



Emergence of New Western Thought in the Drama of David Edger

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Abstract : British theatre shifts and procures towards a steady socialist perspective and provides an alternative view of the theatre as the very locus of political upheaval and social debate. David Edger relates to this category of dramatists who combines contemporary political awareness and social concern. He is credited to have published more than sixty plays, performed on stage, radio and television around the world. The scope of his dramas range on various topics that includes

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British fascism, Thatcherite politics, utopian communities of the sixties, political defectors, the collapse of communism in eastern Europe and most recently American politics and British multiculturalism. Thus, the continuing diversity and immediacy of Edgar's plays are fascinating for critics and audiences alike. For research scholars who attempt a comprehensive study of his work, these qualities pose a daunting challenge. Yet considering the scope of political and social spectrum, his work requires undaunted research which will help understanding not only British but European zeitgeist as such.

European history commentators place the genesis of the idea of a united Europe firmly in the aftermath of the Second World War. . Although during the interwar period a number of visionaries advocated an integrated political project for Europe, the real energy behind these ideas emerged after the Second World War when a united Europe offered a possible solution to the problem of French, German rivalry, which was seen as the root cause of three European wars since 1870. The Cold War also provided a powerful stimulus to mutual defense and political integration. The US was more ambivalent about creating a rival economic power, the Cold War kept western European integration a sold parts of US foreign policy. Germany's Chancellors Conrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt led their country into close association with the rest of the West as a hedge against Germany's past and as a way to build a democratic future. Charles DeGaulle, if perhaps only because of Anglo American resentments, led France into the European Economic Committee. In fact, as early as 1949, the formation of the Council of Europe while only a consultative body meeting once a year, inaugurated the first in a series of steps toward a European federation. By 1952, the European Coal-Steel Community was formed without Britain-by the six countries that eventually became the Common Market in 1957. A Considerable factor influencing the early post-war situation was the separation of central and Eastern Europe behind the iron curtain. As Timothy Garton-Ash has pointed out, "This meant that European integration could begin between a relatively small number of bourgeois democracies at roughly comparable economic levels and with important older elements of common history. As has often been observed, the frontiers of the original European Economic Community of six were roughly coterminous with those of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire." (P.70)

European Union has gradually defined itself, not only through the European Economic Committee but also through a series of treaties on agriculture, environmental regulation, transportation, key industries, and also through the



growth of a European Court, a European Parliament with directly elected members, and a Council of Ministers which decides issues on the basis of a majority vote. The European Union now has a common working environment and a common trade environment. . Yet, this Europe has had more than its share of problems, and is far from creating a united federation of European states with its own constitution, government, currency, foreign policy, and justice system. The difficulties faced by advocates of this Europe begin with the tension between national and supranational interests.

Thatcher demolished the theory and much of the practice of the providential state, and it is that which is unthinkable across the channel. In continental Europe, the state will continue to play the major role in public life. In France and Germany, he argues, people expect the state to play an active role in employment practices, regulation commerce, and servicing the health and education and benefits sector. But what happens when British mortgage rates, for example, are higher than typical rates on the continent? Or work weeks are longer? British business interests worry about conforming to integrated European codes and practices. What about Germany and the wealthy Scandinavian countries when they contemplate their poorer eastern and southern neighbors? Germans, in particular, are sensitive to the notion that they will subsidize the new currency at a time when new members with less resource would not be net contributors to the European Union Budget. As Timothy Garton-Ash points out, “Cheaper imports from east-central Europe could also undercut more expensive German products. In the short term, keeping industrial jobs in Bohemia could mean losing them in Bavaria.”(p.149) As for those eastern countries, resentment of the European Union is substantial among people in the Czech Republic, Solovakia, Hungary, and others now awaiting membership. The austerity programs their governments enforced in order to meet the European Union criteria seem to ordinary citizens too harsh and unfair, and there is also substantial disagreement over nationalist issues, crystallized over the Haider affair in Austria.

David Edgar, definitely a playwright of language who exposes the political circumstances and social concerns, takes up the divisive issues of the New Europe in overt bon mots. , Edgar provides an advanced argument about the importance of this Europe- its place within the global economy, politics and culture, and its borders and membership. The play *Pentecost* opens with the arrival of a British art historian, Oliver Davenport, in an eastern European country. Gabrielle Pecs, the Director of the National Museum, has brought Oliver to an abandoned church to see a painting she has uncovered and which she thinks might be an important historical find, a painting remarkably similar to Giotto’s Lamentation in the Arena Chapel, Padua. Gabrielle believes it was painted before Giotto was born, in the early twelve hundreds. Within the opening minutes, Edgar represents several aspects of the current situation in post-communist Eastern Europe. The church is revealed to be at present a storehouse for potatoes, previously the Museum of Atheism and progressive people’s culture, and before that a German army prison during World War II. The religious background of the church is also layered: it has been Catholic, Orthodox, and a mosque.

