

**HITLER ON THE BALLACHULISH BEAT:
THE PLAYS OF C.P. TAYLOR**

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ABSTRACT

Although seven of his plays were performed at the 1992 Edinburgh International Festival, the Scottish playwright C.P. Taylor (1929-81) is much less well-known than some of his younger colleagues. This is particularly unfortunate as C.P. Taylor's thematic concerns, and the dramatic vocabulary he employs to voice them, are unique in their contemporary Scottish context, albeit strongly indebted to European, specifically German, Modernism.

The article will first provide a brief survey of C.P. Taylor's life and writing career, focussing on his Jewish background (which informs, for example, such plays as *Walter* and *The Black and White Minstrels*), and on the conditions of writing in exile (as a Scot in England). The second part will consist of a detailed, comparative examination of three plays, namely, *Bread and Butter*, *The Ballachulish Beat*, and *Good*. In spite of their considerable differences —*Bread and Butter* explores the lives of two young Jewish couples in Glasgow, *The Ballachulish Beat* follows the career of a rock band, and *Good* discusses the question of euthanasia before the sinister background of 1930s Germany—all three plays are concerned with the responses of individuals to the pressures, but also the allure, of various kinds of totalitarianism. In addition, all three plays associate totalitarianism with music, as a pre- or non-rational form of experience; as a consequence, the role of music in these plays, both as a theme and as a dramatic technique, will have to be explored.

My themes are the conflicts between man's ideals and his limitations. At present I am concerned with the particular. I am obsessed with the danger presented by the general rules, general diagnosis. Every play is about particular people, particular periods, particular incidents. The universal comes from a close and accurate study of the particular.

(C.P. Taylor)

Cecil Philip Taylor was born in Glasgow in 1929 and died in Newcastle in 1981, at the age of 52. His obituarists were unanimous in declaring that he had not been given his due as a playwright in his native Scotland, a situation which the 1992 Edinburgh Festival, in which seven of his plays were performed, sought to remedy. Although Taylor himself was deeply influenced by European, specifically German, dramatic traditions —hence his adaptations of a number of German plays, notably of Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* (*Threepenny Opera*, 1972) and *Trommeln in der Nacht* (*Drums in the Night*, 1973) as well as of Sternheim's *Die Hose* (*Schippel*, 1974) —he is virtually unknown on the Continent, and only one of his plays, *Mr David*, seems to have been performed there (at the Jewish State Theatre, Warsaw, in 1967). This is particularly unfortunate as Taylor's thematic concerns, and the dramatic vocabulary he uses to articulate them, are unique in their contemporary Scottish context.

The following article will first provide a survey of Taylor's life and writing career, with a brief excursion into the condition of the Scottish theatre in the 1960s and early 1970s. It will then move on to a more detailed analysis of, respectively, two of his better-known and one of his lesser-known plays, the early *Bread and Butter* (premiered in London, 1966), the late *Good* (premiered in London, 1981), and *The Ballachulish Beat* (published in 1967, but only premiered at the 1992 Edinburgh Festival). To the latter two, incidentally, this article is indebted for its title, marking, as they do, the two poles of Taylor's writing, namely, his intense concern with the general or universal, and his rootedness in the particular and local.

Taylor was the son of Jewish immigrants who had fled to Scotland from the pogroms and persecutions of Czarist Russia. He grew up in Govanhill, a middling suburb of Glasgow between the crammed, decaying tenements of the Gorbals and posh King's Park during the Depression. His near-contemporary Ralph Glasser, also descended from Jewish immigrants, recalls in his autobiography *Growing Up in the Gorbals* that the Jewish newcomers swiftly formed a distinct community and that, in the 1930s, they still talked

with the certainty and passion of people who saw a bright deliverance within reach, convinced that they were in the van of those who would secure it.

And:

Soon the whole mankind would be delivered from the burdens of poverty, class, despotism, religious prejudice —for Jewish socialists the crucial evil of the old order.¹

It is this milieu, perceived to be under threat from Nazi Germany, which informs *Bread and Butter*, and which, in Taylor's last major play *Good*,² may have caused him

to confront anti-semitism in its most nefarious form, and within Germany itself (see below).

