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*Mike Leigh's Late Coming Out: The analysis of Two Thousand  
Years and its position within modern Anglo-Jewish drama*

Diplomová práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem svou diplomovou práci na téma *Mike Leigh's Late Coming Out: The analysis of Two Thousand Years and its position within modern Anglo-Jewish drama* vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a veškerou použitou literaturu a jiné podklady jsem řádně citovala.

V Olomouci dne .....

Podpis .....

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## Introduction

The thesis explores a largely unknown field of contemporary Anglo-Jewish drama. The core of its focus is the analysis of Mike Leigh's most recent theatre play, *Two Thousand Years* (2005). The play portrays a year in a life of a secular English Jewish family living in London. The thesis also argues *Two Thousand Years*' special position within the canon of post 1945 theatre plays. It starts with the exploration of the similar subject matter in the plays of nineteen relevant post-war authors. Thus, it establishes the context for the analysis itself, while also marking the play's relation to some of its most prominent forerunners.

The following two chapters open the analysis, seeking answers for questions connected to the construct of Jewish identity of the members of Rosen family. Their Jewishness is presented in the play mainly as a sense of secular ethnic belonging. Yet, such identity construct gets confronted with religion through the member of the family's youngest generation, Josh. He rediscovers Judaism and reintroduces its daily practise. The work further looks into the problematic resolution of Josh's abandonment of the religious practise which gained reviewers' critique. It discovers a potential influence of the author's own opinion on religion and belief in general within the play. The thesis thus starts seeking an answer for an ongoing question if the play is overall reflective of a reality of Anglo-Jewish life or if it primarily presents preformed views on the discussed issues.

The next section of the thesis seeks to answer a question whether *Two Thousand Years* falls within the tradition of theatrical realism since conveying reality of everyday life is Leigh's overall work focus. It explores the unique working method behind the play's making and negotiates if it helps to enhance its realistic appeal. The same is argued with respect to the choice of the actors. All of them come from precisely the same background as their respective characters. The thesis subsequently discusses the language use and style, discovering its similarity to the language in Pinter's plays. The play also includes a relatively wide Yiddish and Hebrew vocabulary, and its translation in the alphabetical index. The chapter therefore explores to what extent is the language intended for a general audience as well.

The thesis also considers the play's setting, Cricklewood, North London, with respect to the real situation of London Jewish inhabitancy. Afterwards, it explores an overall realistic appeal of the characters since Leigh's work has been commonly criticized for constructing characters as mere satirical sketches. The thesis consequently negotiates the play's genre. It argues for tragicomedy and against satire which is widely mistook as prevalent in the author's work. It follows with the discussion why the play became to be known as the author's "Jewish coming out" and comments on author's recent testimonies on the issue.

In the sixth chapter, the thesis further explores the links between the play and the author's own personal background. The section discovers the connections to both his family history and his growing up in the leftist Zionist secular environment. All the characters in the play used to be members of Habonim, socialist Zionist youth club. They remember it with a great deal of nostalgia despite the criticism of its communist and Zionist propaganda. Their reflections raise questions about the sense of a loss of Jewish community life which the thesis also observes. The issue further relates to the ongoing discussion of the UK's politics, especially general elections; world's major political events, such as public reaction to the war in Iraq; and last, but not least, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The final part of the thesis thus follows the discussion of politics in the play, tracing Rosens' voting behaviour. It tries to answer a long existent question raised in the play – that of double political loyalties of English Jewry supposedly divided between the UK and the state of Israel. At the same time, the work explores whether and to what extent the political opinions are constructive of the characters' identity. It also examines how the play presents Israeli-Palestinian conflict, discussing overall change of the UK's public discourse on the issue. The potential influence of the author's own view on the conflict is also examined and compared with the first-hand experience of the only Israeli character in the play.

In the end, the thesis arrives at an answer for the underlying question whether the play predominantly has an appeal of reflective realism, or if it is somewhat didactic discussion of preformed conclusions on the presented issues, such as identity, religion, politics and family relations. After presenting the findings, the thesis summarizes the play's position within contemporary English political theatre. It thus closes the research in relation to the larger context again.

## Chapter 1: *Two Thousand Years*' forerunners

The thesis chooses to analyse Mike Leigh's *Two Thousand Years* (2005) based on the hypothesis that it is the first theatre play among the works of post 1945 Anglo-Jewish playwrights which places the portrayal of contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience in its very centre. To investigate the hypothesis, the chapter looks only at those plays which more or less touch upon the Jewish subject matter. Then it evaluates if the modern Anglo-Jewish experience is their main focus. The chapter thus tries to answer a question whether there is a strong Anglo-Jewish dramatic tradition or rather a sum of plays that happen to be written by English Jews. At the same time, it questions if Leigh's *Two Thousand Years*, with respect to its subject matter, is a breakthrough play in Anglo-Jewish drama.

David Jays' 2000 article "Missing Theatre" from *New Statesman* initiated questioning the existence of Anglo-Jewish dramatic tradition. As the title suggests, Jays supported the notion that Jewish subject matter is rather lacking in the plays by Anglo-Jewish authors. Yet, he did not present any substantial research on the issue and the question was not satisfyingly answered even in 2012 Guardian's A to Z of modern drama rubric of Michael Billington. Since a single comprehensive index of post-war Anglo-Jewish playwrights and their works does not yet exist, the chapter's findings are based on anthologies, such as Cheyette's anthology *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland* (1998), articles on the subject, collections of complete works and online databases, especially Doollee online database of playwrights and theatre plays. The chapter concentrates almost exclusively on English playwrights, listed alphabetically, and only on their theatre plays. It discusses the relevant works of the best known playwrights, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker, more profoundly due to the existence of more divergent opinions on the Jewishness in their subject-matter. Although Brian Glanville and Arthur Koestler are considered literary and public figures rather than playwrights, they are also included since they publically commented on the issue of presence of Jewishness in the post-war Anglo-Jewish writing.

Mike Alfreds may be better known as a director rather than playwright, yet playwriting is part of his occupation. He concentrates on reworking of plays and

novels such as Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1985), Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, (1996) although the two of his plays touch on Jewish subject matter as well. His *The Wandering Jew* (1987) tells the story of Serbian, Italian, French and other characters who all come in terms with their partial Jewish identity. *The Tin Ring* (2012) is inspired by autobiographical story of the Czech holocaust survivor, Zdenka Fantlová, but this play was produced only seven years after Leigh's *Two Thousand Years* and it stays far of the Anglo-Jewish context as well.

Most of Peter Barnes' plays draw from the chapters of the world history, such as *Leonardo's Last Supper* (1964) or his most acclaimed play *The Ruling Class* (1968), but those chapters connected to Jewish nation, let alone post-war Anglo-Jewish experience, are avoided. Steven Berkoff is more prolific playwright than Barnes. Many of his plays are reworkings of Old Testament stories such as the story of Adam and Eve, David and Goliath etc. In 2010, five years after Leigh's *Two Thousand Years*, Berkoff admits that there is a link between these plays and contemporary Jewishness: "These stories do inspire us and that's what they are there for, it inspires Jews to have ... pride."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, they are still far from focussing directly on modern Anglo-Jewish experience. The same is the case for his reworking of some of Kafka's works, for instance *Metamorphosis* (1969). Only his *Kvetch* (1986) shows non-stereotypical and unapologetic modern Jewish characters,<sup>2</sup> yet the play conveys American Jewish experience.

Ryan Craig is the first playwright of the survey who deals directly with contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience in some of his plays. *Our Class* (2004), the only play coming before Leigh's *Two Thousand Years*, however, is a holocaust story about a group of Polish Jews. *What We Did to Weinstein* (2005) largely follows one member of an Anglo-Jewish family, young Josh, who leaves to Israel to fight in the Intifada. Yet the play was produced only shortly after Leigh's play. *The Holy Rosenbergs* (2011) deals with a similar subject as *What We Did to Weinstein*. This time both children of the Rosenberg family go to Israel, one to fight and the other to investigate the war crimes, whereas their father in England tries to save both his business and position in the local Jewish community.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Elgot, "The Bible, Rewritten by Steven Berkoff," *The Jewish Chronicle*, n.p. 21 May 2010, <<http://www.thejc.com/arts/theatre/31983/the-bible-rewritten-steven-berkoff>>.

<sup>2</sup> See David Jays, "Missing Theatre," *New Statesman*, 30 October 2000, 43-44.



Ronald Harwood, similarly to Barns and Berkoff, also draws on the past in his plays. Two of them concentrate on the chapters from the Second World War. Yet, both *Taking Sides* (1995) and *An English Tragedy* (2008) focus on the Nazi figures Wilhelm Furtwangler and John Amery rather than on Anglo-Jewish figures and their experience. The last play touching on relevant topic would be *Collaboration* (2008), depicting relationship between Richard Strauss and Stephan Zweig. Yet even this one, written three years after *Two Thousand Years*, does not deal with Anglo-Jewry of the post-war England.

Brian Glanville, known predominantly for his novels and other writings rather than theatre plays, was one of the first few Anglo-Jewish figures commenting publically on Anglo-Jewish writing. According to Cheyette's anthology, Glanville is known to have shared opinion of Arthur Koestler who believed that due to the migration to the State of Israel or assimilation there would be an inevitable disappearance of Jewish traits. As a consequence, it would bring Anglo-Jewish artists much needed independence from Jewish subject matter.<sup>3</sup> Thus, neither Glanville's first drama, *Visit to the Villa* (1981), nor his second and last, *Underneath the Arches* (1981), show Jewish discourse. Even though the latter walks the audience through both world wars, the war events serve merely as a hindrance for the show-business of the two main protagonists. Koestler's only play, the *Twilight Bar* (1945), is also as much about politics as it is not about Anglo Jewry.

Returning to fully established playwrights, Bernard Kops wrote about twenty theatre plays. One of them, *The Dreams of Anne Frank* (1992), uses the famous story in London setting. Kops' birthplace, poor and at the time undeniably Jewish East End, shows mostly only in his late biographical writings, not the theatre plays. Wolf Mankowitz, similarly to Glanville and Koestler, declared in one of his interviews that he would not write about Jewishness of Anglo-Jewry. He further explains that for him, such writings would be no more than "dead flat rhythms of English vernacular."<sup>4</sup> His only relevant plays would be: *It Should Happen to a Dog* (1962) and *The Samson Riddle* (1972). Yet these, similarly to Berkoff's plays, recreate Old Testament stories. *The Hebrew Lesson* (1978) also

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<sup>3</sup> See Bryan Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), xxviii.

<sup>4</sup> Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxviii.

draws on history of the early twentieth century Ireland rather than post-war England. Michael Meyer focusses almost exclusively on adaptations, namely of Ibsen's and Strindberg's plays and none of his own plays deal with Jewishness.

Patrick Marber seems to be much closer to Leigh's *Two Thousand Years* in openly treating the contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience. His *Howard Katz* (2001) tells a story of a middle aged London Jew who is a show-business agent dealing with a life crisis. According to Marber's own words, "Howard's Judaism is important."<sup>5</sup> He also admits that he wrote the play with a feeling that "modern English Jewry was a territory that hadn't really been explored on stage."<sup>6</sup> Having been produced four years prior to Leigh's coming out, *Howard Katz* would thus be the first play to centre on Jewishness and contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience. In the UK, however, the play did not receive many positive reviews and overall critical acclaim was less than favourable with respect to the play's originality.<sup>7</sup> US reviews confirmed the UK's opinion and agreed that *Howard Katz* lacks originality. The play is believed to be a reworking of Mamet's *Everyman*,<sup>8</sup> an adaptation of Saul Below's "Henderson the Rain King"<sup>9</sup> or Bud Shulberg's movie *What Makes Sammy Run*<sup>10</sup> and many others. Moreover, presenting Jewish characters as no more than a literary stereotypes<sup>11</sup> was also criticised.

The first woman Anglo-Jewish playwright included in the survey, Julia Pascal, avoids such stereotyping. She produced about twenty of her plays before Leigh's *Two Thousand Years*. Most of those that touch upon Jewish topics however, do so through the Second World War history (*A Dead Woman on Holiday* 1991, *The Dybbuk* 1992, *The Holocaust Trilogy* 1995), mythology (*The Golem* 2002) or through American setting (*The Yiddish Queen Lear* 1999). She openly addresses the issue of contemporary Anglo-Jewry in her play *Broken English*, but only in 2009, four years after Leigh. Recently, she also comments in

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Allen Greene, "British Playwright Makes Use of His Judaism," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, n.p. 6 September 2001, <<http://www.jta.org/2001/09/06/life-religion/features/british-playwright-makes-use-of-his-judaism-3>>.

<sup>6</sup> Greene, "British Playwright Makes Use of His Judaism".

<sup>7</sup> See Greene, "British Playwright Makes Use of His Judaism".

<sup>8</sup> See Greene, "British Playwright Makes Use of His Judaism".

<sup>9</sup> See Ben Brantley, "A Kvetch de Coeur From the Abyss of Middle Age," *The New York Times*, n.p. 2 March 2007, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/02/theater/reviews/02katz.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/02/theater/reviews/02katz.html?_r=0)>.

<sup>10</sup> See Margaret Croyden, "Howard Katz," *The New York Theatre Wire*, n.p. 5 March 2007, <<http://www.nytheatre-wire.com/mc07031t.htm>>.

<sup>11</sup> See Croyden, "Howard Katz".

her plays set in Israel on the Middle East situation (*King David Hotel* 2000, *Crossing Jerusalem* 2003, *Nineveh* 2013). She thus seems, together with Ryan Craig, to shift the central subject matter of Anglo-Jewish plays largely from domestic commentary on the situation and life within England towards Israel.

Harold Pinter is probably the best known and perhaps also the greatest British playwright of modernity. His Faber and Faber edition of complete plays comprises of four volumes and forty-eight plays. He gained prestigious literary awards for both his fiction and poetry and in 2005, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Yet, it is on his account that Michael Billington in *Guardian* and David Jays in *New Statesman* doubt that there is “a Jewish theatrical identity.”<sup>12</sup> Both of them, like many other commentators (eg. David Krasner in his article “Harold Pinter’s *Homecoming* and Postmodern Jewish Philosophy”), base their opinion on one of Pinter’s best known plays, *Homecoming* (1965). Jays, like Krasner, advocates for *Homecoming*’s Jewishness on such general notions as a presence of “monstrous patriarch.”<sup>13</sup> The play indeed promises to deal with modern Anglo-Jewry with respect to some of the names of the characters and the North London setting.

However, it never makes any of its characters explicitly Jewish, let alone taking Jewishness as the main theme. The only mentioned family traditions, besides whoring, are bidding on horses and Christmas time charity.<sup>14</sup> Such traditions are distinctively English, or Christian, but by no means Jewish. Billington’s article thus rightfully advocates for the lack of Jewish subject matter in the plays and supports it by author’s claim that the play has “much wider social resonance”<sup>15</sup> than such subject matter. Pinter confirms the claim again in his introduction to the first volume of his collected plays. He says that especially his characters are “no allegorical representations.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Billington’s opinion appears to be more justified than Jays’ or Krasner’s.

The only Pinter’s character that ever openly points out to his Jewishness seems to be Goldberg from *The Birthday Party* (1958). Once he mentions his

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Billington, “J is for Jewish Dramatists,” *The Guardian*, n.p. 14 February 2012, <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/feb/14/jewish-dramatists-modern-drama>>.

<sup>13</sup> Jays, “Missing Theatre,” 43.

<sup>14</sup> See Harold Pinter, *Plays 3* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), 18,40.

<sup>15</sup> Billington, “J is for Jewish Dramatists”.

<sup>16</sup> Harold Pinter, *Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), ix.

mother serving him a “gefilte fish”<sup>17</sup> when he was little, then he toasts to everyone using a traditional toasting sentence from Jewish funeral celebrations: “Mazoltov! And may we only meet at Simchahs.”<sup>18</sup> However, when he raises his glass right after, he does not choose Jewish *le chaim*, “to life.” Instead, he mockingly uses German “Gesundheit,”<sup>19</sup> meaning “to health.” Such juxtaposition makes the scene undoubtedly humorous, otherwise, there are only two other effects that the presence of those few Yiddish words create. Firstly, according to Pinter’s words, both Jew Goldberg and Christian McCann are meant to be bastards symbolising “how religious forces ruin our life.”<sup>20</sup> The second effect is reducing gefiltefish-eating and mazoltoving Goldberg to a mere literary stereotype, as both Cheyette in his anthology and Efraim Sicher in his *Beyond Marginality: Anglo-Jewish Literature After the Holocaust* (1985) agree.<sup>21</sup> In a private life, however, Pinter did not conceal his Jewishness. On the contrary, the story goes that he “threw a glass of whiskey in the face of a drunken Irish actor who called him a filthy Yid.”<sup>22</sup> Yet, overall, it stays out of his works.

Another contemporary Anglo-Jewish woman playwright, Diane Samuels, belongs to the newer generation, having started her career only in 1990s. She, like many other playwrights in this list, connected Jewishness in her plays mostly to the Second World War events or woven them into the adaptations of the great plays of theatre history. Her award winning and most famous *Kidertransport* (1993) and her *3 Sisters on Hope Street* (2008) are the most salient examples of it.

Peter Shaffer is another one of the London based Anglo-Jewish playwrights who gained numerous drama and critic awards. His fourth play *Five Finger Exercise* (1958) appeared in 2007 at the schedule of readings of British Jewish plays in Washington Theatre J. Although Shaffer states that this drama is latently about the crisis within Jewish family,<sup>23</sup> its Jewishness never comes out and all an audience can see is “a typically English situation.”<sup>24</sup> He goes even further from any Jewish subject matter in the rest of the plays, dealing with

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<sup>17</sup> Pinter, *Plays 1*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Pinter, *Plays 1*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Pinter, *Plays 1*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Jays, “Missing Theatre,” 43.

