

ربط التاريخ بالحدث في المسرح السياسي لجيمس غراهام

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الكلية التربوية المفتوحة مركز ذي قار / فرع الشطرة

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ملخص

تتناول هذه المقالة كتابات جيمس غراهام، أحد أبرز رواد المسرح الإنجليزي المعاصر. تربط مسرحياته أحداث الماضي بما يحدث الآن، كالسياسة والإعلام والأفكار الجديدة. يتميز جيمس غراهام بأسلوبه في سرد قصص تدفعك للتفكير بعمق في السياسة. يستخدم المسرح للحديث عن أمور كالسلطة والسياسة والإعلام والأخلاقيات والمشاكل التي تصاحب الحكومات الديمقراطية. يمزج غراهام بين الماضي والحاضر ببراعة في عروضه. تتناول الدراسة كيفية استخدام غراهام لتقنيات درامية جديدة، كالسرد القصصي غير الخطي، وعناصر الوسائط المتعددة، وتفاعل الجمهور، لإعادة تصور القصص السياسية للجمهور المعاصر. ويتم ذلك من خلال تحليل نصوص ومواضيع ثلاث مسرحيات مهمة: "هذا المنزل" (٢٠١٢)، و"الحبر" (٢٠١٧)، و"الاختبار" (٢٠١٧). وتتضمن العملية دراسة كيفية مزج غراهام بين الواقع والخيال لطرح أسئلة حول ما هو حقيقي، ومدى فساد الإعلام، ومدى أخلاقيته. يتضمن البحث أيضاً دراسة كيفية استقبال النقاد والجمهور لأعماله من خلال قراءة مراجعات المسرح وتعليقات الخبراء. تُظهر النتائج أن مسرحيات غراهام تتجاوز مجرد المتعة، بل لها أيضاً تأثيرات سياسية واجتماعية تدفع الناس إلى التفكير في القضايا الأخلاقية والديمقراطية المعاصرة. لقد أحدث جيمس غراهام تغييراً كبيراً في المسرح البريطاني الحديث من خلال إضفاء أهمية على الحقائق التاريخية لعصرنا. إن من يكتب مسرحيات تدفع الناس إلى التفكير والتحدث عن القضايا السياسية قد صنع لنفسه اسماً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأحداث، الابتكار المسرحي، المسرح السياسي، أخلاقيات الإعلام.

Bridging History and Modernity in the Political

Theater of James Graham

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Abstract

This article looks at the writings of James Graham, who is a major player in English theater today. His plays connect things that happened in the past with things that happen now, like politics, the media, and new ideas. James Graham has a way of telling stories that make you think deeply about politics. He uses theater to talk about things like power, politics, the media, ethics, and the problems that come with

being a democratic government. Things from the past and things that are still important today are mixed together very well in Graham's shows. The study conducts a textual and thematic analysis of three pivotal plays: *This House* (2012), *Ink* (2017), and *Quiz* (2017). Graham analyzes the text and themes by utilizing innovative dramaturgical techniques, such as nonlinear storytelling, multimedia components, and audience engagement and interaction to reinterpret political narratives for a modern audience. The process includes looking at how Graham mixes fact and fiction to question ideas about what is true, how crooked the media is, and how ethical the media is. It also includes looking at how his work is received by critics and the public by reading theater reviews and expert comments. The results show that Graham's plays are more than just fun. They also have political and social affects that make people think about moral and democratic issues of the present. James Graham has pretty much changed modern British theater by making historical facts important to our time. Someone who writes plays that make people think and talk about political issues has made a name for himself.

Keywords: Modernity, Theatrical innovation, Political theatre, Media ethics.

Introduction

English drama has a lengthy and fascinating history, spanning from William Shakespeare's Elizabethan period to Samuel Beckett's modernist experiments and Harold Pinter's socially conscious works. Recent years have seen the emergence of a new generation of playwrights who capture the issues of the twenty-first century. One of the most significant and innovative voices in contemporary English drama is James Graham. Graham is renowned for his innovative storytelling techniques and politically charged plays. By pushing the boundaries of theatre, he has made it a potent medium for examining significant social issues.

To understand how James Graham's plays have influenced English drama in the contemporary era, we must examine his life, works, and impact. Through his plays, themes, and theatrical contributions, it has demonstrated his significance as a playwright, his influence on the evolution of English drama, and his discussion of contemporary issues (Sierz, 2011).

Breakthrough and Recognition

James Graham was born in the Midlands mining town of Mansfield in 1982. His birthplace is Nottinghamshire. In particular, the fall of the coal sector and the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s had a profound impact on Graham. The family he was born into was working class. The ideas of social justice and politics that he came up with after these important events show up in all of his writing.