Taylor left school at 14, in 1943. Among the subsequent succession of what he called “non-jobs,” he trained as an electrician, took up the post-1953 job of television repair-man, and the similarly new-tech one of LP record salesman, in which last capacity he went to live and work in Northumberland, at the age of twenty-eight. He had won a play-writing prize as early as 1954, and presumably found his metier, though not a means of earning a living, in drama. Even so, Tyneside, and smaller theatres of other English cities, provided him with creative challenges and outlets which there is no evidence existed in Scotland. On the whole, Taylor completed some seventy plays in a writing career spanning barely thirty years, including almost thirty plays for television, and a dozen for radio. Partly through expedience—he needed money to sustain a family of four children from two marriages—he also became involved in community drama, working with children and with long-term patients in hospital wards. However, neither the circumstance that most of his working life as a dramatist was spent outside Scotland, nor the fact that he was a Jew, withdraws him from consideration as a Scottish writer. He wrote about Scotland, and he offered a great deal to his native country. In addition to *Bread and Butter* and *The Ballachulish Beat*, the plays *Allergy* (1966), *The Black and White Minstrels* (1972), and *Walter* (1977), are also set in Scotland, the first in a hovel in remote Ross-shire, the second in a small, semi-detached villa in Glasgow’s King’s Park, and the third on Loch Lomond-side. In *Allergy*, as Cordelia Oliver has argued in an article entitled “Home and Away,”³ the three characters involved undoubtedly come from Clydeside, and most of the ingredients in the dilemma facing them just as surely mirror the author’s own problems: Jim and Peter are seen desperately working on a massive “Re-statement of Marxism for Today,” the one a theoretician and the other a former bus driver with a late-awakened intellect, now in the process of earnestly widening his horizons. In *The Black and White Minstrels*, the central figure who similarly finds himself at odds with his world is, according to Oliver, once again based on “Taylor’s own memory self,” while the eponymous hero of *Walter* shares salient features with one of Taylor’s Glasgow friends, the old music hall actor Walter Jackson, though the Walter of the play is, of course, a fiction: an old man—rich, socialist, Glaswegian and Jewish—recalls his life in a series of flashbacks and asides while figures from his past and present life impinge on his memories. In the process, the play offers some ironical reflection on the conditions of the Scottish stage: due to the post-war closure of numerous Scottish theatres and music halls, Walter, in his middle years, finds himself out of work, but in old age, fame and prosperity, and even sexual success, arrive, as he is cast as token “charming old character” in a television soap. Walter’s sexual success, however, turns out to have been largely illusory, and with some justified scornful personal allusions to Scottish broadcasting institutions, it is made clear that fame has been so much nonsense, too.

In “Home and Away,” Oliver describes C.P. Taylor’s attitude to Glasgow as a “love-hate relationship,” directed, in particular, at the “literary, intellectual and theatrical establishment of Glasgow, and indeed of Scotland” (11). The “hate” component in this relationship was surely fuelled by specific instances of rejection, as when, in 1965, *Bread and Butter* was submitted to the Glasgow Citizens’ Theatre and turned down, to be successfully premiered in London a year later. It took another three years

for the first Scottish theatre, the Edinburgh Traverse, to produce the play. In 1972, another painfully controversial episode in C.P. Taylor's Glaswegian career, or rather non-career, caused Kenneth Roy, founder and editor of the now defunct magazine *Scottish Theatre*, to write him an open letter, culminating in the following statement:

Frankly, C P, I doubt whether Scotland's ever going to take you to its old and crumbling bosom. I mean the Scottish Arts Council Bursaries and University Selection Boards, the Scotland of poetry anthologies and cultural monthlies [...] of artistic fashion and snobbery, pettiness and spite. (11)