<sup>21</sup> See Efraim Sicher, *Beyond Marginality: Anglo-Jewish Literature After the Holocaust* (Albany: State University of New York, 1985), 101; Cheyette, xxxii.

<sup>22</sup> Billington, “J is for Jewish Dramatists”.

<sup>23</sup> See Sicher, *Beyond Marginality*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> Sicher, *Beyond Marginality*, 111.

various topics like Ancient Egypt, death of Mozart etc. Cheyette confirms author's opinion and supports it with Shaffer's own words. Jewishness or "yiddishkeit is the most boring thing in the world,"<sup>25</sup> as the author derogatively called it.

Tom Stoppard started his playwriting career as early as in his twenties. He was a first generation Jewish Czechoslovakian immigrant, having come to the UK after the Second World War spent in exile in Singapore and India. His plays are considered an essential part of an English theatrical tradition. For Instance, one of his best known plays, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1968) draws on Shakespeare, and the same can be said about *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) and *Dogg's Hamlet* (1979). He is also inspired by Russian writers, for instance *The Coast of Utopia* (2002), by his childhood experience from India, *In the Native State* (1991), *Indian Ink* (1994) and by the situation in his original homeland, Czechoslovakia during communist regime, *Professional Fool* (1997). However, none of his plays centre on modern Anglo-Jewish experience.

The last Anglo-Jewish woman playwright in this list, Michelene Wandor, is more established as a fiction writer, yet she also wrote twenty two plays until now, and therefore has a right to be considered. Cheyette's anthology speaks about her fiction as dealing with "what it is to be a Jew, or a woman, in England."<sup>26</sup> Yet, the only play that centres on Jewishness, *The Wandering Jew* (1987) co-authored by Mike Alfreds, does not convey modern Anglo-Jewish experience, as explained early in this chapter.

The last author in this survey, Arnold Wesker, is in the tradition of modern British drama a playwright of very similar importance to Pinter. Just like him, Wesker wrote about fifty theatre plays, as well as some fiction and besides other awards, he was knighted for his lifelong contribution. Whereas Pinter's Goldberg contributed to the bank of stereotyped Jewish characters in the world's writings, Wesker works against this fashion. He recreates Shakespeare's sixteenth century *The Merchant of Venice* from Shylock's point of view into *The Merchant* (1976) because the play's "irredeemable Anti-Semitism" preserved in the adaptations shocked him<sup>27</sup>. Another motivation for *The Merchant* was, as he admits, "the sight

<sup>25</sup> Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxvii.

<sup>26</sup> Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxvii.

<sup>27</sup> See Arnold Wesker, *The Merchant* (London: Methuen, 1983), xviii.

of the world abandoning the Jews after the Yom Kipur War (October 1973)” which increased his “sense of responsibility towards the Jewish image.”<sup>28</sup> Unlike Shakespeare, he does the justice to historical relevance of the story and builds the play upon an extensive research of the laws conditioning relations between Jews and full citizens of Venice at the time.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the play’s setting remains in the past.

Some of his plays placed in the twentieth century also contain characters that are more openly Jewish than Pinter’s Goldberg. The two of his most famous plays, *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958) and *I’m Talking about Jerusalem* (1960) that are together with *Roots* (1959) commonly known as *The Wesker Trilogy* (1960) are admittedly taking place within “a Jewish working class family.”<sup>30</sup> The first play follows the life of East End Kahn family from 1936 to 1956. Sarah Kahn, the mother of the family is noted to be “a small, fiery woman, aged 37, Jewish and of European origin.”<sup>31</sup> Harry Kahn, her husband, “is 35 and also a European Jew, and the antithesis of Sarah.”<sup>32</sup> The author admits in public statement on his playwriting: “Jewish temperament is what informs my work.”<sup>33</sup> However, he is also quick to add that Jewishness is not central to the play:

acknowledging a Jewish temperament is not the same thing as being preoccupied with Judaism. My first play, *Chicken Soup With Barley* was no more about Judaism or Jewishness than it was about the working class. It happened to be played out through a Jewish working class family, because that was my background.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, most of the scholarship on *The Wesker’s Trilogy* concentrates on politics, some of it even considers the play a result of the political situation (eg. Zimmermann’s article, “Wesker and Utopia in the Sixties”). Michelene Wandor, in the chapter “The Jewish Family, Women and Politics” of her book *Look Back in Gender* (1987), confirms Wesker’s claim that Jewishness is as important for the play as the politics.<sup>35</sup> In comparison with Pinter’s stereotypical Goldberg, whose Jewishness is squeezed into eating gefiltefish and saying mazoltov, *Chicken Soup*

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<sup>28</sup> Wesker, *The Merchant*, xviii.

<sup>29</sup> See Wesker, *The Merchant*, xix.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Raines, “Sir Arnold Wesker,” *British Council*, n.p. last modified 2016, <<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/arnold-wesker>>.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold Wesker, *The Wesker Trilogy* (London: Penguin, 1964), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Wesker, *The Wesker Trilogy*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Raines, “Sir Arnold Wesker”.

<sup>34</sup> See Raines, “Sir Arnold Wesker”.

<sup>35</sup> See Michelene Wandor, *Look Back in Gender* (London: Methuen, 1987), 19.

*With Barley* and *I'm talking about Jerusalem* certainly displays more of it in its characters. Yet, it is by no means, according to the above claims, the central theme in the play. Still, as it will be further negotiated, Wesker's *Chicken Soup With Barley* is probably the most salient forerunner of Leigh's *Two Thousand Years*.

The chapter discovered that from 1945 until the first production of Leigh's *Two Thousand Years* in 2005, there is hardly any Anglo-Jewish theatre play to deal deliberately and mainly with modern Anglo-Jewish experience, and thus confirmed the hypothesis. The chapter considered nineteen post-war English Jewish playwrights who from 1945 until 2005 produced four hundred and seventy two plays. Almost each playwright under consideration touches upon topics close to Jewish issues in some of their plays, mainly through the adaptations of already existing writings with the Second World War themes or through the war events. The only playwright who centred mainly on the contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience before Leigh's *Two Thousand Years* is Patrick Marber. His *Howard Katz* showed middle crisis of the eponymous Jewish character from London. The further examination of the play however showed that it was widely denounced, besides other things, on the account that it does not show the contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience, but merely blends together existing stereotypical characterisations and situations of other works of art.

Two other playwrights, Ryan Craig and Julia Pascal who offer subject matter similar to Leigh's play in some of their plays, produced them only after *Two Thousand Years*. The closest forerunner to Leigh's play seems to be Wesker's *Chicken Soup With Barley* whose Jewishness is at least of some substantial importance, although the author does not acknowledge it as anything central. The findings in this chapter thus prove that Leigh's *Two Thousand Years* is the first post-war Anglo-Jewish play that actually centres on the modern Anglo-Jewish experience. For this reason, it deserves to be analysed further on in the thesis, both with respect to its unique theme and position, and the resemblance to some of its forerunners mentioned here. The following chapter is thus going to start the analysis with an exploration of the play's Jewish subject matter.

## Chapter 2: Religion and Its Role in *Two Thousand Years*

There are two aspects connected to the concept of Jewish identity that Leigh presents in *Two Thousand Years*. First and foremost aspect is ethnic Jewishness: a person identifies as a Jew when he or she is born to a mother who is ethnically Jewish. There is also religious Jewishness or the everyday practise of Judaism that is now not necessarily a construct of the Jewish identity. Leigh presents Judaism in *Two Thousand Years* as a source of struggle within Rosen family. The chapter explores the aspect of religious Jewishness and the role of Judaism in the play. It looks mainly at the story of Josh, the only character in the play who turns to Judaism. The aim of this chapter is to answer a question why the issue has gained much criticism and what was the author's motivation for portraying religion as he had. The findings in the chapter are supported mainly by few existing reviews, articles and author's comments on the play.

*Two Thousand Years* tells a story of a small secular Jewish family from North London. Grandfather Dave is an old working class socialist and choleric who spent early years of his adult life in a kibbutz in Israel where he married another Jewish Englishwoman. His wife, Naomi, never appears on the stage. The news of her death brings home their younger daughter Michelle, or Mash, who has not contacted the family for eleven years. Their elder daughter Rachel, who was born and raised until her fourth year in the kibbutz, has just turned fifty. She is ten years older than Michelle. After marrying dentist Danny, who is also an English Jew from North London, Rachel has become a full-time housewife, despite her university education.

Both Rachel and Danny used to be socialists, but then changed their political favours for Guardian observing left-wing liberalism. Their son Josh is approaching his thirties and even though he holds an honourable degree in mathematics he lives of his parents ever since he left university. His sister Tammy is his antithesis. She is a successful freelance interpreter and although she lives in London, her work often takes her all around the world. In US, she meets young Israeli, Tzachi, whom she later introduces to her family as her boyfriend. The family also has a long-time friend, Jonathan, who used to date Michelle, still visits frequently and who is present during her brief visit.



The timespan of the play ranges from July 2004 until early September 2005, the exact time of the play's making. At the beginning, Danny and Rachel leave for two weeks to Malta to celebrate Rachel's fiftieth birthday. During their time away of the house, Josh turns openly religious and continues keeping traditions of Judaism even after his parents return, much to their dismay. The situation starts to turn into a family crisis after Tammy, and the most vigorous secularist Dave, learn about it. Throughout the play, all the characters also maintain a discussion about the world politics. The first act comes to an end right after the 2004 general election. The second act opens on the third September 2005, after almost a year when Rosens mourn the loss of the grandmother and Tammy returns with her Israeli boyfriend.

Tzachi's arrival into the family brings a new dimension to the ongoing political discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The family crisis reaches its climax when egoistic and apparently alcoholic Michelle appears at the door after eleven years, having heard about her mother's death. Tzachi decides to take the potentially violent situation under control and pacifies the family authoritatively. Afterwards, Tzachi and Tammy leave for the cinema and Josh reconciles with his grandfather and parents. Michelle leaves in a fury, not admitting her misbehaviour.

Josh, through whom the issue of religion as a part of Jewish identity enters the story, is one of the most central characters in the play. He is the only one to be present in every scene. At the beginning of the first scene, on late Saturday afternoon in July, he and his parents are reading in the living room on the ground-floor of their Victorian semi-detached house. According to the setting note, it is full of comfortable contemporary furniture, modern books, popular paintings, very nicely kept conservatory and garden, and bright, informal atmosphere.<sup>36</sup> The setting is thus a classic "my house, my castle" embodiment of a middle-class English dream-come-true. The beginning of the first scene of the first act supports the notion of idyll; Danny reads a Guardian article. Rachel, having already finished it, is reading a book. Josh is surrounded by several books.

When Jonathan, old family friend, pays them a visit, the audience sees for the first time that Josh is rather too self-absorbed. He does not notice the bell and

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<sup>36</sup> See Mike Leigh, *Two Thousand Years* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), 2.

Danny has to get up to answer the door in his stead, giving Josh a disapproving look.<sup>37</sup> After the small talk about their gardening hobby, Jonathan, Danny and Rachel discuss the guardian article about the failure of 2000 Camp David diplomatic meeting. Josh never enters the discussion and the rest apparently forgets about him, changing the subject to the brilliance and success of his sister Tammy and discussing her recent travels. When Danny and Rachel confess to Jonathan that they are very proud of her, Josh feels confronted and leaves his sofa to exit to the garden through conservatory. He stops at the door to listen a little further and after another shower of appraisal for Tammy, he returns to leave to his upstairs room instead without even saying Jonathan goodbye. When Jonathan tries to enquire what's wrong with Josh before he leaves, Danny cuts him in with simple: "Oh he's doing his thing,"<sup>38</sup> to avoid confessing that his twenty-eight years old son with a university degree is a disappointment.

In an interview with Linda Grant for her Guardian article about the issue of Jewish identity in *Two Thousand Years*, Mike Leigh confesses that the play is indeed about disappointment, connected to "how one child, of whom you had high hopes, has turned out."<sup>39</sup> The author repeats the claim even in the introduction to the print version of the play itself, where he summarizes the most important points about the play and his motivations behind its making.<sup>40</sup> Both Josh and his parents are apparently very sensitive about the issue and deal with it in a very English way, with silence.

The second scene shows that even in private, without any guests in the house, Josh is unwilling to communicate. He comes down to read in the armchair to keep his mother a company while she is packing for the Malta trip. Rachel is watching him silently and reproachfully. After Josh asks her casually what she is doing during the day, she turns the question on him, "What are you doing today, more to the point?"<sup>41</sup> When Josh explains that he was just thinking, Rachel replies, "Oh don't tire yourself out. What about?"<sup>42</sup> Josh responds by announcing

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<sup>37</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> See Linda Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out," *The Guardian*, n.p. 18 April 2006, <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/apr/18/theatre.religion>>.

<sup>40</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>41</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 17.

hurtfully that he is going for a walk and before he leaves, Rachel only gives him another displeased look.

The next scene, however, shows that Josh was actually thinking about something of utmost importance for him that he didn't wish to share yet with his family. While Danny and Rachel are in Malta, Josh is seen "pacing around the room in a very anxious state."<sup>43</sup> There is a delivered package on the sofa. He makes sure all curtains are drawn, so that no one from the outside sees him. Afterwards, it seems that he is about to inject some sort of a drug. "He takes off his watch and places it on the arm of the sofa. He rolls up his left shirtsleeve. Then he takes several items out of the carrier bag and lays them out on the sofa."<sup>44</sup> The items, however, are not for a drug injection, as the scene would suggest, but for everyday usage of a religiously observing Jew. There is a "*kippah*," or a skullcap, and "*tefillin*," or phylacteries. It is also very obvious that Josh intends to use them, as he puts the kippah on his head and tefillin on his bared arm and says blessing in Hebrew that is supposed to be said every time before the prayer with tefillin: "*Baruh Atah Adonai, eloheinu, melech ha'olam. Asher kidishanu bemitzvotav v'tzivanu lehanilach tefillin.*"<sup>45</sup> The resemblance to a drug abuse, makes the scene creates ironically comical.

Such comical effect is the reason for criticism on the part of reviewers of the play. For instance, Charles Isherwood calls his *New York Times* review aptly "No Yarmulke, Please, We're Assimilated" and points out that Josh's sudden conversion to Judaism is treated as a lunacy and a joke.<sup>46</sup> Sue Vice holds the very same opinion in her article "'Becoming English:' assimilation and its discontents in contemporary British Jewish literature." She states that "Josh's new-found orthodoxy is represented in terms of a "sight-gag" and the religion is overall treated in "ostensibly comic terms."<sup>47</sup> The comical effect is not Leigh's only motivation to show Josh's religious coming out resembling a drug addiction. Leigh comes from a secular Jewish family that was more than sceptical towards

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<sup>43</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Leigh, (Blessed is you Lord, almighty, king of the world who ordered us to wear tefillin.), 19.

<sup>46</sup> See Charles Isherwood, "No Yarmulke, Please, We're Assimilated," *The New York Times*, n.p. 8 February 2008, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/theater/reviews/08leig.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/theater/reviews/08leig.html?_r=0)>.

<sup>47</sup> Sue Vice, "Becoming English," *Jewish Culture and History* 14 (2013): 107, <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1462169X.2013.805900?journalCode=rjch20>>.

Judaism, as the story of his grandmother confirms: He says that she “loathed and detested rabbis, and she was known to chuck them out of her house with her bare hands.”<sup>48</sup> The author admits the impact of her vigorous secularism in his family and on *Two Thousand Years*. “The healthy influence of this formidable lady could be felt throughout our family during my childhood, and I owe something of this play to her.”<sup>49</sup> His own opinion on religion is rather negative. He admits: “what nobody could have foreseen in the 1950s was the extent to which religious fanaticism would come to afflict the world as it has. The confusion of a young person who turns to religion is a phenomenon of our strange times.”<sup>50</sup> As shown further in this chapter, this opinion clearly translates into Josh’s ridiculed love affair with religion.

At the same time, such portrayal of religion makes the play somewhat more reflective of the author’s own stance on the issue rather than showing overall contemporary attitude of Anglo-Jewish families towards religion. Vice settles for a simple commentary that the play “emphasizes the irrationality of any religious observance.”<sup>51</sup> Kenneth Minogue is much more critical in “Mike Leigh’s Jewish Play.” He states that Leigh opportunistically uses Josh’s struggle with religion to defend author’s own secularist orthodoxy.<sup>52</sup> The reaction of Josh’s parents supports Minogue’s claim.

On the morning of his parent’s return, Rachel, to her bewilderment, finds Josh at his morning prayer. When she asks him what is going on, he answers simply: “I was praying.”<sup>53</sup> Later on, when he is cross examined by both of his dismaying parents for his reasons to turn to Judaism, they ask: “How can it just come from you? Have you been influenced by people, some kind of sect. The *Chassidim*? Those *Luboviches*, or something?”<sup>54</sup> Here, the play mention perhaps the two best known orthodox Jewish groups, the latter of which aims to bring secular Jews back to Judaism.

When Josh replies that it simply comes from him, his parents refuse to believe that he has not changed into a religious fanatic and Rachel voices another

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<sup>48</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>49</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>50</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>51</sup> Vice, “Becoming English”, 106.

<sup>52</sup> See Kenneth Minogue, “Mike Leigh’s Jewish Play,” *The Social Affairs Unit*, n.p. 6 June 2006, <<http://www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/000961.php>>.

<sup>53</sup> Minogue, “Mike Leigh’s Jewish Play,” 19.