Graham learned how to write plays while studying theater at the University of Hull. He was especially influenced by political playwrights like David Hare and Caryl Churchill, who used theater to criticize how society works. Plays like *Eden's Empire* (2005), one of Graham's earlier works, demonstrated his ability to blend historical and contemporary elements. Because of this, he was hailed as a fresh, exciting talent in British theatre.

With the 2012 play *This House*, which he wrote on the workings of the British Parliament in the turbulent 1970s, Graham finally broke through. The original venue for the premiere of *This House* (2012) was London's National Theatre. The complex characters and crisp conversation were well-received. They were also pleased by how the performance enlivened and simplified complex political history. After the play became popular, Graham was recognized as one of the top playwrights of his era. Major theatres such as the Old Vic and the Royal Court hired him frequently (Sierz, Schnierer, Paul, Middeke & Martin, 2011).

Objective of the study

The basic objective of this study is to examine how James Graham's political theatre addresses the interplay between history and modernity by linking historical political events with contemporary social issues, thereby illuminating enduring and evolving challenges within British democracy.

Theoretical Framework

When critics look at James Graham's writing, they often use cultural materialism and critical theory together. This is especially true when it comes to political drama, how history is portrayed, and the role of theatre in society. These theoretical frameworks work especially well for modern political plays like Graham's that explore issues of power, ideology, social class, and historical awareness in depth. Marxist literary theory looks at works of literature to see how they show, criticize, or support unfair social and economic systems. In light of what Hasan (2025, p. 14) confirmed that "Internalized trauma and cultural conditioning lead to the unconscious submission" Graham's plays look at how the government works and how the media and business affect everyday life. One of these plays is "*This House* (2012) and *Ink* (2017)." Through the lens of Marxist theory, we can better understand how different people show their class or ideological interests. The fact that both populism and neoliberalism are used in theatre shows that it is a place where many ideas fight for dominance. Some critics think that *Ink* (2017) is a dramatization of how capitalism changes people's views on politics and public opinion to make money, just like

Rupert Murdoch did with the Sun newspaper. This is what most Marxist criticism is about.

Graham's Major Works

1. This House (2012)

British politics and the economy were in shambles in the 1970s, the period depicted in the political drama *This House (2012)*. The drama delves into the parliamentary power battle between the Labour and Conservative parties and their behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings. Okunnu & Ogunbanjo (2024, p.74) said "Human rights have always been founded on idealism" You can learn a lot about how democracies function from watching *This House (2012)*, which depicts whips, backbenchers, and legislative processes. "Three themes" describe this drama. Power and Corruption is the first one. Abuse and misuse of authority within political institutions is the subject of the play. Lastly, we need to talk about resilience and hope. In this theme, Graham talks about how there are class differences in Parliament that are similar to bigger social problems. The play says that democracy is worth fighting for, even though things are crazy (Dorney, 2018).

2. Ink (2017)

Ink (2017) is about Rupert Murdoch buying The Sun newspaper in 1969 and turning it into a huge tabloid. The play explores the ethical dilemmas faced by journalists and the impact of sensationalist news on public discourse regarding significant issues. Graham is worried about the media's ability to shape public opinion and the limits of journalism's ethical coverage because it has such a big effect on how people think and feel. But with this power comes a lot of moral responsibilities, especially when it comes to the rules and limits of journalism. Since a lot of people get their news from the media, they need to know about important social, political, and economic issues. The media can shape public opinion by how they report and analyze news events. Media can have an effect on political decisions, like voting. Every vote tells a story. "A secret lurks in every ballot box." (Graham, 2020, p. 90-91).

Middeke, Schnierer, Paul & Sierz (2019, p. 429) estimated that this sentence encapsulates Graham's talent for tying together personal narratives with larger political and historical currents. By presenting voting as an individual and a community duty, Graham opens a conversation on electoral changes of the past and the difficulties faced by democracies today. Social influence (such as adopting certain values). For example, extensive media coverage of an issue can push the public to pressure decision-makers into taking specific actions. "You don't change

the world by playing nice. "You change it by getting your hands dirty." (Graham, 2020, p. 46).

The Ethical Responsibility of Journalists

The media can set the "agenda" for public discussion by choosing which issues to cover and which to ignore. This means that the media has a lot of power to shape what society cares about. Some basic rules of journalistic ethics are to be accurate in reporting and not to be biased. But because there is a lot of competition for views and readers, some media outlets may be tempted to give false or exaggerated information to get people to pay attention. The public's right to know and people's right to privacy are always at odds with each other. For example, investigative journalism may need to share private information, which raises moral questions about whether or not such actions are right. Graham examines the pursuit of power, a subject that is particularly relevant in the modern world, which is characterized by sensationalized news and fake news. Through an examination of the history of tabloid journalism, Graham offers criticism of the functioning of contemporary media and the ways in which it influences public opinion. The fact that Graham is interested in the pursuit of power is demonstrated by this line. This is a topic that is quite pertinent in the modern world, which is characterized by sensationalized news and fake news. Through an examination of the history of tabloid journalism, Graham offers criticism of contemporary media practices and the ways in which these activities influence public opinion (Dickason, & Haignon, 2024).

