>
<td>John Dexter</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>The Waiting of Lester Abbs</td>
<td>Kathleen Sully</td>
<td>Lindsay Anderson</td>
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<td>20 Oct.</td>
<td>The Waters of Babylon</td>
<td>John Arden</td>
<td>Graham Evans</td>
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<td>1 Dec.</td>
<td>A Resounding Tinkle</td>
<td>N.F. Simpson</td>
<td>William Gaskill</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Feb.</td>
<td>Love from Margaret</td>
<td>Evelyn Ford</td>
<td>John Wood</td>
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<td>9 March</td>
<td>The Tenth Chance</td>
<td>Stuart Holroyd</td>
<td>Anthony Creighton</td>
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<td>23 March</td>
<td>Each His Own Wilderness</td>
<td>Doris Lessing</td>
<td>John Dexter</td>
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<td>22 June</td>
<td>Brixham Regatta</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
<td>William Gaskill</td>
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<tr>
<td>For Children</td>
<td></td>
<td>George Hulme</td>
<td>Phil Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Sept.</td>
<td>Lady on the Barometer (later retitled Sugar in the Morning)</td>
<td>Donald Howarth</td>
<td>Miriam Brickman &amp; Donald Howarth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Nov.</td>
<td>More Like Strangers</td>
<td>George Hulme</td>
<td>Phil Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Feb. 1959</td>
<td><strong>Progress to the Park</strong></td>
<td>Alun Owen</td>
<td>Lindsay Anderson</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 March</td>
<td><strong>A Resounding Tinkle</strong> (Cambridge ADC)</td>
<td>N.F. Simpson</td>
<td>John Bird</td>
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<td>19 April</td>
<td><strong>Leonce and Lena</strong></td>
<td>Georg Buchner (transl. Michael Geliot)</td>
<td>Michael Geliot</td>
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<td>26 April</td>
<td><strong>The Trial of Cob and Leach</strong></td>
<td>Christopher Logue</td>
<td>Lindsay Anderson</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Jazzetry</strong></td>
<td>Christopher Logue</td>
<td>Lindsay Anderson</td>
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<td>17 May</td>
<td><strong>The Shameless Professor</strong></td>
<td>Luigi Pirandello</td>
<td>Victor Rietti</td>
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<td>5 Sept.</td>
<td><strong>Eleven Men Dead at Hola Camp</strong></td>
<td>Keith Johnstone &amp;</td>
<td>William Gaskill</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Keith Johnstone &amp;</td>
<td>William Gaskill</td>
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<td>6 Sept.</td>
<td><strong>The Kitchen</strong></td>
<td>Arnold Wesker</td>
<td>John Dexter</td>
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<td>1 Nov.</td>
<td><strong>The Invention</strong></td>
<td>Wole Soyinka</td>
<td>Wole Soyinka</td>
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<td>22 Nov.</td>
<td><strong>The Naming of Murderer's Rock</strong></td>
<td>Frederick Bland</td>
<td>John Bird</td>
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<td>1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Jan.</td>
<td><strong>Christopher Sly</strong></td>
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<td>Colin Graham</td>
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<td><strong>Music:</strong> Thomas Eastwood</td>
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<td><strong>Libretto:</strong> Ronald Duncan</td>
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<td>20 March</td>
<td><strong>One Leg Over</strong></td>
<td>Albert Bermel</td>
<td>John Blatchley</td>
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<td>10 April</td>
<td><strong>Eleven Plus</strong></td>
<td>Kon Fraser</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
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<td>1 May</td>
<td><strong>The Sport of My Mad Mother</strong> (Bristol Old Vic Theatre School)**</td>
<td>Ann Jellicoe</td>
<td>Jane Howell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 July</td>
<td>Sea at Dauphin</td>
<td>Derek Walcott</td>
<td>Lloyd Reckord</td>
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<td>Six in the Rain</td>
<td>Derek Walcott</td>
<td>Lloyd Reckord</td>
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<td>7 Aug.</td>
<td>The Keep</td>
<td>Gwyn Thomas</td>
<td>Graham Crowden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Oct.</td>
<td>You in Your Small Corner</td>
<td>(Cheltenham Theatre Co.)</td>
<td>Barry Reckord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John Bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Nov.</td>
<td>The Maimed</td>
<td>Bartho Smit</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Dec.</td>
<td>On the Wall</td>
<td>Henry Chapman</td>
<td>Peter Duguid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 May</td>
<td>The Departures</td>
<td>Jacques Languirand</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(transl. Albert Bermel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Blatchley</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 May</td>
<td>The Triple Alliance</td>
<td>J.A. Cuddon</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 June</td>