<sup>54</sup> Minogue, “Mike Leigh’s Jewish Play,” 21.

concern; the dietary laws that may have befallen their household. “Will he want to go kosher? There’s an unopened packed of unsmoked organic in the fridge.”<sup>55</sup> Danny’s natural reaction makes the scene ridicule religious practise: “What, there’s bacon? Is it past its sell-by date?”<sup>56</sup> When Rachel replies that it’s not since she bought it for Josh just before they left, Dave says ostentatiously. “Right, I’m starving. I’m going to have bacon and eggs.”<sup>57</sup> When grandfather Dave comes to visit and sees Josh with kippah on his head, he calls him a rabbi in a mocking tone and adds to Rachel and Danny cynically: “I’ll tell you one thing. You’ll have your own personal rabbi on tap to say *Kaddish* for me for nothing.”<sup>58</sup> Here, he resembles Pinter’s Goldberg who also mentions Jewish mourning rituals and for similarly spiteful reasons. At the same time, he resembles Leigh’s own grandmother, Rachel Blain, with her anti-rabbi thinking and manners mentioned above.

Yet, one cannot consider Dave a mere cynic stereotype and has to look further at Dave’s behaviour towards his grandson. After Josh leaves to his room to be alone again, Dave asks his daughter and son-in-law more about his grandson: “Does he go to *shul*? Does he put on *tefillin*?”<sup>59</sup> Danny and Rachel inform him that Josh prays the morning prayers and eats kosher and Danny adds: “Oh, and he lights the candles every Friday night.”<sup>60</sup> On that Dave replies, “What, he lights candles? A man?”<sup>61</sup> Rachel explains that Josh asked her first to be lighting the candles for the start of Shabbat, but she refused. Dave is shocked by the fact that Josh’s religious observance turned so strict that he is performing the traditional task of the mother of the house.

Yet, Dave is also the only member of the family who tries to deal with Josh’s situation constructively. He suggests that he should become a rabbi, “I mean it, it’s a good number being a rabbi – they make a bloody fortune.”<sup>62</sup> Still, everybody takes it as another instance of Dave’s cynicism. Dave is also the only one to criticise his daughter and son in law for not being able to communicate with their son, failing to help him become independent and complaining that the

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<sup>55</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 41.

<sup>61</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 41.

<sup>62</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 40.

situation is hard on them instead: “I’m sure it’s hard. But I’ll tell you something if you don’t mind my saying so. You make it hard for yourselves.”<sup>63</sup> Josh is not present to see that his grandfather actually reproaches his parents. He also does not notice that even though his family is dismayed, they have never thought about him as someone excluded from the family circle, as they awkwardly try to assure him: “We still love you Josh. Of course we do.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, he storms out of the room every time the issue gets out of control. For instance Danny burst out: “I don’t understand, Josh. It’s beyond me. It’s unbelievable. It’s like having a Muslim in the house.”<sup>65</sup> When Rachel rebukes him, Danny quickly rephrases for fear of political incorrectness: “Alright, then, a Martian!”<sup>66</sup> Josh therefore thinks himself not only excluded from family circle, but also mocked.

He confesses to such feelings the final family confrontation. He tells Michelle who appears at the doorstep despite having no interest in family trouble for past eleven years: “You think you are the victim in this family? Well, you walked away. I’m still stuck with it! My grandpa thinks I’m a waste of space. My parents see me as a religious freak! My sister doesn’t understand me at all. And let me tell you something. It’s lonely. It’s fucking lonely!”<sup>67</sup> While Josh’s parents and his sister stay shocked and mute, it is Dave who in the end defends Josh openly: “So what? He’s found something that has some meaning for him – something positive. You may not agree with it. I may not agree with it. Actually, I think it’s a load of crap – all religion’s bollocks. But it means something to him.”<sup>68</sup> Dave’s reaction is the only instance when the play breaks the prevalent criticism of religion.

Josh apparently appreciates the remark that proves there is some understanding between him and the other family members to such an extent that after the row he comes back without kippah on his head. Then he starts crying and reconciles first with his grandfather and then the rest of the family. Symbolically, Josh thus leaves religion in favour of his family ties which again shows religion serving as rather temporary relief, just like the drug intake. Moreover, throughout all the play, Josh never explains why he has turned to Judaism. Linda Grant sees it

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<sup>63</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 20.

<sup>66</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 104.

<sup>68</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 105.

as a flaw in her Guardian review. She observes that the play avoids the discussion of why Josh has chosen religion as his belief in the first place.<sup>69</sup> Isherwood also criticises such attitude towards religion and supports Grant's view: "Josh is never allowed to articulate any rationale for his sudden adherence to committed orthodox belief."<sup>70</sup> The family does not discuss Josh's motives for taking the kippah off of his head, even though they all notice it. Instead, they react similarly to how they reacted to Josh before, with silent meaningful looks.

Last, but not least, Josh's religious love affair is also a mock-ironic reverse of a Biblical story from the New Testament about the prodigal son. Whereas the original prodigal son asks for his money and leaves the family's house to squander it off, Josh stays in his parent's house to live off their salaries, even though they would wish him to move out and become independent. The prodigal son forgets the faith of his family, praises the false gods and sins abundantly. Josh, on the other hand, goes back to the practise Judaism, the religion that was for thousands of years tightly linked with the Jewish identity and becomes observant to the shocking dismay of his hardboiled secularist family. In the end, he, just like the prodigal son, returns to "the faith" of his family when he takes off the kippah. Yet ironically again, in Josh's case it means a return to secularism.

The portrayal of religion in the play thus overall does not hold true to what the author says he intended: "*Two Thousand Years* doesn't pretend to explain away Josh's dilemma in easy, simplistic terms. My job is always to raise questions, and leave you to ponder, to debate, to argue."<sup>71</sup> As proven before, Leigh treats Josh's issue with great deal of simplicity since he does not question Josh's motivation for becoming religious in the play. Josh indeed fits for the most part into the role of the skeleton in the closet of a firmly secularist Jewish family. The issue is never brought into the light out of the family circle. The whole situation continues to feed many loud and funny quarrels throughout the play, yet it is never resolved by a direct discussion. The only reviewer who seems to be

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<sup>69</sup> See Linda Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out," *The Guardian*, n.p. 18 April 2006, <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/apr/18/theatre.religion>>.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Isherwood, "No Yarmulke, Please, We're Assimilated," *The New York Times*, n.p. 8 February 2008, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/theater/reviews/08leig.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/theater/reviews/08leig.html?_r=0)>.

<sup>71</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

content that the play only “captures the alarm with which the secular now regard religious conviction”<sup>72</sup> is Charles Spencer.

Nevertheless, even his *Telegraph* review notices a problem that for Josh “religious faith seems to offer little remedy for his pain.”<sup>73</sup> Josh thus overall appears to critics as a character skilfully constructed to serve a purpose of conveying Leigh’s sceptical opinion on religion. At the same time, the play shows that Judaism is only a temporary part of the Jewish identity for only one member of the family. The religion is also used to create the comical effect. It might, therefore, lead to a conclusion that Josh’s struggle is just a convenient device for the plot, constructed for solely for the above mentioned purposes rather than realistically reflecting contemporary secularism of English Jews.

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Spencer, “Terrific – this is vintage Leigh,” *The Telegraph*, n.p. 16 September 2005, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3646590/Terrific-this-is-vintage-Leigh.html>>.

<sup>73</sup> Spencer, “Terrific – this is vintage Leigh”.



### Chapter 3: Contrastive Personalities and Belief in *Two Thousand Years*

The chapter follows the focus of the previous one, looking closer at the character of Josh. It aims to answer a question whether the story of his struggle with religion is realistic or if the character is just a one-dimensional device for the plot. For that reason, Josh and his personality is compared mainly with the most contrastive personality of Tammy. The play also examines the original cast and compares it with the most contrastive casting of the New York adaptation of the play. Afterwards, it compares Josh with other characters from Leigh's works and Anglo-Jewish drama. The chapter also looks at whether there is any other purpose of displaying religion than criticising it and examines different beliefs presented in the play.

US choice for casting seems to support the findings of the previous chapter about Josh's character. New York's Acorn Theatre chose Jordan Gelber for Josh. Overweight with big glasses and dressed unfashionably<sup>74</sup> he fits perfectly into an image of the black sheep of the family, a clear cut loser approaching his thirties. His struggle is thus much more comical overshadowing the questions Leigh claims to have raised in relation to religion. Moreover, he contrasts considerably with Natasha Lyonne as Tammy. She is attractive, she's also nicely dressed and jewelled, her face is fittingly made up and she smiles radiantly and often.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, for the play's first production in London, Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre on 15 September 2005, Leigh has chosen an acclaimed actor, Ben Caplan to perform Josh.

Even though he is also craftily masked which gives him a look of a bookworm, overall, he is much less a cliché than Jordan Gelber's Josh.<sup>76</sup> Leigh's choice for Tammy, Alexis Zegerman has a styling not only far different from Natasha Lyonne's styling, but it is Zegerman who comically embodies the typical contemporary young all-purpose campaigner for human rights. She is wearing baggy khaki Manchester trousers, grey comfortable long sleeved shirt, loose knitted beige handbag and beige trainers. She wears no make-up and jewellery,

<sup>74</sup> See <<http://www.jewishexponent.com/leigh-way>>.

<sup>75</sup> See <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/theater/reviews/08leig.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/theater/reviews/08leig.html?_r=0)>.

<sup>76</sup> See <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newspnight/review/4249180.stm>>.

her hair is a natural brown, undyed. It is also her who is a little overweight whereas Ben Caplan has a sportive figure.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, she is full of smiles and proud to talk about her happiness.

When Michelle blames her family for her loneliness, Tammy rebukes her for her egoism and adds that she herself “enjoys immensely”<sup>78</sup> the responsibilities of adult life and Michelle should also try to be responsible for walking away from them. The family row leaves Tammy untouched, proving her psychic balance. Moreover, she mostly only observes it and “finds it very funny.”<sup>79</sup> Then she leaves to the cinema to enjoy a movie with her boyfriend whereas Josh is left crying. She does, therefore, embody the successful child of the family who always knows the right thing to say and is naturally happy with her life. Even though Leigh did construct an opposition between Josh and Tammy, it is not based as much on appearance as was the case with the Acorn Theatre adaptation. Leigh constructed the contrast based on their divergent personalities.

Tammy is the first to notice Josh’s breakdown and the first one who tries to comfort him: “Are you alright?”<sup>80</sup> She does not lack compassion. She also contemplates, before Josh admits it in the final row that Josh’s more introverted personality must make him feel estranged from the rest of the family: “It’s a shame he could never share it with anyone, really.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, she is not a one-dimensional character. Josh is also far from being a one-dimensional character. On the contrary, Ben Caplan’s Josh is perhaps the most round character in the play and also the only one who evolves.

Prior to his religious coming out, he appears to be rather self-absorbed, as was described. When he adopts the traditions of Judaism, what previously seemed to be passivity turns in the new light into thoughtfulness. In the course of the play, more aspects of his personality show. Although he is mostly melancholic and unwilling to communicate, yet he is also intelligent and contemplative. Once, his father voices a concern that obeying religious rules will overshadow Josh’s ability of rational inquiry: “When it’s all laid down, Josh, it stops you asking

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<sup>77</sup> See <<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/2000yearsPDL-rev>>.

<sup>78</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 109.

<sup>79</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 108.

<sup>80</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 35.

questions.”<sup>82</sup> Josh reminds him confidently: “This is me you’re talking about, Dad. When have I ever not asked questions?”<sup>83</sup> Thus, Josh is certainly not a one dimensional stereotype of a naïve young person absorbed by religion.

His personality comprises of more divergent aspects. As it was already mentioned, Josh often refuses to communicate with other members of his family. He also almost never explains or defend himself. His disappearances and most of all his hurtful reaction to the appraisal of Tammy shows that he is overall rather sensitive. Apparently, escaping inwards is his natural reaction, however weak it may seem. Josh is not the only character with such disposition in Leigh’s own works. According to Rosie Millard and her *New Statesman* review of the play, Josh’s personality matches other “typically sad and misunderstood men”<sup>84</sup> in Leigh’s works. There is for instance Phil from his film *All or Nothing*. He is a main male character in the film, a taxi driver whose relationship with his wife goes through a major crisis. Leigh himself confirms: “Phil is related to a long line of philosophical guys in my films, who feels deeply, but articulate very little of what they are thinking.”<sup>85</sup> Leigh also seems to assign such characters particular importance, since both Josh and Phil are central to both stories.

The other members of Josh’s family do not have the same disposition, and so some of their reactions are inevitably rather hard to bear for Josh. For instance, Danny tells him: “We feed you, we clothe you, we don’t complain. You’ve never had a job. Josh: you left university seven years ago with a first Class Honours degree in mathematics – the world was your oyster... and now this *mishigas!*”<sup>86</sup> Josh reacts with frustrated defeat, “I’m sorry I’m such a disappointment to you! *He goes out slamming the door.*”<sup>87</sup> At this point, the play makes his temper understandable. In the end, his decision to conform to family’s objections on his choice of religious life and at least symbolically to abandon Judaism certainly matches his sensitive nature. It leaves him crying and resigned. He is thus not only an object of his parent’s disappointment, but he also experiences it himself. As

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<sup>82</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 32.

<sup>83</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 32.

<sup>84</sup> Rosie Millard, “Notebook,” *New Statesman*, 19 September 2005, 41, <<http://www.newstatesman.com/node/162854>> .

<sup>85</sup> Leonard Quart, “Going Beyond Despair,” *Cineaste*, Winter (2002): 39, <<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/interviews/8869635/going-beyond-despair-interview-mike-leigh>>.

<sup>86</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 22.

<sup>87</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 22.

was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the disappointment is one of the central themes.<sup>88</sup> It sheds some light on Josh's disengagement with religion and links the play with Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley*.

Josh resembles a well-known character from forty-four years ago prior to the production of *Two Thousand Years*. Ronnie from *The Wesker's Trilogy* is a less successful child in the Kahn family than his sister Ada who is having a stable relationship with Dave and lives according to the family's belief, socialism. Ronnie, like Josh, abandons this ideal and in the end goes through a breakdown: "What has happened to all the comrades, Sarah? I even blush when I use that word. Didn't it hurt *you* to read about the murder of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union? I've lost my faith."<sup>89</sup> Both Josh and Ronnie thus convey a disappointment over the loss of a belief.

Leigh claims that *Two Thousand Years* indeed explores "what we believe in."<sup>90</sup> On one hand, he stigmatizes Josh as one of the young religious fanatics he mentioned, and resolves Josh's religious practise as a fruitless quest that brings him pain rather fulfilment and stays in the way of his return to the family fold. On the other hand, the play also shows that it is the belief itself that is crucial for people, rather than its form or its object. "He's found something that has some meaning for him – something positive."<sup>91</sup> Even though Leigh is unable to put aside his secularism and condemns religion throughout the play, its positive even though temporary impact still shows. Linda Grant even considers the nature of belief the main message: "believing in something was what Leigh was talking about. The way it won't let you go, because without it, there's a void."<sup>92</sup> Michael Billington agrees with her in his *Guardian* review. He says the fact that "we all need something in which to believe,"<sup>93</sup> is the play's main point.

Indeed, the play also offers abundant display of beliefs of other characters. Rachel and Danny believe in the importance of the family, Tammy believes in the better world. Dave believes in socialism. *Two Thousand Years* thus opens a question of belief as a universal human need. Yet, it provides further explanation largely only for concepts connected to Judaism, despite condemning it as a folly.

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<sup>88</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>89</sup> Wesker, *The Wesker Trilogy*, 71,72.

<sup>90</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, v.

<sup>91</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 105.

<sup>92</sup> Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out", 2.

<sup>93</sup> Billington, "J is for Jewish Dramatists".

Firstly, it includes all the key traditions into the play: It describes with utmost accuracy the ritual of prayer with tefillin and shows other religious garment. Through its characters, the play explains what it means to eat “*kosher*” and touches upon fasting on the most important day of mourning, Yom Kipur. It mentions the ritual of lighting candles at the beginning of Shabbat, the day of the rest in Judaism, also attendance to synagogue that is linked to it and various religious groups within Judaism, etc. Moreover, every concept connected with Judaism that might not be familiar to general public is indicated by italics in the text of the play and presented in the index in alphabetical order provided with an explanation.

Judaism thus clearly belongs into *Two Thousand Years*. In the very first sentence of his introduction to the play, Leigh moreover announces that it is: “my Jewish play.”<sup>94</sup> His urge to ensure the understanding of the key concepts connected to Judaism underlines its importance for the subject matter of the play itself. The choice of the cast for Josh’s character further supports the notion that the issue of religion was not intended to be oversimplified, even though religion is clearly overall scorned. Nevertheless, the play shows various other beliefs instead and thus presents belief as a universal human need. Thus, the play reflects that Leigh was ultimately unable to avoid the influence of his secularism over the plot which ensured that the portrayal of Josh’s struggle with Judaism is more reflective of his pre-formed opinion, rather than reflecting the contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience. Still, Leigh claims that *Two Thousand Years* is overall reflective rather than didactic.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the following chapter will further examine to what extent is the contemporary Anglo-Jewish experience realistic in the play.

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<sup>94</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, v.

<sup>95</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

## Chapter 4: Realism and *Two Thousand Years* – the process of making, the choice of the actors and the use of language

The thesis already examined the portrayal of religion in the play and discovered that it is perceived overall negatively even though the play claims to aim at realistic reflection rather than conveying particular opinions on particular issue. Therefore, the main focus of this chapter is to answer a question whether *Two Thousand Years* is indeed intended and made realistic. The chapter presents what strategies were used for achieving realistic effect and examines if they were successful. The focus lies on the process of the play's making, the choice of actors, and last but not least, the usage of languages.