In this case, Taylor had written an undisguisedly autobiographical "letter to Scotland" entitled *Me*, which was staged by the Citizens' Theatre during the resident company's absence in Europe. The production in question, with a cast of mostly English actors headed by the London-based American Al Mancini, appears to have been a travesty of what was, in Oliver's words, "admittedly a highly controversial work." Oliver continues:

It was duly savaged with what can only be described as wolfish glee, Taylor being blamed for a result totally outwith his control — a bad, two-dimensional caricature of a work which, more than most, needed careful midwifery. (11)

Taken together, these and related incidents serve to suggest that it is in Scotland where fault must be found for the relative obscurity of Taylor's name and work there. However, Taylor's experiences must be seen within the wider context of the Scottish stage in the 1960s and 1970s.

C.P. Taylor's immediate predecessor as a serious and prolific dramatist of Scottish native origins was James Bridie (1888-1951), whose considerable public prominence and success in the commercial theatre enabled him, in 1943, to found the Citizens' Theatre, and with the post-war governmental support for the arts, to bring one abiding ideal to realisation: an art theatre, both permanent building and company of actors, and an audience for a repertoire not devised for sheerly commercial purposes. This repertoire, no small matter, could and did draw on living and locally based writers such as Robert MacLellan and Alexander Reid. More naturalistic and left-wing playwrights, for example Ena Lamont Stewart, had also Unity Theatre, a company using the weeks when the Queen's Theatre's normal run of vaudeville would not have made any money by occupying its stage.

By 1965, however, the year of the Citizens' rejection of *Bread and Butter*, commercial theatres such as the Queen's Theatre had lost their patrons, who had found what they wanted in the alternative medium of television, and their often palatial premises had been demolished, damaged by fire beyond economically feasible repair, or put to other uses. With the decline of general theatre-going the subsidised art theatre had become not what Bridie had managed to establish for a number of years beside the Gorbals Cross, but a business of managements looking to maintain minority audiences within the narrow parameters allowed by committees and rules on continuing provision of public funds. Eventually, the Citizens', as the late Allen Wright, then drama critic of *The Scotsman*, observed in the 1986 double issue of *Chapman* on

the Scottish theatre,⁴ ceased to make any effort to relate to the contemporary concerns of the community in which it was then situated, and “turned to world drama in a style which owes more to contemporary German theatre than the Scottish idiom” (5). Admittedly, the Citizens’ had no choice; as Giles Havergal discovered in his first season as a director, when well-known players appearing in fairly conventional productions failed to bring large audiences back to the Gorbals, drastic changes had to be made, or else the theatre was going to be closed down.⁵

It was thus mainly left to the Edinburgh Traverse studio theatre to produce plays by living Scottish playwrights, and for a number of years, it took Taylor on board, and found sympathetic directors such as Michael Geliot, Roland Rees, and Mike Rudman for his work. Among other Taylor plays, *Happy Days Are Here Again*, *Of Hope and Glory*, *Allergy*, and *Lies about Vietnam/Truth about Sarajevo*, were premiered by the Traverse (the first two in 1965, the third and fourth in 1966 and 1969, respectively). Circumstances did not, however, encourage even the modest representation the Traverse gave Taylor’s plays in Scotland. In what may perhaps be an overstatement, Allen Wright claimed that “some misguided director, hell-bent on promoting new writers, failed to provide the necessary encouragement” (5), so that Taylor’s work was even more completely confined south of the Border. It was thus in the North-East of England, rather than in Scotland, that he would have profited from the 1970s substantial injection of money into the arts, and a high level of public spending generally, which, on both sides of the Border, led to what Sandy Neilson, in his contribution to the *Chapman* double number, called “a period of positive growth”⁶ in theatrical activity. A perceptible revival of interest in Taylor, indicated, for example, by a Scots version of *And a Nightingale Sang* at Perth, and the prospect of a commission from Ewan Hooper’s promising but short-lived Scottish Theatre Company, was cut short by his untimely death, and the 1992 Edinburgh International Festival’s efforts also seem unlikely to secure him a more permanent representation on the Scottish stage.