<td>Empress With Teapot</td>
<td>R.B. Whiting</td>
<td>Nicholas Garland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Aug.</td>
<td>Humphrey, Armand, and the</td>
<td>G. Roy Levin</td>
<td>Piers Haggard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artichoke</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Nov.</td>
<td>Orison</td>
<td>Fernando Arrabal</td>
<td>Nicholas Garland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(transl. Barbara Wright)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fando and Lis</td>
<td>Fernando Arrabal</td>
<td>Nicholas Garland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(transl. Barbara Wright)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Dec.</td>
<td>The Scarecrow</td>
<td>Derek Marlowe</td>
<td>Corin Redgrave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28 Jan.</td>
<td>Sacred Cow</td>
<td>Kon Fraser</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Feb.</td>
<td>Twelfth Night</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>George Devine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>The Captain's Hero</td>
<td>Claus Gubalek (transl. Derek Goldby)</td>
<td>Derek Goldby</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Sept.</td>
<td>Day of the Prince</td>
<td>Frank Hilton</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Dec.</td>
<td>The Pope's Wedding</td>
<td>Edward Bond</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 April</td>
<td>Skyvers</td>
<td>Barry Reckord</td>
<td>Ann Jellicoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 April</td>
<td>Spring Awakening</td>
<td>Frank Wedekind (transl. Thomas Osborn)</td>
<td>Desmond O'Donovan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 July</td>
<td>Wiley or God in a Machine</td>
<td>Mack McCormick</td>
<td>Elain Pransky</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Dec.</td>
<td>Edgware Road Blues (later retitled Traveling Light)</td>
<td>Leonard Kingston</td>
<td>Keith Johnstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(No productions without decor due to remodeling)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 Feb.</td>
<td>The Sleeper's Den</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
<td>Desmond O'Donovan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 April</td>
<td>Miniatures</td>
<td>David Cregan</td>
<td>Donald Howarth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Aug.</td>
<td>A Collier's Friday Night</td>
<td>D.H. Lawrence</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Aug.</td>
<td>The World's Baby</td>
<td>Michael Hastings</td>
<td>Patrick Dromgoole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>23 Jan.</td>
<td>Transcending</td>
<td>David Cregan</td>
<td>Jane Howell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dancers</td>
<td>David Cregan</td>
<td>Jane Howell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>Little Guy, Napoleon</td>
<td>Leonard Pluta</td>
<td>Tom Osborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Local Stigmatism</td>
<td>Heathcote Williams</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 June</td>
<td>When Did You Last See My Mother?</td>
<td>Christopher Hampton</td>
<td>Robert Kidd</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 June</td>
<td>Bartleby</td>
<td>Massimo Manuelli</td>
<td>Massimo Manuelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Local Stigmatism</td>
<td>Heathcote Williams</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Aug.</td>
<td>The Ruffian on the Stair</td>
<td>Joe Orton</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's My Criminal</td>
<td>Howard Brenton</td>
<td>Ian Watt-Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 Oct.</td>
<td>A Provincial Life</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
<td>Peter Gill</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 March</td>
<td>A Touch of Brightness</td>
<td>Partap Sharma</td>
<td>Ian Watt-Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 April</td>
<td>A View to the Common</td>
<td>James Casey</td>
<td>Desmond O'Donovan</td>
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<td>23 July</td>
<td>Dance of the Teletape</td>
<td>Charles Hayward</td>
<td>Charles Hayward</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Rising Generation</td>
<td>Ann Jellicoe</td>
<td>Jane Howell</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Oct.</td>
<td>The Journey of the Fifth Horse</td>
<td>Ronald Ribman</td>
<td>Bill Bryden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1968</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Feb.</td>
<td>Backbone</td>
<td>Michel Rosen</td>
<td>Bill Bryden</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 March</td>
<td>Early Morning</td>
<td>Edward Bond</td>
<td>William Gaskill</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 April</td>
<td>A Lesson in a Dead</td>
<td>Adrienne Kennedy</td>
<td>Rob Knights</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funnyhouse of a Negro</td>
<td>Adrienne Kennedy</td>
<td>Rob Knights</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Aug.</td>
<td>Changing Lines</td>
<td>Nicholas Wright</td>
<td>Nicholas Wright</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Oct.</td>
<td>The Tutor</td>
<td>Jacob Lenz</td>