Sources discussing Leigh's works agree that reality is what his films and plays are mirroring. For instance, Paul Clements aptly summarizes their realistic appeal in his book, *The Improvised Play, The Work of Mike Leigh* (1983). He says,

it generally appears to be the case that when people talk about Leigh's plays and films one of the commonest observations is that the characters are very familiar... The things they do are also familiar. A lot of eating goes on in Leigh's work... there's a lot of drinking too, and, as a natural consequence, a lot of going to the lavatory... and a fair bit of illness. They have a lot of domestic rows and argument and, without its ever becoming a complete preoccupation, there's a fair amount of sex. The characters smoke a lot and there's a great deal of talk about work, and plenty of examples of work itself. Their lives seem a lot like yours or mine.<sup>96</sup>

*Two Thousand Years* fits nicely into such a description. Arguing or not, the family always finds some time to enjoy a cup of tea together, preferably with a slice of cake and they consequently do the dishes. Dave has to be helped every time he wants to go upstairs to use a toilet and so the matter is sure to be mentioned. He is also a heavy smoker despite his emphysema<sup>97</sup> which causes him coughing attacks. Last, but not least, the characters also often discuss their former and present jobs and argue about their pros and cons etc.

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Clements, *The Improvised Play: The Work of Mike Leigh* (London: Methuen, 1983), 59,60.

<sup>97</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 38.

The first Bert Cardullo's interview with Mike Leigh was made shortly after the production of *Two Thousand Years*, but published only in 2009. In the interview, Leigh states that capturing reality is indeed general purpose behind his works. He speaks of "reproducing a real world" and "creating a total reality."<sup>98</sup> He confirms the same in the 2007 book by Amy Raphael aptly named *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh* and also in his second interview with Ben Cardullo in 2010. He adds that his ultimate subject is "people relating to each other and the relationships between men and children and work."<sup>99</sup> He further explains that it comes out of a preoccupation with life as such and that these themes are underlying and constant in his body of work.

Clearly, *Two Thousand Years* has the same thematic foundation; it shows the relationships between six members of one family and their struggle to keep them well functioning despite the circumstances. The motifs of pregnancies, being parents etc. which Leigh connects to the theme and confesses to be recurrent<sup>100</sup> are also present. Danny and Rachel discuss Jonathan and his wife Shirley going through a miscarriage.<sup>101</sup> During his last visit, Jonathan brings the news that they are expecting a baby. The author therefore rightfully summarizes that the play is not only about the family in question, but about "families"<sup>102</sup> in general.

Leigh further states what helps him to create a world in his movie or a play as realistic as possible. It is a process of making it itself.<sup>103</sup> Although he speaks especially about film as a medium enabling him to get hold of existing life,<sup>104</sup> he uses the same strategy of making for his plays as well. The process in question is unique in the world of visual entertainment. At the beginning, there is no script and the author claims to start only with a "pretty fluid brief"<sup>105</sup> or a vague conception in his imagination.<sup>106</sup> Then he chooses his actors and they help him start building the characters for the story, including naming them. They usually choose to model particular character on someone from the mass of random people

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<sup>98</sup> See Bert Cardullo, "Making People Think Is What It's All About," *Cinema Journal* 1 (2010): 12, <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cj/summary/v050/50.1.cardullo.html>>.

<sup>99</sup> See Cardullo, "Making People Think Is What It's All About," 4,7.

<sup>100</sup> See Cardullo, "Making People Think Is What It's All About," 7.

<sup>101</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>103</sup> See Cardullo, "Making People Think Is What It's All About," 3.

<sup>104</sup> See Amy Raphael ed. *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 11.

<sup>105</sup> Cardullo, "Making People Think Is What It's All About," 3.

<sup>106</sup> See Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 28.

they remember from random places. The rule is that it is not supposed to be someone familiar to them.

The following six months the crew goes through sessions of improvisations. Leigh claims that half year rehearsals are a convention he learned at the theatre and he keeps in line with such timing regardless of if he is making a film or a play.<sup>107</sup> Thus, his method is more strongly linked with theatre than filmmaking since theatre is the place of its origin. During those six months, Leigh claims that the key to success is to forget what the work should be about and to respect the decisions of his actors on whether they think their character would or would not react in such and such way in a reality.<sup>108</sup> He calls the half year period a mere preparation.

Leigh also firmly opposes the suggestion that his process of creating a work is similar to the so called Method: “The notion that acting is simply about intuitively responding to situations in the way you ‘feel’ them couldn’t be farther away from how I ask actors to work.”<sup>109</sup> He states that his actors need to work as much with their head and intellect as with emotions because it enables to get their characters closer to how they might function in reality. Leigh clarifies the actual realisation of what he talks about as following:

I may have a clear notion that ‘x’ should happen. But then ‘y’ happens in an improvisation. What do I do? Well, sometimes I think, ‘Great. That’s so much more interesting/makes more sense – let’s go for it.’ Or I might reject it because I know it must be ‘x’. Or, as a result of being confronted by ‘y’, I realise it should be ‘z’.<sup>110</sup>

*Two Thousand Years* went through the same process of creation initiated by a six-month chain of improvisation. During that time, Leigh even played Naomi, the grandmother who never actually appears on stage. He thus claims to have helped the actors “experience the character’s existence”<sup>111</sup> and think about them as real even though not present. Thus, his unique process of building up the play really aims at making it as realistic as possible.

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<sup>107</sup> See Cardullo, “Making People Think Is What It’s All About,” 10.

<sup>108</sup> See Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Bert Cardullo, “I Call My Films Subversive,” *Film Quarterly*, n.d.:18, <<https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-2261876061/i-call-my-films-subversive-a-conversation-with>>.

<sup>110</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 29.

<sup>111</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 26.



At the same time, all the Anglo-Jewish characters in the play are played by Jewish actors born and raised in England. Such choice of actors for the play may firstly seem to be somewhat biased. It is however crucial to notice that *Two Thousand Years* is the only play for which he has chosen Anglo-Jewish actors. At the same time, it is not the only Leigh's play for which he has chosen the whole ensemble of a particular ethnicity. The cast for his original production of *Greek Tragedy* in Sydney in 1989 comprised exclusively of Australian actors of Greek origin.<sup>112</sup> In the 2010 interview with Cardullo, Leigh claims that the process of choosing the character is very particularly motivated. "The actors with whom I collaborate tend to be confident in the best sense of the word: relaxed, cool, together, focused, open, intelligent, and they have a sense of humour. The reason my films work is that every actor on the set is very secure; that makes them able to fly."<sup>113</sup> Leigh explains that choosing such actors is crucial since all of them actively participate in the making of their characters.

That is not to suggest that there is a higher concentration of such abilities among Anglo-Jewish actors or actors with Greek-Australian background. Again, it boils down to the author's desire to create a work as realistic as possible. *Greek Tragedy* is actually about Greek community of Australians, just as *Two Thousand Years* is about English Jews. Leigh even admits that "*Greek Tragedy* laid down the tracks for *Two Thousand Years*."<sup>114</sup> He further explains that both plays have in common the nature of an anthropological study of a community in its own environment. For that reason, casting Jewish actors was "part of the agenda."<sup>115</sup> The proof that he really invariably follows such policy is the fact that Tzachi is played by Nitzah Sharron, Israeli citizen living temporarily in London with a strong Israeli accent. Leigh also tries to avoid employing an actor based solely on the actors fame; "What we haven't done is wheel in the self-appointed kings and queens of Jewish acting."<sup>116</sup> His motivation for the choice of actors for these two plays is thus based on the abilities mentioned together with the actual life experience of membership in a particular ethnicity that the play conveys. Just like the process of the play's making, it enhances realistic performance.

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<sup>112</sup> See Cardullo, "I Call My Films Subversive," 28.

<sup>113</sup> Cardullo, "I Call My Films Subversive," 18.

<sup>114</sup> Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out".

<sup>115</sup> Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out".

<sup>116</sup> Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out".

There is another reason why Leigh needed his characters to be played by English Jews. The play realistically reflects that since 1980s, contemporary Anglo-Jewry that is not defined anymore as religious, but “only” as an ethnic group.<sup>117</sup> Even though the secularisation of English Jews thus weakened the notion that Anglo-Jewish culture is linked to the traditions of Judaism, yet it does not mean that the secularisation deprived English Jews of any distinct culture. The major difference is the usage of language. All of the characters in the play use in all the scenes a wide range of Yiddish common words which are in no way connected to religious concepts. Still, these are the natural part of the actors’ vocabulary which got included into the process of initial improvisations. In other words, Leigh used the all-Jewish cast as another device to ensure that his fictitious English Jewish family would be as realistic as possible.

Tammy calls her family members “*chaverim*” which means friends or comrades. Grumbling is referred to as “*kvetching*”. Josh’s religious coming out is called a “*mishigas*”, or madness, and whenever anybody gets mad, he or she is called “*mishigah*”. “*Tuchus*” stands for bottom, ass or arse. Whenever anyone says he needs some rest, he or she needs “*shluff*” or goes “*shluffing*”. Interjections are no exception. “*Oy*” is commonly used instead of Oh and “*Nu?*” Goes for Well? A lot of other and more specific words occur as well, although frequency of mention declines with growing specificity of the words. Moreover, when Tzachi appears in the house, many other common Hebrew words and phrases are added. Instead of congratulations and cheers, the family uses “*Mazeltov*” and “*L’chaim*”. “*B’seder*” passes for OK. The whole sentences also appear, such as How are you? “*Ma shlomchah?*” What time is it? “*Ma ha-shaah?*” or See you again. “*Le’hitraot.*” Thus the family uses especially Yiddish language as part of their natural communication. Rosens are thus comparable to any family who lives in a particular region with particular dialect, and so uses such dialect in their everyday communication. At the same time, usage of Yiddish and Hebrew words confirms that there is a cultural difference between Englanders and English Jews.

The question arises whether Leigh intervened in the amount of Hebrew and Yiddish words and phrases in the play. He himself claims that his works

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<sup>117</sup> See Ben Gidley, Keith Kahn-Harris, “Contemporary Anglo-Jewish community leadership: coping with multiculturalism,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 63 (2012): 175  
<<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2011.01398>> .

target “general”<sup>118</sup> audience and *Two Thousand Years* falls into that cannon as well: “It is both a Jewish play and a play for and about everybody.”<sup>119</sup> The total number of the words and phrases connected to Judaism counts 84 items. That means there occurs almost one word in a language potentially strange to readership per page which roughly equals to one such word per minute and half of the performance. Although the real distribution of these words in dialogues is obviously different, it is overall still not enough to seriously hinder the audiences understanding. This supports, to some extent, the author’s intention not to overwhelm the audience with the strange words and thus keep the access of the general audience to it. Moreover, all words and phrases in the two mentioned languages are also included in the index of the published version. The presence of the index also proves the argument, since it ensures complete understanding of the potentially strange words, at least to the readers.

Sue Vice views the presence of the index as an explanatory key to the words and phrases in unfamiliar languages as a problem in the play. She thinks that the author thus stigmatizes its items as “other”<sup>120</sup> and potentially estranges the readership from the play not in terms of understanding the actual words, but in terms of being able to relate to the play and engage in it. She calls such approach “defensive”<sup>121</sup> which equals the term “apologetic” and “assimilationist” used for Anglo-Jewish literary works. According to her opinion, Leigh is oblivious to the fact that people will get the new words in real interaction of the play more readily than from the presented index. She thus concludes that Leigh subdues Hebrew and Yiddish language to the universalizing effect, or so called Englishing.<sup>122</sup> The endeavour to target the play on general audience through making it more universal can thus potentially make it less reflective of the specific Anglo-Jewish experience.

To support such argumentation, Vice gives an example of a sentence that had to be modified to keep such policy and thus caused a less favourable result. She quotes the author’s words from her interview with him: “we struggled for days with, ‘what do you want her to do? Put on a sheitl and go to mikveh?’ And

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<sup>118</sup> Cardullo, “Making People Think Is What It’s All About,” 4.

<sup>119</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>120</sup> Vice, “Becoming English,” 104.

<sup>121</sup> Vice, “Becoming English,” 104.

<sup>122</sup> See Vice, “Becoming English,” 102.

we finally said, ‘put a sheitl on her head and go to mikveh and clean herself?’”<sup>123</sup> In the published version of the play, the sentence goes: “Wear a *sheitl* on her head, and go to the *mikvah* to cleanse her sins?”<sup>124</sup> It corresponds more to the second sentence Vice quoted. It is indeed more explanatory than the first one, suggesting that sheitl is a wig and stating the purpose of mikvah. Vice holds an opinion that the line thus loses its laconic rhythm together with esoteric status.<sup>125</sup> Leigh’s intervention into the language is thus negative, although Vice does not specify, what exactly according to her would be the benefit of preserving both the rhythm and the status. In any case, continuous success of the play itself with the general British audience<sup>126</sup> by no means proves her claim that it would learn the words while watching the play. It does, however, indicate that the general audience did not find a presence of Yiddish and Hebrew words hindering their understanding. This proves Leigh’s intention to make some of the sentences more explanatory worked positive, contrary to Vice’s opinion.

At the same time, she correctly observes that the overall language of the play is laconic. Great majority of the lines are simple clauses. She is also correct in assuming that there seems to be a value in such a simple style of the language. Nevertheless, she does not elaborate on what value that might be. The answer is obvious to attentive observer. Firstly, keeping such style serves as a unifying element for the play. It also makes the characters sound very natural. For instance, Jonathan during his first visit asks Danny, “So how’re things?”<sup>127</sup> The sentence is perfectly colloquial. There is a comma missing after “So” and the plural of the verb “to be” is contracted to attach to the interrogative pronoun. Danny’s response is similarly colloquial, “Can’t complain. Busy. And you?”<sup>128</sup> Instead of one compound clause, the sentence is broken into three simple chunks. The first two are missing the subject, the second one and the third are missing the verb and the third one starts with conjunction. The play also contains a fair share of common vulgarisms, such as “crap” and “arse,” colloquial versions of accordance expressions such as “yeah” and “yep” and so forth. The language practically equals casual spoken communication.

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<sup>123</sup> Vice, “Becoming English,” 102.

<sup>124</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 54.

<sup>125</sup> See Vice, “Becoming English,” 102.

<sup>126</sup> See Tony Whitehead, *Mike Leigh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 196.

<sup>127</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 5.

Again, such style of language fits into the canon of Leigh's works. For instance in *Naked* (1993), occasional intellectual monologues of its main character, demoralized Jonny, are the only ones to break the colloquiality and simplicity of the rest of the utterances. Even more similarly to *Two Thousand Years*, in *Vera Drake* (2004), the four members of one family also communicate between each other and their friends in such a manner. Thus, the author clearly applies the use of natural spoken language in both his theatrical and film works, which is again in line with the author's claim that he aims for realistic portrayal in both these areas of his work. The application of such language is another element that helps to enhance play's realism.

Such treatment of language also connects Leigh to the most famous of his forerunners, Harold Pinter. His *The Birthday Party*, mentioned in the first chapter as the most feasible for the occurrence of Jewish subject matter, is also filled with sentences of similar colloquial simplicity. For instance, Stanley and McCann greet each other only with "Evening,"<sup>129</sup> even though it is the first time they meet. Another good example is Meg's communication, which comprises largely from a simplistic sentences, such as the question "You like my dress?"<sup>130</sup> which lacks the interrogative element.

In *The Homecoming*, the colloquiality of the language is even more prominent. Apart from Ruth and Teddy, the characters greet each other with "Hullo"<sup>131</sup> and phrasal verbs such as "plug it,"<sup>132</sup> meaning stop it, occur frequently. The play also overflows with vulgarisms, such as "sod," "prat" and "bitch."<sup>133</sup> More sources confirm that Leigh himself determines Pinter and his dramas as one of his most important influences. For instance, Michael Coveney states in his book *The World According to Mike Leigh* that the language in Leigh's plays is similar to Pinter's in its use of connotations and lower middle-class and working-class argot.<sup>134</sup> In *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, Leigh confirms that "Pinter and Becket are particular influences. The fusion of the word, the silence, the visual, the spatial, the comic, the tragic."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Pinter, *Plays 1*, 31.

<sup>130</sup> Pinter, *Plays 1*, 47.

<sup>131</sup> Pinter, *Plays 3*, 19.

<sup>132</sup> Pinter, *Plays 3*, 17.

<sup>133</sup> Pinter, *Plays 3*, 17.

<sup>134</sup> Michael Coveney, *The World According to Mike Leigh* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 6.

<sup>135</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 16.

Leigh also reveals that Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1960) was in production when he first arrived in London after he left Salford Grammar school at the age of seventeen. Later, it was also the very first play he ever directed.<sup>136</sup> Again, its common style of language is visible on every page. For instance, Davies uses "ain't"<sup>137</sup> instead of "isn't," and throughout all the play, longer monologues interchange with half-finished sentences broken by pauses. Thus, it shows both lower-middle class speech and fusion of talk and silence that Leigh claims to be inspired by in both Coveney's and Raphael's book. As it was argued above, he also uses both notions as the devices for enhancing realism.

All in all, the chapter proved that making his works realistic is indeed the main aim of the author's endeavour. It also discovered and described author's various strategies to convey the story as realistically as possible. Firstly, it is author's unique approach to construction of the story and the characters through intense collaboration with his actors. In accordance with that, the actors were selected from those with Anglo-Jewish origin, which ensured the natural incorporation of especially Yiddish and Hebrew into the character's vocabulary. The last observed strategy is also connected to language use, namely keeping the colloquial style of natural speech, which was to a certain extent inspired by the language of the plays of Harold Pinter. It was not the main aim of the chapter to examine the extent to which these methods achieve to enhance the realism, yet it was proved that all of them add to the realistic portrayal of the story.

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<sup>136</sup> See Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 16.

<sup>137</sup> Harold Pinter, *Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), 33.

## Chapter 5: Leigh's Jewish Coming Out and *Two Thousand Years*

The aim of this chapter is to look at the rest of the factors that have an impact on enhancing or disrupting realism of the play. It will concentrate mainly on the setting, genre and characters and examine validity of criticism that there is any dichotomy between reality and fantasy. At the same time, it will look at why the play was called Leigh's Jewish coming out. Last, but not least, it will look into the issue of the position of *Two Thousand Years* in Leigh's work and answer a question in what respect is its position special in his, as well as overall canon of Anglo-Jewish arts.