*Bread and Butter*⁷ follows the lives of two young Jewish couples in Glasgow, one pair, Morris and Sharon, moving up socially to Queen’s Park, the other, Alec and Miriam, voluntarily staying in the Gorbals, against world events from 1931 to the year in which the play was completed, 1965. Alec and Miriam work in a clothing factory, while Morris, their friend, has a much more prosperous start in life as the son of the boss. After the war, when Morris’s father loses his business — “You must admit, we’re a highly original family. We’re the only business people to come out of the war bankrupt” (*BB* 181)— Alec gets him a job as a presser; later he becomes an insurance salesman.

On the surface, Alec is a deceptively naive character, in love with the simple pleasures of life such as the “bread and butter” of the play’s title, and his yearly holiday in Dunoon. Thus, when he and Miriam unexpectedly inherit some money from an uncle who died of a heart attack during a German bombing raid on the East End of London, they do not invest in property but use the money to spend six months of each working year, rather than the customary fortnight, by the sea. By contrast, Morris, described as a “student” in the play’s list of dramatis personae, is much more articulate, but also more volatile, especially as he finds himself in the unenviable situation of having to continually adjust his fervently held political convictions to both his changing personal circumstances and the erratic course of world politics.

Bread and Butter bears a close resemblance to the work of another Jewish playwright, namely, to Arnold Wesker's early trilogy *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959), and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960). Both Wesker and Taylor record the breakup of close-knit Jewish communities, and their resulting estrangement from the mass-produced values of modern industrial society. In his introduction to an anthology entitled *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, Bryan Cheyette has argued that Wesker, in his trilogy,

challenges one of the abiding myths of Anglo-Jewry, that the trajectory of poor immigrant Jews was, above all, away from the ghettos and into the suburbs; that is, away from Jewishness and into Englishness.⁸

This is even truer for Taylor's *Bread and Butter* as the play seems to suggest, throughout, that the demands made upon Jewish intellectuals by, respectively, their politics and their Jewishness, may ultimately prove irreconcilable. That is certainly Morris's experience: whenever the two come into conflict, as they do over the observance of religious ceremonies such as weddings and Barmitzvahs, it is Jewishness which proves the more dominant motivatory force.

When the play opens, in 1931, Morris is a Communist who believes that "in another ten years, [...] Communism will have spread all over Europe" (*BB* 161), a belief which, initially, remains unimpaired by Hitler's rise to power in Germany, but suffers a severe blow as a result of the events of the Spanish Civil War, the persecution of the Jews, and the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, "Stalin embracing the Jew-killing fascist maniac, Hitler" (*BB* 178). After the war, Morris is briefly allowed to glow in what he regards as the vindication of Communism, before the events of 1956 cause him to exclaim: "Communism is in ashes" (*BB* 191). However, once again Morris's ideals rise like Phoenix *from* the ashes, and 1959 sees him finish the first draft of a new Socialist manifesto, and even experiment in film as a more advanced medium of propaganda, though he does not any longer rely on the British working classes to help him turn his dream of a better society into reality. Six years later, he seems close to capitulation:

Over half a century, and what have I achieved? I've even bought a house in Giffnock —so that I can have somewhere private to read in summer. [*Waving his hand round the park*] Look at them! A nice, friendly, happy, content community. They're never worried about how to win a new society —or the millions dying of starvation and disease in India and Africa... or the war in Vietnam... Or the H Bomb over their heads night and day. They're happy, they're contented, they sit there discussing their little domestic topics. What right have I to adopt a superior attitude to them? What have I done? What have I achieved? So I stopped buying South African fruit. They're still persecuting niggers there. So I marched against the bomb. They're building bigger and better ones. So I protested against Hitler's anti-Jew laws. He killed off six million of us! I went round and collected money for the Spanish Republic. Franco is still killing off Communists there. What was it all for? Where did it get us, Alec? What's the meaning of it all, Alec? (*BB* 219-20)

Although Alec's mind seems to run in parallel tracks through most of *Bread and Butter*, a technique to which the play is indebted for most of its comic effects, he does manage not only to serve as Morris's sounding-board, but to provide encouragement throughout:

You're needed, Morris, to keep the picture of what could be alive and in front of people, to keep pushing them, to keep banging and banging at the door, unless it breaks open.