The media can make people scared or panicked by focusing on crimes or disasters. It might also help to reinforce negative stereotypes about some groups in society, which can lead to bias and discrimination. Sometimes, the media can be used to change people's minds about certain political or economic issues. This makes people wonder how honest and independent the media really is. It's easy to spread false information or fake news quickly in the age of the internet and social media. This makes it even harder for journalists to check facts before they publish.

3. Quiz (2017)

Quiz (2017) looks at themes of truth, lies, and what it means to be famous, all based on the famous cheating scandal on "*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*" (1998). The scandal is used in the play to look at how much people love reality TV and how hard it is to tell what's real and what's not. The play looks at some intellectual themes, like truth and perception, where Graham asks the audience to question what they think they know about truth and reality. Then it looks at celebrity culture, where the play criticizes the way fame is turned into a product and how the media affects people's

lives. Finally, it looks at justice and fairness. The quiz makes people think about how fair the legal system is and how public opinion affects the outcomes. "Truth isn't what you know; it's what people think." (Graham, 2018, p. 72). Graham is interested in how events from the past and media manipulation affect how people think. Graham connects the past and the present by putting the historical scandal next to today's worries about false information (Luckhurst, 2021).

Innovation in Form and Structure

People know James Graham for the way he tells stories that are different from others. He often combines real and made-up events to make his stories more interesting. He often uses music, projections, and changing set designs in his plays to make them more enjoyable for the people who see them. Graham's plays are also like factual theater because they are based on real events, conversations, and historical records. He wrote a book called *This House* (2012) about how the UK Parliament worked in the 1970s. There are both facts and drama in it. The play uses real government arguments and political schemes to show history from the point of view of someone who was there. Graham can use this method to tell both true and dramatic stories, which makes for an interesting mix of truth and multimedia. Graham makes *This House* (2012) look like the House of Commons by using screens and a simple set. The audience is placed in the midst of the political process now. *Ink* (2017) also alters the lighting and the noises in order to create the impression that it is a bustling workplace (Baugh, 2014).

Audience Interaction

There are several instances in which Graham's plays breach the fourth wall, which implies that they communicate with the audience in a direct manner and prompt them to reflect on their own preconceptions and views. As an example, in the play *Quiz* (2017), the audience is urged to take part in a live quiz, which makes it difficult to differentiate between the stage and real life. "Mental models are based on individuals' embodied experiences and interaction with the physical world. The overlapping relationship between image schemas and mental models underpins the interrelationship between cognitive processes and our encounter with everyday life experiences" (Al-Sari, 2025, p. 162).

Narrative Structure

As pointed out by Clapp (2017) Graham's plays show different points of view and don't tell the same story over and over again. *Ink's* story (2017) is told through a number of flashbacks that help the viewer understand what happened before Murdoch took over The Sun. The broken structure shows how difficult the play's

ideas are and makes people think deeply about what power and truth really mean. What the people and reviewers thought. Both critics and viewers have said great things about James Graham's work. The Guardian called *This House* (2012) "a masterclass in political drama," (Billington, 2012). and they also said that *Ink* (2017) had "razor-sharp dialogue and incisive commentary on media ethics." (Billington, 2017).

Graham is one of the most respected playwrights of his generation because he can deal with difficult problems with humour and intelligence. His plays have also led to important discussions about society, politics, and the media. People have said that *this House* (2012) has made people more interested in parliamentary politics, and *Ink* (2017) has sparked debates about what the media's role should be in a democracy (Rebellato, 2019, pp. 198-201).

A great number of individuals have a strong appreciation for Graham's work, and it has had a significant impact by encouraging people to discuss issues pertaining to politics, identity, and society. As a result of plays such as *The Vote* (2015), which took place in a voting station and was shown live on television, and *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019), which was about the Brexit vote, people have been debating about several major news items. Due to the fact that it gives the impression that politicians and the political process are more genuine, Graham's work has had a significant impact. People are now better able to comprehend the ways in which personal and societal forces have influenced the course of history.