Tony Whitehead supports the conclusion of the previous chapter when he states that in Mike Leigh's work, "realism is privileged above all else as the guiding principle."<sup>138</sup> Yet, he is quick to add that this guiding principle does not ensure that the work itself is finally a realistic piece. According to his opinion, there is still a strong dichotomy between "realism and fantasy." He further explains his stance: "the 'real' can be said to be the worlds the characters inhabit. The unreal is the heightened comedy, the stylisation and comic excess, with which Leigh and his actors portray many of the characters and the situations in which they find themselves."<sup>139</sup> Whitehead is certainly accurate in the first part of his claim. As the second chapter already pointed out, the setting for *Two Thousand Years*, Cricklewood, North London, is the most fitting to be inhabited by an overall secular middle class English Jewish family. Moreover, Cricklewood is attached to Hendon which attaches to Finchley quarter. Together, they construct the main area of Anglo-Jewish inhabitation in North London. It is a new and more well-to-do version of former area of London's East End.

At the same time, Hendon is predominantly a home for religious and orthodox London Jews, just as Finchley is a home to upper social ranks of Jewish population. Cricklewood, on the other hand, is the area of mostly secular Jewish inhabitants, and thus the most fitting for the play about the secular Jewish family. It also happens to be the southernmost of the three boroughs and therefore the closest to the City Centre, with the least suburban feel in comparison with Hendon

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<sup>138</sup> Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 8.

<sup>139</sup> Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 8.

and especially Finchley. Accordingly, Leigh admits that he himself has “never been fond of suburbs” and he has “little sympathy” for the “neurotic compulsion for respectability” of its inhabitants.<sup>140</sup> His negative opinion on suburbs translates into the choice of the play’s setting, since hardly any work of his is actually set within suburbia. Lawrence Black’s claim in his book *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain* (2002) moreover notes that people oriented to political left disliked the suburbs as a new token of capitalism.<sup>141</sup> Leigh’s political opinion is indeed oriented to the left, matching his dislike for suburbs. The author’s political inclination will further be discussed in the last chapter, dedicated to politics in the play.

It is interesting to note that Leigh is not the only contemporary Anglo-Jewish author who is very much aware of the distinction between these three quarters and places his story to the most fitting of the three. Naomi Alderman, whose novel *Disobedience* (2006) told the story of an orthodox London Jewish community, chose Hendon as its setting. Similarly, Charlotte Mendelson chose Finchley as the setting for her novel *When We Were Bad* (2007) about upper-middle-class Jewish family of religious liberals. Together with other authors, such as Harold Jacobson, they create a phenomenon of contemporary British-Jewish experience conveyed in accordance with particular environment. In Leigh’s case, the description of the Rosen’s house is also fitting not only to the Criclewood area, but to what the typical well-to-do middle class family house potentially looks like, as mentioned before.

The first Whitehead’s claim about realism of the worlds the characters inhabit thus certainly holds true. His second claim that Leigh’s endeavour to heighten comical effect sometimes diminishes the realistic appeal of some of the characters supposedly results in appearance of two types of characters in his works. First group comprises of characters who are realistically portrayed, “who are secure in themselves and their relationships with others, who can see the world as it is.”<sup>142</sup> Exaggerated characters that are in Whitehead’s opinion on the verge of caricature form the second group. They are “obsessed with the world as they

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<sup>140</sup> See Leonard Quart, “Being Positive – An Interview with Mike Leigh,” *Cineaste*, Fall (2008): 54, accessed through British Library.

<sup>141</sup> See Lawrence Black, “The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64: Old Labour, New Britain?” *The English Historical Review*, 19 April (2004): 478, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3490261>>.

<sup>142</sup> Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 8.



would like it to be, they lack a purchase on the world as it is, and are intent on keeping up appearances, are less secure, less comfortable in who they are.”<sup>143</sup> Indeed, there is a character in *Two Thousand Years* that seems to be a prototypical member of the second group. Rachel’s younger sister Michelle, or Mash is during her abrupt visit in constant fight with reality.

She denies the true nature of herself and her situation in favour of her less realistic, but certainly more flattering assumptions about herself. Right after she appears, she acts as if she just found out about her mother’s death and puts herself into the role of the most vigorous mourner until Danny reminds her that she did not bother to see her mother for eleven years.<sup>144</sup> Afterwards, she starts arguing about the scope of time during which she hasn’t been in touch with her family to put herself in a better light: “eleven years! That’s ridiculous!”<sup>145</sup> Danny opposes her again, “No it’s not! None of us have seen you for eleven years – your mom and dad haven’t seen you for eleven years – We haven’t seen you for eleven years –”<sup>146</sup> Consequently, it becomes clear that career-building was the main focus of Michelle’s thirties.

She indeed achieved the top position: “I’ve got a beautiful mews house with no mortgage; I’ve got a top-of-the-range sports car; I’ve reached the height of my profession, and that is very hard for woman, let me tell you. I’m dealing with billions of dollars every day.”<sup>147</sup> Yet, all the scenes when she is present leak of her profound unhappiness. For instance, it becomes obvious that she left her job. Her nostalgia for the times when she used to babysit Rachel’s children hints that the main cause of her unhappiness is the lack of her own family. This becomes more obvious when she accidentally meets Jonathan, her former boyfriend who just brought the news that he and his wife are expecting a baby. Her reaction is that of hurt envy as she “recoils in anguish.”<sup>148</sup> She refuses to see the truth about herself until the very end of the play when everybody learns that she is also an alcoholic.

The story of her material success that turns into failure to attain happiness reminds of the character of Mary Mortiner from Wesker’s *The Journalists* (1972).

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<sup>143</sup> Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 9.

<sup>144</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 88.

<sup>145</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 88.

<sup>146</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 88.

<sup>147</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 93.

<sup>148</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 114.

She has two children whom she almost does not see because of her career. In the end, her job accidentally ruins the life of her son. In comparison with Wesker's cheerless drama though, Michelle crucially enhances the comic feel of Leigh's play. The scene that Charles Isherwood in his *New York Times* review marks as the most comical is the biggest row the family plunges in. It is the one that is started by Michelle over the topic of the death of her mother and the one broken by Tzachi's intervention.<sup>149</sup> Kenneth Minogue agrees with Isherwood when he states that Michelle "is a great comedy sketch"<sup>150</sup> and Rosie Millard adds that Michelle appears for her to be "more caricature than character."<sup>151</sup> Seemingly, that proves Whitehead's claim about the exaggerated characters and the dichotomy between realism and fantasy or comedy as right.

Indeed, Whitehead concludes that the genre Leigh operates in the most is a satirical comedy.<sup>152</sup> Leigh himself, however, refuses to be classified as satirist, and explains that his movie *High Hopes* (1988) is the only work that had been intentionally satirical to a certain level.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, Whitehead's claim has to be further examined. In interview with Lee Ericson and Richard Porton, Leigh speaks further about the genre classification of his works. He states that the genre he is ultimately applying is tragicomedy simply because the tragicomedy is the way he looks at life.<sup>154</sup> Life, as mentioned before, is the ultimate professional focus of his work.

He also adds that the tragicomic feel in his works arises logically mainly from the characters.<sup>155</sup> According to this claim, Michelle would help to create the tragicomedy in *Two Thousand Years*. Even though she is by most of the reviewers, apart from Isherwood, perceived as a mere satirical sketch, it is apparent that her life crisis and its consequences are far from being unrealistic. She is also the one through whom audience learns that the Rosen family is not altogether capable of accepting all of its lost souls, revealing the family's weaknesses. Josh is in the end always supported and stood up for, which is never the case with Michelle. She is also the only character in the play who does not

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<sup>149</sup> See <<http://www.photostage.co.uk/cache/tcache/00005636.jpg>>.

<sup>150</sup> Minogue, "Mike Leigh's Jewish Play".

<sup>151</sup> Millard, "Notebook," 41.

<sup>152</sup> See Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 8.

<sup>153</sup> See Bert Cardullo, "Making People Think Is What It's All About," 7.

<sup>154</sup> See Lee Ellickson, Richard Porton, "I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life," *Cineaste* 20 (1994): 14, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41687318>>.

<sup>155</sup> See Ellickson, Porton, "I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life," 14.

have a Jewish name, also the only one who altogether abandoned Jewish traditions and the only one who does not use any Yiddish or Hebrew words.

If Leigh intended *Two Thousand Years* to be a satire, he would point out at the inefficiency of the well-to-do-middle class English Jewish families as something he wishes to change. He, however, wanted the play only to reflect caring, generosity and togetherness, together with disappointment and selfishness.<sup>156</sup> It is thus an accurate portrayal of reality he strives for rather than conveying his wish to change what he portrays. The intention behind the satire is missing altogether in the play. The play is clearly a tragicomedy, since the last drawing of the curtain leaves Rosens happy, as if Michelle's intervention did not happen. Yet, the audience is left with the feeling that climax of Michelle's life crisis will not be followed by any positive resolution. Thus, play cannot be a satire solely on the premise that Michelle is a hypocrite, as the goal is not to point out to the hypocrisy of English bankers or the above mentioned inefficiency of their families to help them. At the same time, Michelle's hypocrisy does create a comical relief more than once, even though her situation is serious. Whitehead's assumption about satire in Leigh's work thus certainly does not hold true for *Two Thousand Years*.

Moreover, the application of tragicomedy is not only natural for Leigh, as he claimed, but it enhances realism in his works as well. Some of the already quoted sources state that tragicomedy in *Two Thousand Years* is precisely what makes it realistic explicitly for an Anglo-Jewish audience. For instance, Linda Grant mentions such impact on herself in both of her Guardian articles. Leigh also states in her interview that tragicomic genre and Jewishness are from his perspective indivisible: "I don't think you can pull out any play or film from my canon that is not Jewish in its view of life and all its tragi-comic aspects."<sup>157</sup> Tragicomedy for him is a mode through which he captures Jewishness, as much as film and theatre are modes through which he captures life.

His confession is not only interesting, but also crucially reflective of the change in his attitude towards Jewishness. Before 1990s, he has mostly denied impact of his Jewish background to his works, just as he has not provided a broader insight into it. In 1991 interview with Judy Bloch, twelve years ahead of

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<sup>156</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.

<sup>157</sup> Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out".

initiation of his “Jewish play,” he claims that taking a tragicomic perspective could possibly be influenced by his Jewish background, but he refuses to assign any more importance to the issue and states that labelling his works as Jewish would be “nonsense.”<sup>158</sup> Such point of view is very similar to Wesker’s statement about his works quoted in the first chapter. Until *Two Thousand Years*, Leigh thus fitted among the typical post Second World War Anglo-Jewish authors who avoided writing explicitly about the Jewish experience in Britain. This stage of Anglo-Jewish literature lasted broadly until the turn of the new millennium, when it starts to be replaced by more open attitude. As proved in the first chapter, *Two Thousand Years* is the first theatre play that reflects such attitude. At some point, Leigh thus had to change his attitude.

The change shows in the introduction to the play which is for the most part author’s personal testimony, explaining the shift from suppression to acknowledgement of his Jewish background. He claims about his generation of secular English Jews that “we have usually spent most of our adult lives keeping quiet about our Jewishness, at least in public. This isn’t about being ashamed of one’s identity, it’s rather about not wanting to be perceived as being something you are actually not, or being cast in a stereotype role that isn’t your true self.”<sup>159</sup> The statement clearly contains his previously held opinion that the most correct behaviour is not to show Jewish experience at all. Such solution was in the eyes of British society the default behaviour towards all minorities in the second half of the twentieth century. According to Ben Gidley’s and Keith Kahn-Harris sociological study, Jewish communal leadership at the time embraced this policy as well and emphasized widely “secure British citizenship and belonging,”<sup>160</sup> the outcome of which was largely successful assimilation.

The current attitude towards the members of ethnical and religious minorities is much more tolerant. A phenomenon of being open about one’s ethnic belonging results from the acceptance of multiculturalism. Leigh himself is aware of this shift in public opinion when he says in Raphael’s book, “It is very easy and comfortable at this stage of my life and of history to be Jewish and to be upfront

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<sup>158</sup> Howie Movshovitz, *Mike Leigh: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 76.

<sup>159</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, v.

<sup>160</sup> Gidley, Kahn-Harris, “Contemporary Anglo-Jewish community leadership,” 173.

about it.”<sup>161</sup> This awareness is also probably a reason why he is quick to disprove that being quiet about one’s Jewishness does not mean a suppression of one’s identity. Despite the above claim, the author was still rather reluctant to start working on the play that would become known as his “Jewish coming out.” He states that the main motivation for starting a project that turned to be *Two Thousand Years* was the fact that “Nicolas Hytner had commissioned him to write a play for the National Theatre.”<sup>162</sup> Tony Whitehead states that even though Leigh accepted the offer, he started the actual project only four years later, in 2004, after twelve years gap after his last play, *It’s a Great Big Shame* (1993). Again, Leigh confesses that until such time he has not felt ready to produce what he himself calls a “Jewish play,”<sup>163</sup> even though he always wanted to produce it.

The transition to acknowledging the impact of his Jewish background, in another words his Jewish coming out, is somewhat uneasy for Leigh. In 2006 review by Linda Grant, two years after the play’s initiation, he confesses that even though he could abandon most of the Jewish practise, he could never have stopped it entirely. “While I walked away from a Jewish existence, lots of things carried on in my life: gastronomic obsession, massive amounts of reading Isaac Bashevis Singer and Saul Below. So one doesn’t stop being Jewish.”<sup>164</sup> He repeats the stance in Rachel’s book and concludes that it would simply be wrong “to suggest that my life is devoid of anything manifestly Jewish. It isn’t.”<sup>165</sup> These two claims ultimately support the argument that he is now much more willing to admit the influence of his Jewish identity in his works. Still, the statements that comprise the introduction to the play show how self-conscious and careful the author is when he talks about Jewish identity. That is also clearly seen in the play itself.

Neither of the characters in the play who are discussing Jewish identity are ashamed of it, but everyone seems to be taken aback when Josh asks: “Are you proud to be Jewish?”<sup>166</sup> Again, Josh is the only one to be openly religious, thus, for him identifying as a Jew is connected to practise of Judaism. For the rest of the characters, it is somewhat more complicated to express what it means for them to be Jewish. With much reluctance, Dave replies: “You are born Jewish. You are as

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<sup>161</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 7.

<sup>162</sup> Grant, “Mike Leigh comes out,” 4.

<sup>163</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, v.

<sup>164</sup> Grant, “Mike Leigh comes out,” 6.

<sup>165</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 7.

<sup>166</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 51.

you are. I'm proud of some things, and not so proud of others."<sup>167</sup> He further explains that the part of what he is ashamed is that Zionism and the idea of existence of Israel as a Jewish state was taken over from socialist atheists by religious Jews. Thus, his Jewish identity is more in accordance with certain political ideology or opinions rather than religion.

Since Josh finds Dave's answer insufficient, he rephrases the question and directs it on Tammy instead: "What does it mean to you to be Jewish?"<sup>168</sup> She answers: "Well, being Jewish is just part of who I am. Well, like my little toe... or my middle finger. It's not the whole of me – I feel Jewish and I don't feel Jewish. And I've got no idea what it's like not to be Jewish."<sup>169</sup> In the introduction to the play, Leigh states that Tammy's description is reflective of his own thinking about his Jewish identity. In *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, he further explains that in some situation, he feels very Jewish and in another not at all, "it depends."<sup>170</sup> To some readers such claim may be disappointing in its vagueness. Similarly, Josh also takes Tammy's answer as a disappointment, "What, so it does not have any meaning? It does not have any resonance?"<sup>171</sup> Consequently, Dave criticizes him for not being able to admit that for some people being Jewish does not mean connection to religion. Here, Dave has a point that turns the attention to whom the play is predominantly about, secular English Jews. Both him and Tammy in the above quoted sentences confirm that being Jewish is relevant for their lives, yet it somehow more uneasy to come in terms with it or to explain it clearly. Thus, their sense of Jewish identity is very similar to Leigh's own. He is also unable to specify on what it depends whether one feels Jewish or not.

Even though he fails to describe clearly what does it mean for him to be Jewish, Leigh is the first Anglo-Jewish playwright who admits it certainly means something which echoes in *Two Thousand Years*. Moreover, his works are mostly tragicomedies which also proved to be influenced by his Jewish background. *Two Thousand Years*' tragicomic feel also proved to make its story plausible to Anglo-Jewish audience, and thus makes the play more realistic. Other factor enhancing realism is the play's setting which places Leigh among other contemporary British

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<sup>167</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 51.

<sup>168</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 53.

<sup>169</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 53.

<sup>170</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 7.

<sup>171</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 54.

Jewish authors. It also shows his negative opinion on the suburbia. Characters are proved to be overall realistic, despite the common critical view that due to some of them, Leigh's works are satirical. This chapter thus proved that realism is not only the author's aim, but he also achieves it. The critical stance that there is a strong dichotomy between reality and fantasy in his works thus does not hold valid, in case of *Two Thousand Years*.

At the same time, the chapter also supported the conclusion from the first section of the thesis that the play reflects the changing climate in Anglo-Jewish literature towards more outspoken works. Once again, Leigh proves to open the field for other Anglo-Jewish playwrights, for instance Julia Pascal and Ryan Craig, whose plays also reflect the change in displaying Jewishness. Leigh also claims that that if he should wish to do so in the future, he will explore the issue in the film as well.<sup>172</sup> Thus, the chapter found that being outspoken about his Jewish background and its influence over the play is continuous process for the author that started as early as with the theatrical exploration of a different ethnical community in *Greek Tragedy* and has a potential to enter the film as well.

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<sup>172</sup> See Cardullo, "I Call My Films Subversive," 28.