And Morris gladly responds:

Alec, it's like a siege. You're right. Not the first wave, not the second, not the third... but the last wave breaks through the castle gates... But without the first —or the others that followed— the castle would still be unconquered. (*BB* 220)

It is easy enough to make fun of the ideological twists and turns of Morris's half-baked Marxism, and of his self-justifications —and very funny they are, especially as Morris does not personally perform a single revolutionary act in his entire life. However, the example of Alec's wife Miriam shows that to live without ideals is to atrophy and die.

Taylor's *Bread and Butter*, throughout, points to the ways in which global politics impinge upon the local, as when Morris and Alec, at the beginning of the war, mentally prepare for a German invasion, and speculate upon the reactions of their non-Jewish compatriots to this event. Taylor himself, in his preface to *Good*, talked of how he grew up during the war with the anxiety hanging over him that Germany might win the war and overrun Britain. There was then the very real threat that "I, and my mother and father would end up, like my less fortunate co-religionists, in a Nazi death camp —perhaps specially built in Scotland or England" (Alan Taylor, "True Stories" 3). It is thus, as the critic Joyce McMillan has remarked, precisely Taylor's rootedness in the Scottish Jewish community which makes possible a combination of intimacy with ordinary Scottish life, and involvement in the greatest historical movements of the century.⁹ However, as the comment with which this article opens indicates, Taylor's main concern is not so much with the global and the local but with the universal and the particular —of which the global and the local are (merely) specific spatio-temporal manifestations. The question now is, of course, which aspects of human existence Taylor may have considered "universal." In the universe of Taylor's plays, a comparison between *Bread and Butter*, *Good*, and *The Ballachulish Beat*, yields at least two possible answers: a certain attitude towards life, and the power of music.

The protagonist of *Good*,¹⁰ Taylor's late and most acclaimed play, is the German literature professor Johnnie Halder, who finds himself caught up in the brutalities of the Third Reich. He initially attracts the attention of Nazi officials because of a pro-euthanasia novel about life in a home for the aged (inspired by his own mother's senile dementia), is then invited to join the NSDAP and the SS, and eventually becomes one of Eichmann's most trusted consultants, dispatched to Auschwitz to perform, in Eichmann's words, "an evaluation of the recommendations for the processing of the diseased and the unfit" (*G* 372-73). Halder is anything but the stock villain of, for

example, British war films; instead, his fall stems from a series of decisions he makes or fails to make. While each of these decisions is hardly momentous in itself, together they add up to reach tragic proportions. Stewart Conn, in his contribution to the *Scotland on Sunday* C.P. Taylor supplement, draws attention to the parallels between *Good* and Taylor's adaptation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, *Gynt, Gynt!*, with its similar succession of moral choices and crossroads.¹¹ At the same time, it is very difficult to see—the play makes it very difficult to see—where exactly it is Halder does go wrong. Taylor achieves this by placing Halder in the centre of a complex system of relationships and conflicting loyalties: his Jewish friend Maurice versus his chief Nazi contacts Bouller and Major Freddie, his wife versus his mistress, his young children versus his helpless mother. In addition, *Good* is a technically more innovative play than *Bread and Butter* in that Halder occasionally assumes the role of a Brechtian epic narrator; the resulting chronological reversions—the first act begins with Halder's account of the role music plays in his life ("The bands came in 1933", *G* 330) and concludes with his account of a conversation between himself and the Major ("This is 1932 I am talking about", *G* 349)—serve to strengthen the impression of inexorability, of Halder being manoeuvred, rather than manoeuvring himself, into a position from which he cannot escape. As the drama critic Benedict Nightingale puts it, the play

shows someone no worse than ourselves insidiously transforming himself into a moral monster. Thrust into the same circumstances, faced with similar pressures, would we have behaved more nobly? It's the key question of our century; and it's one to which all Cecil's previous work had been logically leading him.¹²