<td>Barry Hanson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(adapt. Bertolt Brecht, transl. Richard Grunberger)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>Captain Oates' Left Sock</td>
<td>John Antrobus</td>
<td>Barry Hanson</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Nov.</td>
<td>Famine</td>
<td>Thomas Murphy</td>
<td>Clifford Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Feb.</td>
<td>The Big Romance</td>
<td>Robert Thornton</td>
<td>Roger Williams</td>
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<td>10 May</td>
<td>Strip Jack Naked</td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Colin George</td>
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<td>13 Dec.</td>
<td>Pirates</td>
<td>Keith Dewhurst</td>
<td>Bill Bryden</td>
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<td>1971</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 Jan.</td>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>Michael O'Neill</td>
<td>Roger Croucher &amp; Jeremy Seabrook</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Sept.</td>
<td>Lay By (Portable and Traverse Theatres)</td>
<td>Howard Brenton, Snoo Wilson &amp; Brian Clark, Trevor Griffiths, David Hare, Stephen Poliakoff, Hugh Stoddart, &amp; Snoo Wilson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Oct.</td>
<td>The Front Room Boys</td>
<td>Alexander Buzo</td>
<td>Clive Donner</td>
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<td>1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 March</td>
<td>The Centaur</td>
<td>Jonathan Hales</td>
<td>Jonathan Hales</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 June</td>
<td>Pretty Boy</td>
<td>Stephen Poliakoff</td>
<td>Colin Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Oct.</td>
<td>England's Ireland</td>
<td>Tony Bicat, David Hare &amp; Snoo</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Howard Brenton, Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brian Clark, David Edgar, Francis Fuchs, David Hare &amp; Snoo Wilson</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 March</td>
<td>The Fourth World</td>
<td>David Caute</td>
<td>Buzz Goodbody</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 June</td>
<td>Millenium</td>
<td>Michael O'Neill</td>
<td>Roger Croucher &amp; Jeremy Seabrook</td>
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<td>1974</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 April</td>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>Robert Thornton</td>
<td>John Tydeman</td>
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<td>25 Aug.</td>
<td>Taking Stock</td>
<td>Robert Holman</td>
<td>Chris Parr</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Oct.</td>
<td>In Celebration</td>
<td>David Storey</td>
<td>Lindsay Anderson</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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<td>5 Jan.</td>
<td>Innocent Bystanders (Upstairs)</td>
<td>Gordon Graham</td>
<td>Denise Coffey</td>
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<td>19 Jan.</td>
<td>Sand:</td>
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<td>Moments on Jaffa Beach</td>
<td>Michael Almaz</td>
<td>Peter Stevenson</td>
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<td>The Port Said Performance</td>
<td>Michael Almaz</td>
<td>Peter Stevenson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Feb.</td>
<td><strong>Number One Rooster</strong></td>
<td>David Throsby</td>
<td>William Alexander</td>
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<td>15 June</td>
<td><strong>Moving Clocks Go Slow</strong> (Upstairs)</td>
<td>Caryl Churchill</td>
<td>John Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 July</td>
<td><strong>A 'Nevolent Society</strong> (Upstairs)</td>
<td>Mary O'Malley</td>
<td>Henry Woolf</td>
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<td><strong>Soul of the Nation</strong></td>
<td>Sebastian Clarke</td>
<td>Donald Howarth</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Oct.</td>
<td><strong>Asleep at the Wheel</strong> (Upstairs)</td>
<td>David Coulter</td>
<td>John Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Dec.</td>
<td><strong>A Tale of Three Cities</strong></td>
<td>Gebre Yohanse</td>
<td>Nicholas Wright</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Gordon Maxwell Bolar was born in Forest City, Arkansas on March 9, 1948. He graduated from Hall High School in Little Rock in 1966 and completed a B.A. in theatre at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas in 1970. He attended Ohio University on a Shubert Playwriting Fellowship and received an M.F.A. in directing in 1972. He taught in theatre departments at Hendrix, Arkansas College, and the University of Rhode Island. Prior to earning a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University, he entered the field of arts administration. He is currently Performing Arts Coordinator and Arts in Education Coordinator for the Louisiana Division of the Arts in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Candidate: Gordon M. Bolar
Major Field: Speech Communication, Theatre, and Communication Disorders
Title of Thesis: "The Sunday Night Productions Without Decor at the Royal Court Theatre, 1957-1975"

Date of Examination: 3 December 1984

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination: 3 December 1984