## Chapter 6: Leigh's Background and Opinion in *Two Thousand Years*.

*Two Thousand Years* is the first work of Mike Leigh that links substantially with his personal background. It seems to be more than what he only names an anthropological study of his own community in Grant's interview. This chapter therefore examines whether the play is also an exploration of his own particular experience of growing up as an English Jew. The focus thus lies upon those parts of the play that are reminiscent of the author's background to clarify the work's relation to his person. At the same time, the chapter continues to examine the presence of the author's opinions in the play.

Firstly, it has to be noted that the play is not directly autobiographical. It was neither an intention, nor could have been with respect to the process of its making. In Raphael's book of interviews, Leigh states that his sister knew that the play was supposed to be on Jewish subject matter. She confessed to Leigh that she was worried it would be a story of their family from 1950s to which Leigh makes the following comment: "Of course, it was, but not literally."<sup>173</sup> Still, it is so far the play that touches the most on Leigh's background. At the same time, it is perhaps also the play most directly influenced by his opinions, as it is argued further.

As stated in the second chapter, Dave is to a certain extent a recreation of Leigh's great-grandmother. At the same time, he is by far not the only direct reference to the author's background. There are also other similarities. For instance, Josh starts eating kosher, which reflects previously mentioned "gastronomic obsession" that the author has not been able to shed after "walking out" of traditional Jewish life. Leigh further confesses that his "maternal aunts both emigrated, one to Palestina, the other after it became Israel."<sup>174</sup> In the story, Dave emigrates to Israel as well. Even though he later returns to England, he spends there a portion of his life with both his wife Naomi and their first daughter Rachel.

It has to be noted that immigration of European Jews to Israel around the mid-twentieth century had a strong ideological motivation, Zionism. The

<sup>173</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 8.

<sup>174</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, vi.



movement was, however, appealing only for a certain group of European Jewry. These were secular or not strictly observant Jews with a strong affiliation with political left. Leigh confesses that his family fitted precisely the target group: “our extended family were Zionists, which not all Jews were in the 1940s and 1950s. My parental great-grandfather edited a Zionist newspaper in Blackburn long before the First World War, and my parents met each other in the Zionist youth movement referred to in the play, and to which I belonged as a teenager.”<sup>175</sup> The movement in question, Habonim, is a Jewish youth leisure-activity club promoting Zionist ideas that were at the time strongly linked to socialism and communism. Even though it was predominantly connected to Jewish cultural traditions, it could be compared for instance with “Pijonýr” club during communist era in former Czechoslovakia. Habonim members also wore a prototypical “blue shirt.”<sup>176</sup>

Danny, Rachel and Jonathan start remembering their involvement with the movement with great deal of nostalgia. Danny says, “All that Israeli dancing – remember?” Rachel replies, ‘Rikudim – how could anyone forget?’<sup>177</sup> So called Israeli dances arose from an endeavour to recreate Israeli national cultural tradition especially after the countries successful declaration of independence in 1948. From late forties until sixties the tradition of Israeli dancing was so popular that it spread to the individual movements outside Israel, for instance into the leisure activities of European Habonim. The tradition of Israeli dancing survives in both inside and outside Israel until now.<sup>178</sup> The original idea of Israeli dances is also very much in accordance with socialism. Dancers shape a circle to emphasize the equality of all participants.

This aspect is another memory connected to Habonim that Jonathan and Danny remember in the play with great deal of nostalgia. “And it didn’t matter if you could dance or you couldn’t dance, or if you had a wooden leg... It didn’t matter who we were, nobody judged you, everybody was equal...”<sup>179</sup> Afterwards, Rachel joins into the recollection and quotes the movement’s motto: “From each

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<sup>175</sup> Leigh, *Two thousand Years*, vi.

<sup>176</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 13.

<sup>177</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 13.

<sup>178</sup> See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hdStY-fMxs>>,

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJryLZBW7Gc>>,

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgMdAug7BFA>>.

<sup>179</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 13.

according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”<sup>180</sup> Here, it is apparent that the movement clearly backed communist ideas.

In the following recollection the main purpose of the Habonim existence reveals. Jonathan says: “And then, at sixteen, you went to Israel for six weeks, you went on *kibbutz*, and they’re actually living it, and it all makes sense – the great socialist dream. Ach, at sixteen it was seductive.”<sup>181</sup> So called kibbutzim are predominantly an agricultural settlements in Israel whose inhabitants live according to the commune standards, even though only an insignificant percentage of them are still functioning. They were used to host the Jewish youth trips from organizations like Habonim. The main purpose of those trips was to incite a desire in European Jewish youth to settle in them permanently. Thus, Habonim was clearly ideologically conditioned. In fact it used to be one of the organizations that were actually actively establishing kibbutzim in Israel. However, similarly to other communist and socialist endeavours, Habonim movement also left its followers disillusioned and most of its settlements dysfunctional. Disillusionment shows also in the memories of Jonathan Rachel and Danny. Jonathan answers “Israel happened. It changed. I got disillusioned.”<sup>182</sup> When he is asked why he eventually did not settle in Israel permanently and did not make so called “*Alliah*,” or the return by birth right, as he was intending.

Moreover, at the end of the discussion of the characters’ past involvement with Habonim, all of them agree that it was a “propaganda machine.”<sup>183</sup> There is a reason to assume that the above quoted opinion is once again author’s own as was the case with the religion. Author’s was the view presented through family’s reaction to Josh’s religiousness in the play. Leigh’s parents are also not the only ones who were involved with Habonim, he was an active member too. Around fourteen he was even a leader of a group of younger members. His current age also fits into the generation represented in the play by Jonathan, Danny and Rachel. They, just like Leigh in reality, were those that faced the disillusionment with socialism after 1950s and change of public opinion towards the State of Israel from predominantly positive to negative in late sixties and especially seventies.

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<sup>180</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 13.

<sup>181</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 13.

<sup>182</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 14.

<sup>183</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 13.

Leigh summarizes Habonim's prospective in Rachel's book, "Of course, this was all about the collective ideology of the kibbutz. Habonim's real objective was to get us young men and women to emigrate to Israel and be kibbutzniks. At sixteen you would be taken there on a subsidized trip. I had this wonderful experience in the summer of 1960."<sup>184</sup> Even though the author speaks about the experience itself with positive nostalgia, just like the older generation of the characters in the play, he eventually condemns the movement for its propagandistic aim: "Immediately after this [the trip] I quit the movement, left home, went to RADA and walked away from Jewish life forever."<sup>185</sup> Later on in the interview with Judy Bloch he even uses the exact words "propaganda machine"<sup>186</sup> in reference to Habonim that appear in the play. Thus, his refusal to adhere to the propaganda was ultimately stronger than the positive impact of the visit of Israel, which also translates into the play.

Rachel mentions the actual malfunctions of the kibbutz ideology that made her parents repatriate back to England eventually: "My parents came back to this country because my mother found it so unacceptable that she couldn't live with her child. Their children were taken away from them as soon as they were born to free them up to do their bit for the Great Zionist Dream; and they ended up *schlepping* [doing heavy work] for the whole kibbutz."<sup>187</sup> Rachel's disapproval with overburdening women was also the reason why she got disillusioned during her own youth trip with Habonim to Israel. She says, "And when I went back there at the age of eighteen, nothing had changed. I spent six months, either in the laundry, or in the kitchens."<sup>188</sup>

Afterwards, when Tzachi comes to visit, the family learns that he comes from kibbutz Dalia, not far from kibbutz Kfar Hanassi where Dave used to live with his family for a while. Both kibbutzim are real places. Kfar Hanasi is in the North-East of the country, Dalia is near Haifa, the third largest city in Israel. However, only Dalia is still functioning as a kibbutz. During the discussion on kibbutzim in the play, it also becomes apparent, that most of the kibbutzim are already dissolved. Dave asks whether Tzachi knows his former friend Cyril

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<sup>184</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 7.

<sup>185</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 7.

<sup>186</sup> Movshovitz, *Mike Leigh: Interviews*, 77.

<sup>187</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 14.

<sup>188</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 14.

Nyman who left to Dalia from East End. Tzachi indeed recollects Nyman family and says they left the kibbutz and moved to Tel Aviv, the biggest city in the country. Tzachi himself also left the kibbutz to go to study in Tel Aviv, much to the dismay of his parents who wished him to stay and continue the tradition of manual work in kibbutz. Tzachi also admits that only three out of thirty-five children from his class eventually stayed in their kibbutz.<sup>189</sup> When he asks if Rosens have ever been to kibbutz themselves, it becomes apparent that even Josh went to the trip with Habonim once. It was considered a rite of passage experience for Rosens. Yet, even Josh's experience is not positive. He admits he did not really like it and together with Tammy and Rachel, they confess that the inhabitants of the kibbutz saw them as "a foreign invasion" and "spoiled Jewish bourgeois kids, who were a bad influence on their children."<sup>190</sup> The negative opinion on kibbutz and Habonim thus seems to be overall prevalent in the play.

Yet apparently, Habonim also had a very positive and constructive impact on the works of Mike Leigh. It undermines the authors previous statement that he walked away from the Jewish life forever at the age of seventeen. In both interview with Judy Bloch and in Amy Rachel's book, he admits that his choice of the career as a playwright and the unique collaborative working style originates in Habonim. Moreover, one of his first theatre productions was actually done through Habonim. He confesses, "A great Habonim Tradition was the so called 'zig', a kind of comedy sketch. Nothing was written down but it was all very structured. Everybody was working together towards a goal, the spirit of which goes right the way through my productions and the way I work."<sup>191</sup> He further confesses that learning to work collaboratively was the best influence on him, since he is by nature an individualist. Moreover, he collaborated with no other than Wesker, at the time also a young member of Habonim. Therefore, his unique working style is not only influenced by Habonim, but also initiated by it.

There is a reason to assume that Leigh's nostalgia over Habonim and its echo in the play is directed more towards the loss of Jewish community life after abandoning the movement. Gidley and Kahn-Harris explain in their sociological study that the need for involvement in the community is central to Jewish way of

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<sup>189</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 64.

<sup>190</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 65.

<sup>191</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 6.

life. They further state that living in a community is particularly important from both religious and historical reasons.<sup>192</sup> Jewish religious practise becomes possible only among more people. On a basic level, it is family circle, since the initiation of Shabbat tasks every Friday evening are divided among particular family members. The following Saturday is then expected to be spent in the prayers with at least ten other Jews, hence the need for the community. The links thus formed between families and acquaintances inevitably support the strong feel of Jewish ethnical belonging. Historically, Gidley and Kahn-Harris state that Jewish communities were also for the most part autonomous and self-governing, yet emancipation led to partial and still ongoing loss of community life.<sup>193</sup> The assimilation then resulted in the loss of practise of Judaism and overall secularization, reflected in the play.

Since for Rosens, just like for the author's family, it would be unthinkable to participate in any religious community, Habonim serves them as a substitutional community. *Two Thousand Years* also reveals how deeply the need for community life is encoded for the characters. Even after Rachel and Danny get disillusioned with the movement and its propaganda, they still choose to send their children to participate in its activities, just like they used to. Rachel confesses that she still has Tammy's blue Habonim shirt<sup>194</sup> and Tammy mentions later on that she met there her close friend and flatmate and that they were together on the Israel tour.<sup>195</sup> It is thus clear that Habonim, as reflected in the play, does function as a community creating element. Both generations of the characters involved in it create through it lifelong ties with other English Jews. Both Rachel's and Danny's friendship with Jonathan, and Tammy's friendship with her flatmate lasts beyond their disillusionment with the movement. In this aspect the play is clearly reflective of the Anglo-Jewish experience. The author states that even he himself is still in a very close friendship with the people he met through Habonim.<sup>196</sup>

As it was demonstrated in this chapter, *Two Thousand Years* does reflect the author's personal background in various respects. Some of the characters in

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<sup>192</sup> See Gidley, Kahn-Harris, "Contemporary Anglo-Jewish community leadership," 171.

<sup>193</sup> Gidley, Kahn-Harris, "Contemporary Anglo-Jewish community leadership," 171.

<sup>194</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 14.

<sup>195</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 45.

<sup>196</sup> See Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 7.

the play are inspired by Leigh's family members or by the events taking place in his family, such as making an Alliah, or repatriation to Israel, references to eating habits, or traditional dances, as well as, and most importantly, active attendance to Habonim movement. Not only had the involvement with the movement positive impact on Leigh's distinct working style, it also enabled him to experience Israel and its kibbutz culture, the account of which is also given in the play. The play likewise shows, through character's involvement in Habonim that the movement provided a sense of a community life for secular Anglo-Jewry, which was formerly provided by local Jewish religious communities. Overall, the play does a justice to the author's following claim: "Deciding to do *Two Thousand Years* constituted a massive decision to come out and, in a certain sense, to stop hiding, if I'm honest; to gather together a group of kindred spirits and say, 'This is what we are.'"<sup>197</sup>

Yet, the play also echoes a strong expression of negative opinion on the past, connected to kibbutz ideology and Habonim propaganda from the author's current point of view. The other reminiscences of Leigh's opinions in the play were also discovered in the previous chapters in relation to different issues. The play thus reaches a certain didactic level. The dichotomy in *Two Thousand Years* thus does not lie between realism and fantasy, as Whitehead once suggested in relation with Leigh's works, but it rather lies between realistic reflection and didactic interference. The following chapter is going to examine the dichotomy with respect to politics reflected in the play, since its didactic impact would also prove the play linked to the author's person more than his previous works.

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<sup>197</sup> Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 8.

## Chapter 7: Politics and *Two Thousand Years*

The chapter focuses on the ongoing political discussion between the characters in *Two Thousand Years*. It examines whether the play reflects author's preformed political opinions and whether overshadows the realistic portrayal of Anglo-Jewish citizenship. The aim of the chapter is to inquire what the play reveals about English Jewish political engagement and examine the issue of double loyalty between UK and the State of Israel. Consequently, the chapter will seek whether and how do the particular opinions of the play's characters on the political situation relate to the formation of their Anglo-Jewish identity.

Mike Leigh is neither established, nor known as an artist who works within a certain political context. Accordingly, he is not known to be advocating any particular political stance throughout his works. On the contrary, his works are ultimately avoiding "larger political themes,"<sup>198</sup> as Grant points out. Leigh is, moreover, keen on keeping his image as non-political artist. He firmly insists that there is never any clear political agenda in his works. He claims that the reason for it to be so is that he does not have any clear political opinion.<sup>199</sup> Such claim, however, does not seem to hold true with respect to *Two Thousand Years*, as it is going to be proved further in this chapter.

Before its first production, *Two Thousand Years* drew extraordinary amount of attention from general British audience. Tony Whitehead, who looked more into the issue of the play's acceptance, suggests that it has to do with the delay of the whole production. Whitehead comments on the massive turnout in his recent book on the author and adds that "the piece could only be advertised as a 'New Play by Mike Leigh,' since he was still evolving it with his chosen cast."<sup>200</sup> He also states that for the same reason even previews had to be delayed for a few days. In fact, the entire run was sold out with some sixteen thousand tickets two weeks before the first official production.<sup>201</sup> Rosie Millard holds an opinion that people may have wanted to see the piece more particularly because its contents were secret until the very last moment.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Grant, "Mike Leigh comes out".

<sup>199</sup> See Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 12.

<sup>200</sup> Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 196.

<sup>201</sup> See Whitehead, *Mike Leigh*, 196.

<sup>202</sup> See Millard, "Notebook," 41.

Sue Vice pays further attention to the visual advertisement of the play and proves that the extraordinary interest in the play had arisen precisely because it was thought to be a political play. She states that the laconic words ‘a new play by Mike Leigh’ were written on a poster showing a photograph of a palm tree in the middle of the sand dunes.<sup>203</sup> She then drew a following conclusion from the visual appeal of the poster: “Leigh’s opposition to the Iraq War led critics to believe that the play would be about the subject.”<sup>204</sup> Her note of such rumour makes the result more obvious. The rumour consequently spread from the critics circles through the grapevine to the public and helped to ensure the massive turnout.

There are three more factors connected to politics that helped to gain the play its fame before it even initiated. According to Spencer’s review, the very first production in the Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre in London was completely sold out more than a week before its initiation, due to the author’s golden reputation.<sup>205</sup> Yet, there is a reason to believe that the setting itself prompted the audience more towards the expectance of explicitly political subject matter. Amelia Howe Kritzer states in her book *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain* (2008): non-commercial theatres such as Royal Court Theatre and National Theatre, which contains Cottesloe auditorium, are traditional venues for political plays.<sup>206</sup> Leigh himself confirms that the venue prompted him to include politics into his play. “Instinctively, I knew that whatever I chose to do would be about people discussing politics. The National is a forum for dealing with issues.”<sup>207</sup>

The last reason why both professional and general audience expected Leigh to indulge in politics has to do with the author’s personal political involvement, despite his denial of it. Leigh follows both national and international politics outside of his professional life. Moreover, he is openly and actively supporting those political subjects that are in line with his political opinions. For instance, he has been involved for a long time with the Afro-Asian Committee of Equity “which campaigned against white actors blacking up.”<sup>208</sup> He is also a

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<sup>203</sup> See <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newspnight/review/4249180.stm>>.

<sup>204</sup> Vice, “Becoming English,” 106.

<sup>205</sup> See Spencer, “Terrific – this is vintage Leigh”.

<sup>206</sup> See Amelia Howe Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 22.

<sup>207</sup> Grant, “Mike Leigh comes out”.

<sup>208</sup> Grant, “Mike Leigh comes out”.



signatory to Jews for Justice in Palestine, as well as to Independent Jewish Voices.<sup>209</sup> It is an association of people who: “share a commitment to certain principles, especially with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in mind: putting human rights first, rejecting all forms of racism, and giving equal priority to Palestinians and Israelis in their quest for a peaceful and secure future.”<sup>210</sup> The initiative has reportedly arisen from the need of its members to convey their disagreement with Israeli government policy towards Gaza.