The box office performance of Graham's plays has also been very successful. Many have relocated to the West End of London and other locations, where they have been able to interact with a diverse group of individuals. Through his work with large organizations such as the National Theatre and his appearances on television, he has been able to communicate with an even greater number of people and share his experiences with an even more extensive audience. *Quiz* (2017), which is about the cheating event on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" and *Dear England* (2023), which is about the English national football team, are examples of his works that make use of cultural allusions in order to make them enjoyable and simple to comprehend for a broad variety of individuals. The innovative concepts that James Graham has developed regarding form, organization, and subject matter have not only garnered him accolades from critics, but they have also left an indelible mark on the brains of regular people. It is clear from this that theater still has the power to reveal us and transform the reality in which we live (Billington, 2023).

Influence on Contemporary Drama

James Graham has had an effect on modern drama that goes beyond just his plays. He has motivated a fresh cohort of playwrights to utilize theatre as a medium for addressing social and political concerns. He has pushed the limits of what theater can do by using form and structure in new and interesting ways. Other playwrights have been inspired to try out multimedia and ways for the audience to get involved. Graham has also helped keep English drama alive by working with theaters, directors, and actors. His work with the National Theatre, the Royal Court, and the Donmar Warehouse has brought new people to the theater and given the art form a new lease on life in the 21st century. James Graham has had a huge impact on modern drama in the UK and around the world. He does this by telling stories in a new way, being interested in social and political issues, and making hard topics easy to understand. Graham has made political theater new and exciting for people today, putting it back in the spotlight of modern drama. He has a way of making political events easier to understand and connect with. His plays *This House* (2012) and *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019) are about the UK Parliament and the Brexit referendum, respectively. This emphasis on the personal narratives underlying political actions has motivated a new generation of playwrights to address contemporary issues with comparable depth and ingenuity (Philpott, 2024).

Graham's use of documentary theatre techniques, verbatim dialogue, and historical research has totally changed the way contemporary drama tackles real-life events. Works like *Quiz* (2017), which dives into the "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" This method has inspired other playwrights to try out mixed styles, blending journalism, history, and theatre to craft engaging stories. It's got playwrights and directors thinking outside the box about how to get the crowd engaged and make them part of the show.

Themes of national identity really stand out in Graham's work. One play that does this is *Dear England* (2023), which is about the English national football team. Another is *The Angry Brigade* (2014), which is about the radicals of the 1970s. Seeing this has made other writers want to write about similar topics and join the conversation about culture, history, and identity. He is good at making important political and social points while also being funny and satirical, like in *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019) and *Quiz* (2017). It's really raised the bar for modern drama. It's made serious topics more fun and easier to understand, and it's also pushed people to make their stuff funnier (Billington, 2024).

Modern theater is also more interesting because of Graham's work with other people and in different fields. He has worked with experts in science, history, and news to

make the creative process more interesting and his work more complex and well-rounded. One play that talks about the UK's space effort is *The Space* (2022). Other writers have joined forces with each other because they are all willing to try new things. The way current dramas deal with characters and stories has changed because of Graham's focus on group storytelling, which can be seen in *This House* (2012) and *Quiz* (2017). It no longer just has one main character; now it has more than one point of view.

Graham has done well in theater and on TV, which shows that there are different ways to tell a story. This has changed how people make and watch modern drama. *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019) and *Quiz* (2017) were both plays that were later made into TV shows. This shows that he can change the way he tells his stories. This flexibility has made other playwrights want to find work outside of the theatre, which has led to the growing overlap of theatre, film, and TV. James Graham's new ideas about form, structure, and subject matter have inspired a new generation of playwrights. This means that his impact on modern drama will last for a long time (Philpott, 2024).

Conclusion

James Graham is the best modern English playwright because he tells stories in new ways and is very good at politics. People enjoy watching his plays, but they also make people think about the world in a different way. Even though English drama is always changing, Graham's work shows that theatre can still show and shape society. Despite the fact that English theater is always evolving, Graham's work demonstrates that it still has the ability to reveal and alter society. Graham is able to transform ordinary occurrences into riveting drama, which is what sets him apart from other people. Through the use of humor, tension, and actual individuals, he demonstrates how the United Kingdom Parliament functioned in *This House* (2012) during the split parliament that occurred in the 1970s. But the play is not simply a boring history lesson; it also demonstrates how democracy works by demonstrating how it affects individuals, how institutions are pushed, and how ideological battles take place. It also discusses the ways in which the news has been altered as a result of Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of the British newspapers. Honesty, power, and the manner in which individuals conduct themselves in public are all things that we hold dear. Graham's plays provoke audiences to contemplate the responsibilities that individuals and leaders have within a community, as well as the ways in which actions made in the past have an impact on the present. James Graham is a great example of how theater can be used in daily life. You can be smart and easy to

understand at the same time in his work. It can be fun and make you think too. Graham's work is a strong reminder that theater can still show how society works, make people think, and get them interested in their communities. This is true even though English play changes to represent changes in technology, politics, and society. He left behind not only art, but also a very democratic heritage.

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