Looking back from the vantage point of *Good* to *Bread and Butter*, it becomes immediately clear that this is indeed the case, and that the earlier play's Morris is a comic prototype of the later's Halder: both characters find it impossible to keep a firm hold on what Halder calls "Objective Moral Truth." "What is an Objective Moral Truth?" asks Halder, and continues:

I'm not being profound, Maurice... I'm just coming to grips with reality... What has happened, is we have confused fantasy concepts like good, bad, right, wrong, human, inhuman... as objective, immutable laws of the universe. Jews are bad, Germans are good... Like a stone falls to the ground... It is a moral act to get rid of the Jews. It's an immoral act... That's the kind of clouded, subjective thinking parading as objective truth that has totally disorientated the world and led us into this violence and chaos... There is something there, Maurice... Do you think there's something there? (*G* 374)

Had Morris been forced to make Halder's decisions, his essential pliability would, one suspects, not have allowed him, in Nightingale's words, "to behave more nobly." Whether Taylor himself expects his audience to believe that there is such a thing as an objective, or universal, moral truth, as the title of *Good* might suggest, is, at this stage in the argument, a moot point. What does seem to be universal is an—all to human—unwillingness to take a stand, an unwillingness which, certainly in the case of *Good*, plays into the hands of *inhuman* totalitarianism.

This is borne out by the last of the three plays under consideration here, *The Ballachulish Beat*.¹³ In *The Ballachulish Beat*, a music impresario tries to create a “megatonic, new sound,” and, assisted by a computer named Walter, finds a rock group, the Keelies, whose provenance and musical orientation are expressed in the play’s title. The characters of the play are mixtures of automaton and parody: the business machines (both human and non-human) talk pop jargon, while the members of the group spout the slogans fed to them by their political mentor, the Communist agitator Andie:

ANDIE: What’s the slogans, comrades?

ALAN: The Profit Motive.

ALL: Out! Out!

DEREK: Nuclear Weapons!

ALL: Out! Out!

MARTIN: The Exploitation of Man by Man.

ALL: Out! Out!

ANDIE: War... War... War...

BOYS: Out! Out! Out! (*Bal* 91-92)

Due to clever marketing, the Keelies do land a series of megahits, achieve cult status, and become the real power in the land. They lead the youth of Britain on a march round the country, emptying factories of workers; a chance word in a song inspires some fans to blow up a few of those factories where work is still done, killing the workers left. A liberal-minded government of surpassing woolly-mindedness shells out social security money to all. In the course of the play, alliances between the characters continually shift: there are tensions among the impresarios, between the impresarios and Andie, between Andie and the group, and so forth. However, the end of the play, in a scenario reminiscent of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, finds them all huddled together and listening to the Ballachulish Beat while tanks roll in, and bombs explode. When Walter, the computer, churns out his final message, “GROW UP! GROW UP! GROW UP!” nobody is left to listen to him.

The characters in *The Ballachulish Beat* resemble *Bread and Butter*’s Morris and *Good*’s Halder in that they also lack an ethical awareness of reality. In their inability to prevent themselves from being carried away, they aid and abet the inexorable rise of totalitarianism. If *Bread and Butter* addresses this “key question of the century” (to quote Benedict Nightingale once again) in what might be called the kitchen sink mode, and *Good* in the context of a historical play, *The Ballachulish Beat* treats it in (and as) a black farce.

All three plays, then, share a similar type of protagonist, exhibiting a similar attitude towards life. *Bread and Butter* and *The Ballachulish Beat* are further linked by their Scottish angle, and *The Ballachulish Beat* and *Good* by their involvement with music.