Leigh sees Israel as occupying power and expresses his support for Gaza in 2007 together with some other famous British Jewish public figures, such as Harold Pinter and Stephen Fry. Thus, he undeniably does have a clear political view on Israeli-Palestine conflict and the Middle East. His view is moreover known to public. Both general public and the critics thus predicted that in case of *Two Thousand Years*, Leigh will break his vows of keeping politics out. Such expectation helped to ensure the play’s massive initial success, as mentioned above.

Not only has the author a clear political view on Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it is also rather surprising with respect to his background. His initial view was supportive of Israel because of his affiliation with Zionism. Yet, he now criticises it in relation to Gaza. What has not changed, however, is his affiliation with the political left also linked to Zionism. In the interview with Elickson and Porton, he confesses that his natural inclination is socialist and anarchist.<sup>211</sup> In the interview with Bert Cardullo from 2010, he states that his background was both strongly liberal and socialist.<sup>212</sup> Ironically, it is the same interview in which he denies to have any clear political opinion. Cardullo further asks him a question about his association with Labour Party: “You are in the Labour Party, aren’t you?”<sup>213</sup> Leigh answers negatively, yet, he adds that he nevertheless financially supports the party.<sup>214</sup> Leigh thus undoubtedly has a clear political conviction. Even if he may very well have excluded it so far from his work, he did not do so

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<sup>209</sup> See Michael Elkin, ‘Leigh Way’, *Jewish Exponent*, n.p., 7 February 2008, <<http://www.jewishexponent.com/leigh-way>>.

<sup>210</sup> Independent Jewish Voices, last modified February 2016, <<http://ijv.org.uk/about/>>.

<sup>211</sup> See Ellickson, Porton, “I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life,” 12.

<sup>212</sup> See Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 12.

<sup>213</sup> Ellickson, Porton, “I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life,” 11.

<sup>214</sup> See Ellickson, Porton, “I Find the Tragicomic Things in Life,” 12.

in case of *Two Thousand Years* as was generally expected and as it is proved further in this chapter.

The play did not actually centre on providing any consistent anti-Iraq-war statement and thus failed to see to the wide assumptions mentioned above by Vice. Nevertheless, there appear three references to the conflict. First one reveals that the Rosen family was participating in the Million March against the war in Iraq, in February 2003. It was the biggest public contra-reaction to Blair's unconditional support of Bush's invasion, criticised for the supposed provocation of Hussain into violent action. Tammy comments the situation: "When we marched against the war, it wasn't about Iraq, it was about a whole load of other things as well."<sup>215</sup> The second reference concerns the 2004 bombing incidents in London. Tammy gives an account of the post Iraq wave of fear and probably the most famous incident that happened in relation to it: "Oh, deporting terror suspects to countries where they might be tortured, infringing on human rights and freedom of speech – oh, and let's shoot a Brazilian electrician for jumping over a turnstile in the London underground – which he didn't even jump over. I'm talking about aggressive reactions to terrorism, and the cycles of fear they cause."<sup>216</sup> Rachel also sees it as a consequence of infamous UK's involvement in the war in Iraq government.

War in Iraq is mentioned again at the very end of the play, when the family learns about Hurricane Katrina hitting New Orleans and comments ironically on the evacuation failure: "And the worst of it is, about a third of the Louisiana National Guard is in Iraq. With equipment that could've helped with the rescue effort."<sup>217</sup> All three quotes prove that the family in the play is of the same negative opinion towards the UK's involvement in Iraq war as was Mike Leigh.

Even though the Iraq issue is far from being central to the play, it shows that the play is incredibly accurately set in the global political situation of the time of its first run, that is, autumn 2004. It is overall filled with similar reference to wider political concerns just like the Iraq war, creating a thematic frame. For instance, Tammy is not present during the first six scenes since she is working

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<sup>215</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 28.

<sup>216</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 69.

<sup>217</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 118.

abroad for Amnesty International at a conference on Guantanamo Bay.<sup>218</sup> The infamous US military prison in Cuba was at the time accused of denying its prisoners basic human rights according to Geneva Conventions. In 2005, Amnesty International issued a statement comparing the facility to gulags. When Tammy arrives back from the Latin America, the attention is turned to the floods in Venezuelan Caracas. Consequently, she gives an account of the real objective of her visit, 2004 Venezuelan referendum that was aiming at voting the then socialist president Hugo Chávez from the office.

Tammy's opinion on the result of the referendum is more than positive: "Chavez won. It was electric – thousands of people on the streets. We stayed up all night. And d'you know what? There was a seventy percent turnout."<sup>219</sup> The mention of the referendum brings an attention to one of the two political issues that is central to the play unlike the events mentioned above. It is the family's current opinions on UK politics and their voting behaviour in 2005 general election. Danny comments on the large turnout at the Venezuelan referendum: "Well, if there's something to vote for, people turn out."<sup>220</sup> Rachel then follows with the view on the voting situation in Britain: "And they had something to vote for. Here, we've only got things to vote against. If there was a viable alternative to Tony Blair, we'd have a seventy percent turnout here next year. But there isn't, so we won't. And he'll get his third term, the jammy bugger."<sup>221</sup> Moreover, both her and her husband are vigorous readers of Guardian, the newspaper known to aim at conservative readership. Their former affiliation with socialism thus ironically shows only in calling Conservative party "Tories"<sup>222</sup> in a derogatory way, yet it does not prevent them from shifting their political allegiance to it.

Tammy is thus the only member of the family who is still truly leftist. As noted above, she is siding with the socialist government in case of the Venezuelan issue and readily supports any underprivileged group whose natural rights seem to be infringed. She does so especially when US is involved, whose capitalism she frequently criticizes in the play. In case of the Venezuelan referendum, she blames US government for wanting to vote out Chavez solely on the basis of US interest

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<sup>218</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 8.

<sup>219</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 27,28.

<sup>220</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 28.

<sup>221</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 28.

<sup>222</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 39.

in Venezuelan oil.<sup>223</sup> She is also the only character in the play whose political ideas and behaviour are blamed to be over-idealistic, especially by her pragmatic boyfriend, Tzachi. When she is frustrated over the shooting of the Brazilian electrician, he reminds her that it was a sorry accident and not an official government policy and he adds: “You are always talking abstract. You need to deal in reality, if a man gets on a bus with a bomb, you have to shoot him – you are not dealing in reality, you are being idealistic.”<sup>224</sup> Rachel also supports Tzachi’s view, “I think that one man’s negligence, it’s not official government policy,”<sup>225</sup> she says.

Overall, the political behaviour of the rest of the family is much more detached from the socialism than might have been expected. Josh is considering voting Green,<sup>226</sup> and his parents are overall sceptical towards their former voting party, the Labour. One reason for them to be socialists was their membership in Zionist movement that was itself socialism in practise. There is, however, also another reason why Rosens were socialists. In past, Dave’s family used to be a working class prototype. The play reveals that Dave himself used to be a common hand in furniture removal business. Later he set his own business, yet, he still seems to adhere to some socialist ideas. When he learns that his younger daughter became a hypocritical career haunted investment banker, he is absolutely outraged: “No no no – what you do is evil. You’re an agent of capitalism! You’re a merchant banker! You do your millions of dollars every day, and you don’t give a fuck how many people suffer in the process.”<sup>227</sup>

Dave’s harsh criticism towards Michelle cannot be a sole prove that he still sticks to socialist morals though, since he is obviously biased against her for abandoning the family. Yet, he is also picking on Danny, for being a dentist and not doing any hard manual work, even though their relationship is very friendly throughout all the play. Dave says, “They come to you and they open their mouths. What do you do? *Gurnisht*.”<sup>228</sup> Consequently, Dave also blames Danny for voting Conservatives: “you’ve got the Tory Party.”<sup>229</sup> Here, the play reflects

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<sup>223</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 27.

<sup>224</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 70.

<sup>225</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 69.

<sup>226</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 29.

<sup>227</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 105.

<sup>228</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 77.

<sup>229</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 47.

overall very subtle, but in terms of British Jewry very crucial change in the voting behaviour from predominantly favouring Labour to Conservative.

According to V. D. Lipman in his *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (1990), “underlying cause for the change in party allegiances was social change in the Anglo-Jewish community.”<sup>230</sup> He gives an account of five social classes according to the occupation. First two, professional and intermediate occupation classes predominantly vote Conservative, whereas fourth and fifth class, partly skilled and unskilled occupations tend to vote Labour. Before sixties, British Jewry belonged predominantly to the fourth and fifth class whereas during sixties there was “increasingly middle-class composition of Anglo-Jewry.”<sup>231</sup> Geoffrey Alderman notes the same shift in the voting behaviour for the very same reasons in his book *The Jewish Community in British Politics* (1983).

Yet, Alderman is much more precise as to when the shift has actually taken place, that is, between 1970 and 1974 general election. He also observes that London Jewish electorate was at the time already predominantly shifted from East End to the area that comprises of previously discussed Cricklewood, Hendon and Finchley. The move to North London also confirms the social shift to middle classes, since the rise of suburbia was, according to Lawrence Black, linked with the rise in social position of the citizens.<sup>232</sup> In comparison with East End, the above mentioned areas are indeed more suburban.<sup>233</sup> At the same time, both studies focus on London Jewish population. They are in fact reflective of the overall Anglo-Jewish voting behaviour, since London still has about two thirds of Anglo-Jewish population from 1945 as Lipman points out. Therefore, the shift in social class is visible both in the shift of location and the shift in voting behaviour.

Both is also accurately reflected in *Two Thousand Years*, Dave grew up in Stepney,<sup>234</sup> the very heart of London’s East End. He later moved to Hendon from there.<sup>235</sup> He does not vote Labour either, even though it is the traditional domain of British socialist voters. Moreover, he is even more critical of it than Rachel. However there may seem to be a hypocritical inconsistency between his socialist

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<sup>230</sup> V. D. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 236.

<sup>231</sup> Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858*, 237.

<sup>232</sup> See Lawrence Black, “The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64: Old Labour, New Britain?” 478.

<sup>233</sup> See Geoffrey Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), 154.

<sup>234</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 77.

<sup>235</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 73.

ideas and his voting behaviour. The eight scene takes place almost a year after the previous one, on seventh May, 2005, two days after the general election. Dave explains in it the reason why the party has fallen out from his favour: “Blair, the Tories, it’s all the same.”<sup>236</sup> After Danny objects that Labour still means “socialists,”<sup>237</sup> Dave replies angrily: “Socialists my arse! Blair’s in bed with big business even more than the Tories now. Labour party doesn’t need trade union money anymore – that’s a piss in the ocean. There’s no political party that represents us anymore, the working people – it doesn’t exist. No wonder half the electorate didn’t bother to vote.”<sup>238</sup> Here, Dave criticises the 1994 transition of the Labour party under the leadership of Tony Blair into so called New Labour that discouraged some more of its traditional supporters among British Jews.

Amelia Howe Kritzer explains in her book, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain* (2008) that New Labour has drawn close to policies established by Thatcher’s government and the following of her legacy failed to change the political situation after the elections.<sup>239</sup> At that time, New Labour became considerably less clearly a representative of leftist policies. Dave’s criticism thus does not disprove his adherence to socialist ideas, but reflects the change in UK politics which resulted into the shift in voting behaviour reflected in *Two Thousand Years*.

As stated before, socialism for Dave was also very much linked with Zionism, the movement that applied communist ideas in practise in so called kibbutzim. From the political point of view, Dave still holds an opinion that kibbutz was perfectly functioning and he explains: “When we were on the kibbutz, everyone was entitled to their opinion. You were made to explain not just what your position was, but also why you held to that position. Sometimes the discussions could go on all night. They were wonderful. And, usually, with a bit of luck, by breakfast time a collective decision had been arrived at.”<sup>240</sup> Rachel, however follows with a view that such system was not half so efficient, she criticises the lack of personal choice. “Look: on the kibbutz, every aspect of people’s lives was regulated by the General Assembly, and people were often

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<sup>236</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 39.

<sup>237</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 39.

<sup>238</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 39.

<sup>239</sup> See Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*, 7.

<sup>240</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 50.

scared to express their opinion, because they didn't want to be made to feel like outsiders."<sup>241</sup> She further compares such result to Hitler's dictatorship, which creates ironic effect in the play, since later it becomes apparent that Dave voted again for the British National Party, which is widely criticised for its fascist agenda.

There has to be noted however that Dave's decision to vote BNP is not as absurd, as it may seem. First of all, even though he strongly believes communism functioned very well in practise in kibbutzim under Zionism, he is not a Zionist himself anymore. He admits: "I am ashamed how Zionism has been hijacked by a bunch of right-wing religious nutters."<sup>242</sup> Here, he refers to the overall change in Israeli politics from left to right, the abandonment of socialist favours since the general election of 1977. He also explains that he is ashamed of the above mentioned change of favour from socialist to conservative among Anglo-Jewish electorate and calls Conservative Jewish MPs "arse-licker's in Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet."<sup>243</sup> That is a reference to the shift in the New Labour's strategies. Whereas New Labour followed to a certain extent right wing policies established during Thatcher's time, BNP has boosted its social agenda and thus became more accommodating to leftist voters. At the same time, it abandoned, at least in terms of public statements, the Anti-Semitic agenda.

BNP's head of legal affairs, Lee Barnes, was moreover known to have supported Israel. Julia Neuberger notes in her lecture his words: "As a Nationalist, I can say that I support Israel 100% in their dispute with Hezbollah."<sup>244</sup> Here, he refers to the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, terrorist organisation connected to Palestine Liberation Organization (hence PLO), that shifted to Lebanon after 1971 when it got expelled from Jordan for inducing a civil war in 1970. Neuberger however also mentions that the leader of the party, Nick Griffin, shifted the agenda from anti-Jewish to anti-Muslim precisely to gain more appeal and voters.<sup>245</sup> Even though Dave criticises Israel's war with Lebanon,<sup>246</sup> in which he technically disagrees with his voting party, his nationalistic loyalty towards

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<sup>241</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 50.

<sup>242</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 52.

<sup>243</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 52.

<sup>244</sup> Julia Neuberger, "The Van der Zyl Lecture," *European Judaism* 43 (Spring 2010): 97, <<http://www.ingentaconnect.com>>.

<sup>245</sup> See Neuberger, "The Van der Zyl Lecture," 96.

<sup>246</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 52.

Britain is the ultimate reason for his affiliation with BNP. He states that he is ashamed of those British Jews who place their loyalties elsewhere. He calls them 'Jewish racists' and follows: "They should know better. Their grandparent came to this country as immigrant themselves."<sup>247</sup> The major public political opinion in Britain is currently anti-Israeli which explains Dave's outrage. The misplaced loyalties that he is talking about therefore are: loyalty to Jewish ethnic or religious belonging, or a political loyalty to the State of Israel. *Two Thousand Years* thus touches upon the issue of dual loyalty in terms of political behaviour of English Jews.

Yet, Dave's political stance does not prove that British Jews take their party's opinion on Israeli-Palestinian conflict much into consideration for their voting behaviour. In reality, potentially dual political loyalty of British Jews is a public issue since even before the Second World War. It has to do again with political orientation of British Jews towards the left and with their potential allegiance with the State of Israel. Raphael Langham explains in his chronology *The Jews in Britain* (2005) that former support of the Russian Revolution in 1917 on the part of English Jews took part because of their affiliation to socialism. It resulted in the wave of Anti-Semitism in UK, since the leaders of the revolution were perceived as Jewish and supported by English Jews.<sup>248</sup> More incidents confirm that even a seeming instance of political loyalties on the part of British Jews outside of UK and against UK's public opinion results in negative feelings against Jewish community in UK.

Maurice Freedman also notices the conditionality of UK's public behaviour towards British Jews in one of the first social studies on Anglo-Jewry, *Minority in Britain* (1955). He states that as a consequence, British Jewry is continuously "concerned in the highest degree with the prevention of any action by a Jew which, they thought, would provoke the hostility of the non-Jewish world."<sup>249</sup> He adds that the trace of such fear, which again translates into assimilationist attitudes on the part of British Jewry, is recorded at least from the seventeenth century till present. Since fifties, however, there is a new perspective challenging the assimilationist attitude for Anglo-Jewry. With the establishment

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<sup>247</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 53.

<sup>248</sup> See Raphael Langman, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Chippenham: Antony Rowe, 2005), 82.

<sup>249</sup> Maurice Freedman, *A Minority in Britain* (London: Valentine, Mitchel & CO., 1955), 169.



of the State of Israel, it becomes natural for British Jews to form an opinion on the situation and potentially more tempting to express political loyalty to a country outside of the UK. Freedman comments on the situation: “at least, in case of some Jews, there is a great deal of self-respect and sense of security to be derived from an identification with the Jewish State.”<sup>250</sup> He presents another ‘common observation that formal ties with organisations centred on Israel have become “‘respectable’ in Anglo-Jewry.”<sup>251</sup> It is, however, the only way he supports the claim.

Yet, Freedman comes to a crucial conclusion that activities linked to the State of Israel may replace the sense of solidarity within Anglo-Jewish community that can no longer be provided by religion due to secularization. Consequently, such activities can express, or assert Jewishness.<sup>252</sup> The remark brings back the question of the role of political opinion on the construct of identity within the play. As it was already stated, Dave’s political understanding does undeniably structure his identity. The same holds true for Rachel and Danny, yet the perspective is slightly different. The second reason why Rachel and Danny express their favour to Conservatives instead of New Labour is more important. The New Labour has not only drawn its policies closer to the right wing political spectrum, but it has also changed its stance on Israel, shifting its support to PLO.