The device Edgar uses to jar lose any complacent notion of a ‘New Political Europe’ is more than a plot development. First a group of refugee bursts into the space, and in the penultimate scene, government forces literarily dynamite the wall of the church, destroying the painting. These two explosions interrupt the terms of



aesthetic negotiation over 'Europe' by blowing open the question of membership and by making cultural struggles over the origins of high art beside the point in the wake of five dead bodies. In the first act of the play, the dramaturgical structure pits two men, representing British and American professional rivalries, in a contest for control of the painting belonging to the eastern European country, personalized in the character of Gabrielle. Here the gendered aspects of the narrative (feminized East, masculinized West) support a thematic structure portraying the country's desire to be recognized and embraced as truly European. The arrival of the refugees constitutes a refusal to allow the narrative to conceptually contain the scope of these questions. At the end of the first act, when the refugees storm the church, they open up the narrative to a larger analysis of interlocking fates between countries like this one, western Europeans, and other geographical regions bordering on, or contesting the borders of, Europe. Stanton Garner, in a perceptive Essay on *Pentecost*, writes of the refugees as figuring the "spectacle of human displacement ... In the face of this inundation of bodies in flight, the idea of Europe... must contend with the geopolitical realities of migrants and refugee hood. What becomes clear is the extent to which this idea has become, in the post-Cold War world, a regulative construction governing the establishing and policing of borders." The play suddenly shifts focus to the refugees. They come from Palestine, Azerbaijan, Mozambique, Bosnia, Russia, the Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. They speak in their many languages although English is the language of currency, the one people use to cross political and language barriers. What these asylum seekers demand are European passports and acceptance into a European country of their choice.

Edgar develops his interest in staging problematic relations between individuals within a public context in his earlier plays, *Destiny* (1976) and *Maydays* (1983), which are considered to be important precursors of *The Shape of the Table*, *Pentecost*, and *The Prisoner's Dilemma*. Resulting from meticulous work with factual material that evolved into a truthful reflection of the political and social life in Britain during the mid-eighties, these plays helped determine the nature of future Edgar's criticism. The anti-fascist *Destiny* and the "post-war epic chronicle" *Maydays* (Peacock, p. 179) established the apparently universal belief that Edgar's historical drama "had [...] been closely associated with the concerns of the Left" (Peacock, p. 173).

Emphasizing the complexity and diversity of Edgar's plays and how little has been done to illuminate his unique reconstruction of history on the theatrical stage. Unlike critics who limit their analyses of Edgar's plays to revealing the historicism of *The Shape of the Table*, *Pentecost*, and *The Prisoner's Dilemma*, I focused on how these plays interpret the formation of national identity in new Europe first attempt to discover certain mechanism according to which Edgar orchestrates the relationships of his characters on stage and, by extension, monitors the political and cultural aspects of their theatricalized collective lives. These mechanisms seem rooted in the dynamics of interpretation within the plays' textually. More precisely, in order to be able to examine the nature of the reflection of the historicized political reality in the plays. The reflection of the political reality in new Europe within *The Shape of The Table* provides a key to the inner dynamics of Edgar's works. As the action in *The Shape of the Table* evolves, the literal act of mirroring is functioning as a mechanism for self-identification for a given collective in their pursuit of their nation-hood. The play disclose the political upheaval, for example, the unnamed country that is described in the play establishes itself at first through an intense diplomatic relationship with the USSR and later,



within the space of post-communist Europe. Edgar's unnamed post-communist East European country is caught in its self-determination, in a limbo created by the opposition between two superpowers, the USSR and the west. Importantly, the characters understand this opposition not as East European political structure counterbalancing Western Europe but as a struggle between the USSR and the USA. The ongoing self-other conflict captured in *The Shape of The Table*, the tension between the opposites, is potentially painful.

The Prisoner's Dilemma communicates the intricately kaleidoscopic nature of Edgar's understanding of the processes of collective self-identification in political upheaval. This understanding comes into view when socially differentiated groups of people face the dilemma of the necessity of communication and negotiation in order to resolve a longstanding ethnic conflict in a southern province of Russia. What distinguishes Edgar's understanding of the problem of national identity construction in this play from the previous ones is a complex internal structure that in its actualization on stage allows the audience to see this process as dynamic, constantly changing, and yet self-referential. At the same time, the play suggests that the framing of the project of international political negotiations on a global scale reflexively shapes the perception of national identity formation in political upheaval.

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