The Scottish angle of *The Ballachulish Beat* is present in the settings of some of the early scenes —Act I, Scenes 2 and 3 take place on the banks of Loch Leven, Act II, Scene 1 in Glasgow’s Hampden Park— and through the members of the band and their political mentor, who speak Scots and are specimens of a recognisable stock

type of the working-class male which has since come to prominence in the fiction of such authors as James Kelman. In addition, the play engages critically with a number of Scottish auto-stereotypes. Thus, the Keelies' march on England looks suspiciously like a parodic re-enactment of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, and Walter, the computer, introduces the Keelies as follows:

Ladies and Gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to honour in a wonderful song a wonderfully talented group of musicians from the land of mountain and flood—I refer, of course, to—The Keelies [...]. Ladies and Gentlemen, a humble tribute to their beautiful country—"Tribute to the Land of the Keelies!"

He sings in a fine, ringing tenor
'A SCOTTISH TENOR'S SONG'

Oh, give me the old Scotch sangs,
And a tenor in a kilt.

With the trumpets fairly blazing out,
The good old Scottish lilt!
And the tenor strutting round the stage,
With a twinkle in his e'e—
Oh, give me the old Scotch sangs,
Oh, them's the sangs for men, for me!¹⁴

Walter, the singing computer, provides only one of the several musical interludes of *The Ballachulish Beat*; others are the songs which the Keelies themselves perform—cruelly funny parodies of working-class and 1960s protest songs. In looking at Taylor's overall output, reference to music is inescapable: *Happy Days Are Here Again* (1965), *You Are My Heart's Delight* (1973), *And a Nightingale Sang* (1977), and the posthumous *Bring Me Sunshine, Bring Me Smiles* (1982) all take their titles from popular song, and *And a Nightingale Sang* in particular is as interwoven with performances of music as is *Good*. While the musical repertoire in *Good* is rather larger than that of *The Ballachulish Beat*, comprising, as it does, 1930s dance band music, Telemannesque recitativos, Richard Tauber's "You Are My Heart's Delight," Marlene Dietrich's "Falling in Love Again," Bavarian mountain bands, or the "Drinking Song" from *The Student Prince*, its dramatic function, as has already been suggested, is the same, and bound up with the first "universal," or constant, introduced above—a certain attitude towards life. On one level, music, in itself an almost totalitarian force, represents, as it were, the inexorability of the characters' slide towards totalitarianism. Thus, the computer's final message in *The Ballachulish Beat* is accompanied by a song, and in *Good*, Halder's musical hallucinations—of which he is aware as hallucinations—find their "real" counterpart when he arrives at Auschwitz. Never before has there been so much music as in this age of mechanical reproduction, an important question in its own right beside the increasing emotive power of music composed since the eighteenth century. On the second level, what characters in both the "non-musical" *Bread and Butter* and the "musical" *Good* and *The Ballachulish Beat* share is a narrowed-down and jargonised language-habit. One need not, perhaps, subscribe to Walter Pater's well-known dictum that all art aspires to the condition of music (especially as some art definitely ought not to). There is, however, no denying that the

hype of the formulaic revolutionary and that of the impresarios are mechanisms which exclude reality—just as the music Halder, in *Good*, hears all the time: by orchestrating his moods in such a way as to paralyse his potential to shape his own life, to act rather than to simply react to outside pressure.

The scenes in which Halder converses with his Jewish friend Maurice have an additional component which begs to be described in musical terms. More subtly than in *Bread and Butter*, or in the other early play *Allergy* (1966), where Christopher's monologues of despair alternate with the breezy entrances of his girlfriend Barbara, too enthusiastic to grasp that she is prattling about a bright future which will not, indeed cannot, happen, Taylor, in these conversations, employs his key dramatic device of *non-conversation*: the counterpoint. Most of his characters' dialogues are, in fact, monologic, their utterances perpetual asides—or recitativos rather than duets. Thus, Halder does not hear what Maurice is saying, he is too taken up with the dizzying euphoria of constantly hallucinating music—in much the same way as *Bread and Butter's* Morris, caught up in his revolutionary rhetoric, rarely makes contact with Alec, himself caught up in cosy domesticity. The distinction is solely in the jargon—Maurice's psycho-babble (he is, after all, a psychiatrist) versus Morris's Marxese. And when Maurice's words do get through to Halder, the latter effortlessly incorporates them into his own mental pre-occupations—as does Morris, when he invariably takes Alec's cryptic remarks as affirmation and encouragement.

In the course of *Good*, Maurice gradually disappears, visible finally as only a ghost. As Maurice vanishes, so does a large part of what Halder was. He has regressed to adolescence and unwittingly become a war criminal, blinkered, shrunk. The cultural references similarly disappear, with the Jewish choir singing Bach replaced by a representation of culture as a show put on to decorate a slave-camp and the site of mass-murder, Auschwitz.

Taylor, as Benedict Nightingale describes him in his obituary, was a political being, indeed a convinced socialist; yet he was too acute and candid an observer to pretend that the building of Jerusalem could ever be easy, given the inadequacy of the human material. He saw too clearly the discrepancy between the grand goals and the fallible human individuals seeking to achieve them. His plays are full of people who think themselves enlightened, progressive, or simply "good," not realising the extent to which they are deceiving themselves.

In his preface to *Good*, Taylor states:

The writing of the play is my response to a deeply felt and deeply experienced trauma in recent history—the Third Reich's war on the Jews, as well as an intellectual awareness, not at all deeply felt, of my role as a 'peace criminal' in the peace 'crimes' of the West against the Third World—my part in the Auschwitzes we are all penetrating today. I put 'crimes' in inverted commas because my concept of history [...] is not quite simple enough to allow me to see either the anti-social activities of the Third Reich, or of the West today, as simply criminal. If the problem were so simple, the solution might then be equally so.¹⁵

Surely this is also a statement about the functions of drama and the stage.

Notes

- ¹ Quoted in Alan Taylor, "True Stories," *Scotland on Sunday* April 19, 1992 (Edinburgh Festival Study Guide, 2): 3.
- ² *Good* was the final play which Taylor saw to the stage himself. *Bring me Sunshine, Bring me Smiles* was premiered posthumously in Newcastle in 1982.
- ³ Cordelia Oliver, "Home and Away," *Scotland on Sunday* April 19, 1992 (Edinburgh Festival Study Guide, 2): 11.
- ⁴ Allen Wright, "Twenty Years On," *Chapman* 43-44 (1986): 2-7.
- ⁵ The Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh, spared the need to engage in similarly drastic emergency measures, also pursued, albeit very differently, a policy of directors' theatre.
- ⁶ Sandy Neilson, "Theatre Revival — A Director's View," *Chapman* 43-44 (1986): 16. For a more recent account of the Scottish theatre, see also Edwin Morgan, "Scottish Drama: An Overview." *Scotlit* 20 (1999): 1-4.
- ⁷ Published in Penguin *New Dramatists* 10 (1967) 157-224. Further references are to this edition, abbreviated as *BB*.
- ⁸ Bryan Cheyette, ed., *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland: An Anthology* (London: Peter Halban, 1998) xxxix.
- ⁹ Joyce McMillan, "C. P. Taylor Remembered," *Scotland on Sunday* April 19, 1992 (Edinburgh Festival Study Guide, 2): 7.
- ¹⁰ Edinburgh Festival Society, ed., *The Plays of C.P. Taylor: As Performed at the Edinburgh International Festival 1992* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Festival Society, 1992) 327-76. Further references are to this edition, abbreviated as *G*.
- ¹¹ Stewart Conn, "Good Times," *Scotland on Sunday* April 19, 1992 (Edinburgh Festival Study Guide, 2): 5.
- ¹² Benedict Nightingale, "C.P. Taylor," *Stand* 23 (1982): 32-33.
- ¹³ Also published in the Edinburgh Festival Society edition of Taylor's plays, 65-137. Further references are to this edition, abbreviated as *Bal*.
- ¹⁴ Followed by another two stanzas in a similar vein, and rounded off by "Oh, Scotia, dear Scotia! / Scotia, fair, and grand, / Oh Scotia, dear Scotia —/ My own— my native land!" (*Bal* 84-85).
- ¹⁵ Quoted in "In His Own Words," *Scotland on Sunday* April 19, 1992 (Edinburgh Festival Study Guide, 2): 12.