The reason for the shift of the support dates back to the 1967 Six Day War. It was a military clash between Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, initiated by Israel after a series of heightened tensions to prevent the supposedly upcoming attack from the above members of the League of Arab States (LAS). The League was formed shortly before the State of Israel has been granted independence. Its first of many operations were put into practise to eliminate Israel’s existence. In the UK context, Israel’s intervention in 1967 started a crucial change of the public opinion on the state. Raphael Langman summarises the reason why in his *The Jews in Britain: a chronology* (2005). During the war “The whole of Anglo-Jewry seemed to be united in support of Israel: eleven million pounds was raised by an emergency appeal and 10,000 attended a mass rally; 8000 young persons

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<sup>250</sup> Freedman, *A Minority in Britain*, 237.

<sup>251</sup> Freedman, *A Minority in Britain*, 237.

<sup>252</sup> See Freedman, *A Minority in Britain*, 237-238.

volunteered to fly to Israel to help and 1700 went.”<sup>253</sup> At the same time, Langman adds, Cairo radio launched a false report that Britain as a state was supporting Israel and flying in reinforcement aircraft. The report caused Arab countries to break off all diplomatic relations with Britain.<sup>254</sup> As a consequence, there was a new wave of Anti-Semitism and official political, as well as public opinion in UK turned against Israel.

Still, Anglo-Jewish MPs were predominantly Labour until 80s. After 1979 the situation changed due to previously discussed socio-economic changes in Anglo-Jewish population, although recognising the PLO on the 1982 annual conference of the Labour Party may have, according to Lipman, played a role as well.<sup>255</sup> In any case, the electorate shifted to support Conservatives instead. According to Alderman, Conservative party was also deciding on its stance towards PLO at the time and there were various activities on the part of Anglo-Jewish electorate aiming at making Margaret understand their anxiety and as a result, conservatives kept their support to Israel.<sup>256</sup> The fact that the same activities were not aimed towards the Labour party proves the social cause of the shift as the main one.

The play does not explain the reasons Rachel and Danny shifted their support from Labour to Conservative. Nevertheless, it presents the shift, and so reflects the Anglo-Jewish citizenship in the UK. Neither of the quoted studies of political behaviour of Anglo-Jewry prove any double loyalties on the part of Anglo-Jewish politicians. Moreover, Alderman’s study shows some statistics of the opposite and proves that British Jews have never voted in a same way.<sup>257</sup> Again, this is also something the play reflects, as there is a great diversity of voting behaviour within the Rosen family. Yet, Alderman summarizes that it is indeed undeniable that British Jews are not totally assimilated within British political culture, as the distinctly Jewish political behaviour occurs, but only in a few instances of serious importance, linked to existence and survival of the world Jewry which suggests, to a larger extent existence and survival of Israel.

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<sup>253</sup> Langman, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 97.

<sup>254</sup> See Langman, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 98.

<sup>255</sup> See Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858*, 236.

<sup>256</sup> See Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics*, 170-171.

<sup>257</sup> See Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics*, 171.

## Chapter 7.1: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The lesser half of the political discussion that goes on throughout the play is about the then current issues concerning Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The discussion of the 2000 Camp David article mentioned in the second chapter occurs right at the beginning of the play. 2000 Camp David stands for a diplomatic summit between the then prime minister of Israel, Ehud Barak, Yasser Arafat, the then chairman of PLO and the then US president, Bill Clinton. The event was initiated by Barak and maintained at Clinton's summer retreat. The main aim behind the meeting was fulfilment of the Oslo Accords from 1993. It was a breakthrough peace building agreement which recognized Yasser Arafat as a partner of peace. For giving autonomy to the West Bank and vacating Gaza strip for PLO, PLO was supposed to recognise Israel's right to exist and renounce terrorist attacks on Israel.

Oslo Accords were to be appointed throughout the period of five years before there would have been a final establishment of the borders. Unfortunately, the mistrust between the two parties grew instead. PLO accused Israel of not stopping the settlements in the West Bank and Israel accused PLO of not stopping the terrorist groups that were destroying the peace process. Camp David was a pre-last and perhaps the most crucial of the diplomatic meetings trying to resume Oslo Accords. Ehud Barak offered a plan permitting a Palestinian state with the Capital in Jerusalem and Clinton persuaded Arafat to come on the grounds that he will not blame him for the outcome. Arafat rejected the offers because the plan involved giving up nine percent of the West Bank which was strategically and economically detrimental.

In the play, Jonathan sums the situation up ironically: "Barak offers everything; Arafat accepts nothing; Barak's the good guy, Arafat's the bad guy..."<sup>258</sup> Both he and Danny criticise Camp David much in the same way, as the Guardian article they have just read. The article was issued 17.7. 2004 and written by David Hirst the then Guardian reporter for Middle East who reworked it from the original one issued in 2001 and gave it a suggestive name "Don't Blame

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<sup>258</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 6.

Arafat.”<sup>259</sup> In the play, Jonathan and Danny agree that the crucial point about the article is that it “questions the crap we were fed about Camp David”<sup>260</sup> until Rachel has to remind them: “He’s such a saint, Arafat?”<sup>261</sup> and then she criticises the article: “I just think it goes too far. I mean, who’s he benefiting by whitewashing Arafat?”<sup>262</sup> Here, the play takes the liberty of a four year span between the first issue of the article and the reworking to show it in the new light and pose the questions that have inevitably arisen from renewed public commentary on the issue.

After a further exchange of opinions on the topic, the attention turns to another related issue. One of the points on the five-year peacebuilding plan of the Oslo Accords was vacating Gaza strip by Israel. In the starting point of the play July 2004, Jonathan asks Rachel and Danny whether Sharon will quit Gaza strap, since the then Israeli government has already made the resolution one month earlier. They answer with disbelief: “No. Of course not. It’s hard to imagine. I reckon it’s just a bluff.”<sup>263</sup> A year later, early September 2005, Gaza strip is being vacated. It is also first time when Tzachi comes to visit the family. His comments add to the discussion on the subject a new perspective stemming from Tzachi’s experience.

Tammy says: “Yeah, well, forgive me but I thought that this [vacating Gaza] might be the start of a real peace process.”<sup>264</sup> To that Tzachi replies: “With Sharon, there is no peace process. There is only Israeli security.”<sup>265</sup> He explains his opinion in relation to the concrete wall that was being built at the time in the area of Bethlehem to stop the fights and that was viewed negatively by the foreign public opinion. He says, “It’s not, er, good idea, bad idea. Is, er, does it stop the terrorists to get through? Does it stop the bomb? Yes? Welcome to Israel, there is no long term. You are always idealistic again. In Israel it is the facts on the ground, a new settlement outpost, a suicide bomb, a *kasan* rocket on the settlers, you know, is a reaction to a reaction to a reaction. It never ends.”<sup>266</sup> At this point,

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<sup>259</sup> See David Hirst, “Don’t Blame Arafat,” *The Guardian*, n.p. 17 July 2004, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jul/17/comment.davidhirst>>.

<sup>260</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 6.

<sup>261</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 6.

<sup>262</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 6.

<sup>263</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 7.

<sup>264</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 79.

<sup>265</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 79.

<sup>266</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 80, 81.

Dave sums the situation aptly: “So ... you are a young Israeli and you’re saying there’s no hope?” Tzachi replies: “Untill the Palestinian leadership decides to stop help themselves, start help the people, I don’t see hope.”<sup>267</sup> The discussion closes up by the suggestion on the part of Rosens that Palestinians need to find a man of peace, as well as Israelis need to.

In relation to that, Rachel points out that Israel has already had a man of peace, Yitzchak Rabin.<sup>268</sup> He was a well-known prime minister of Israel who, especially in his second office from 1992 until 1995 made immense effort for creating, signing and enacting the Oslo Accords which in the end led to a supportive nation-wide peace rally. At the end of the rally the Oslo Accords would get enacted, giving away immense territory on the part of Israel in exchange for the peace. After his final speech, however, Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated while walking down the steps of the city hall in Tel Aviv. The nation lost the only leader it was trusting to follow. Instead, the rival politician Shimon Peres was appointed to the office and the peace process was never resumed or followed in such a scale again. The play thus touches upon every key issue that is crucial for basic understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, it does justice to realistic reflection of the matter since it presents differing opinions and experience and avoids one opinion to overshadow others.

As was proven in this chapter, *Two Thousand Years* is very precisely defined in terms of international political context in which it appears, plus its characters add a dimension of personal involvement and experience into the subject and turn the play into one continuous string of discussions. This particular aspect reflects overall change in the UK theatre attitude. Ellen Redling’s article “New Plays of Ideas and an Aesthetics of Reflection and Debate in Contemporary British Political Drama” (2014) comments on the issue. In the late 1990s and early 2000s British theatre turned from producing action plays towards “foregrounded reflection and debate,”<sup>269</sup> as a result of quieting after the dominance of kitchen sink and in-yer-face theatre. The new plays are not overall didactic, as they do not

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<sup>267</sup> Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 82.

<sup>268</sup> See Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, 82.

<sup>269</sup> Ellen Redling, “New Plays of Ideas and an Aesthetics of Reflection and Debate in Contemporary British Political Drama,” *De Guyter* 2 (2014): 159, <<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jcde.2014.2.issue-1/jcde-2014-0012/jcde-2014-0012.xml>>.

preach what is right, yet they follow Ibsen's and Shaw's tradition of realism.<sup>270</sup> Kritzer describes the same change more profoundly in her book on UK's political theatre since 1995. She adds that in late 90s there was a surprising reappearance of political drama that linked personal with political through interpreting particular issues as public problems and through dialogue, provoking thought on the issue.<sup>271</sup> Redling claims that nowadays, public is no longer detached from politics and questions it through debate which is reflected in the UK's new political plays.<sup>272</sup> She thus supports Kritzer's reflection.

*Two Thousand Years* certainly fits the description of converging personal and political, public and private, religion and citizenship. Moreover, all of these components are constructive of the identity of the characters, shown before for instance on Dave and Josh. Accordingly, Kritzer's second main observation on the new UK's political plays also concerns identity. She states that the expression of political opinions of the characters is very much linked to identity, since identity structures political understanding, choice and action.<sup>273</sup> Yet, the play goes beyond showing identity as a potential for political opinions and behaviour. Political opinion and action reciprocally show the potential for construction of the characters' identity. Identity in the play is, for the most part, continuously being negotiated, just like the opinions on the discussed events.

On the other hand, the overall political opinion on Israel throughout the play could be perceived as surprisingly negative, given the background affiliation of the people behind its making. The two possible reasons for it to be so were already discussed. Firstly, author's own opinions on the Israeli policies are currently also overall negative. It is despite his Jewish background since it was already proven that being Jewish is not a main factor defining particular political opinion or voting behaviour in England. Still, there is one more argument crucial for the explanation of the prominent critique of Israel within the play. The current public discourse, passed as the correct one on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Britain is, according to Kritzer, blaming Israel for the suffering of Palestinians.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> See Redling, "New Plays of Ideas and an Aesthetics of Reflection and Debate in Contemporary British Political Drama," 160-165.

<sup>271</sup> See Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*, 7-12.

<sup>272</sup> See Redling, "New Plays of Ideas and an Aesthetics of Reflection and Debate in Contemporary British Political Drama," 162.

<sup>273</sup> See Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*, 2.

<sup>274</sup> See Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*, 190.

At the same time, it is also the prevailing European public discourse on the issue. The play thus could be seen as a little conformist in following such discourse since, as mentioned before, the overall British public opinion changed in 1967 because of a false report. It illustrates the strength of the public discourse which can be initiated by a falsity, yet survive beyond discovering the truth.

In fact, revealing false motivation behind public discourse does not make it any less powerful. It can and does survive and consequently shows in various areas, such as theatre. That is the case with *Two Thousand Years* and its portrayal of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though the play is still overall reflective, as was argued. Leigh's play is also a unique because of the endeavour to show the conflict without much bias. To compare, David Hare's *Via Dolorosa* (1997), which preceded Leigh's play by seven years, was criticised in an open letter by Arnold Wesker for misinterpretations and one-sided blaming of Israel to keep political correctness.<sup>275</sup> Unlike Hare's play, *Two Thousand Years*, does take pains to present the issue from both sides, mainly through the comparison and questioning of both the character of pragmatic Tzachi and idealistic Tammy, as was demonstrated earlier on.

The play thus fits into Kritzer's definition that through rejecting pure idealism, as well as pragmatism, it offers pragmatic humanism.<sup>276</sup> Overall, *Two Thousand Years* is unique among the contemporary Anglo-Jewish political plays in more than one aspect. It is not only the first play which openly deals with what it means now to be an English Jew, but it is also the first play directly linked to Leigh's personal background. Despite the personal subject matter, it is overall reflective of a general reality of Anglo-Jewish experience, even though the issue of Josh's struggle with religion does not fall within the pattern. Nevertheless, *Two Thousand Years* fits within a larger emerging tradition of discussion plays, showing the development of both Anglo-Jewish and general political theatre in England. It is an extraordinary member of both these areas worth further academic attention.

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<sup>275</sup> See Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*, 190.

<sup>276</sup> See Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain*, 219.

## Conclusion

The thesis concentrated on the field of post-war Anglo-Jewish drama. It looked at Mike Leigh's most recent play, *Two Thousand Years* which was firstly produced at the National Theatre, London, on 15th September 2005. Even though Leigh is widely known more for his film work, he also belongs among well-established and much acclaimed contemporary British playwrights. Yet, his latter plays almost altogether skipped academic attention. *Two Thousand Years* was never thoroughly analysed, despite its special position both within author's work and within Anglo-Jewish drama. The play is the only work of his which directly draws on his personal background. At the same time, it realistically portrays the Anglo-Jewish experience in contemporary UK. Even though the play is overall reflective, it also shows opinions on politics or religion that are not always detaches from the author's own opinions. This also makes *Two Thousand Years* unique among Leigh's works.

The first question to be answered before the actual analysis of the play was whether there exists a tradition of plays written by Anglo-Jewish authors that would portray Anglo-Jewish experience. The thesis thus started with a comprehensive research of Anglo-Jewish playwrights and their works, limiting the focus on English production since 1945 until the first production of *Two Thousand Years*. It found nineteen playwrights and considered the subject matter of some 472 plays. On the ground of this research, the hypothesis that Leigh's play is the first to place the Anglo-Jewish experience at its centre was confirmed.

Nevertheless, there were a few plays that have foregrounded what after *Two Thousand Years* seems to have become a new outspoken approach in Anglo-Jewish drama. The most salient of these is undoubtedly Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup With Barley*. Some of those that followed with the same central theme after 2005 were plays of Julia Pascal or Ryan Craig. The first chapter thus determined the position of *Two Thousand Years* within Anglo-Jewish drama and set the context for the analysis of the play itself.

The analysis started by focusing on the Jewish subject matter in the play. It focussed on factors constructing Jewish identity. Namely it followed characters who embodied the difference between secular ethnic Jewish identity and religious



Jewish identity. It aimed to answer a question whether the play is purely reflective of both secular and religious Jewishness, as the author claimed. It discovered that the treatment of both is rather uneven. Religion as a construct of Jewish identity was shown only on one out of the eight characters. Moreover, Josh's temporary adherence to religious practise was mocked and overall approached by the rest of the characters in the play as a folly. The play left out questions about Josh's motivation for his religious love affair on which he eventually gives up to be welcomed back into the family fold. Most of the reviews also noticed the bias and viewed it as a play's flaw. The portrayal of religion echoed the author's personal negative opinion on religion stemming from his secular background. In this respect, the play proved to be much less reflective of the general Anglo-Jewish experience than the author claimed.

Yet, the play also correctly showed on the Rosen family that contemporary Anglo-Jewry is for at least past two generations overall predominantly secular. Moreover, Josh's involvement with religion walked the audience through all the key Jewish traditions. Neither Josh, nor Tammy who is his opposite were constructed as dimensional characters and so Josh's struggle is not only a simple comedy sketch. Moreover, the play stressed the necessity of belief as such regardless of its form and thus introduced a universalist point of view on the matter. Despite the bias, the play proved not to intend to deal with the issue in a simplistic way.

The fourth chapter further questioned if the reflective realism is indeed the intended and predominant in the play. It explored the process of the play's making and commented on the choice of the actors and the language. It examined whether and to what extent did these enhance play's realistic appeal. The chapter described Leigh's unique working method which he applies for both his theatre and film work. It proved that his method aims precisely at making his works as realistic as possible. He uses it invariably throughout all his working career, as well as for *Two Thousand Years*. The choice of the ensemble proved to be motivated by keeping the play realistic as well. All the English Jewish characters were played by English Jewish actors, except the character of Tzachi, young Israeli living in London. He was played by young Israeli actor living in London. Such casting and its performance supported author's claim that the play was from the start intended as an anthropological study of Anglo-Jewish community.

The language use in *Two Thousand Years* is also a realism enhancing factor. The style of dialogue equals everyday casual speech. It was discovered to be directly inspired by Harold Pinter's usage of language. Unlike Pinter's plays, the conversations in Leigh's play are filled with Yiddish and Hebrew words. The presence of such vocabulary underlined the cultural difference of English Jews despite overall successful assimilation and secularization. At the same time, the restricted amount of potentially strange words for the audience revealed the struggle between keeping the play universal enough and still reflective of its specific subject matter. The commercial success supported the fact that targeting the play at the general audience was successful as well.

Rosens in *Two Thousand Years*' live in Circlewood, North London. It is an area of inhabitancy of mainly secular Jewish families whose past generations moved there from East End. As to the characters themselves, the fifth chapter disproved Whiteheads claim that some of them, for instance Michelle, are unrealistic. Her character clearly showed, against a common critical view, that the play is not a satire. It was further proved that *Two Thousand Years* is a tragicomedy just as the absolute majority of the author's work. At the same time, the chapter explored why the play is known as the author's Jewish coming out. After the release of the play, the author started speaking openly about his Jewish upbringing, as well as explaining that due to opening of the society after the new millennium it is overall much easier to claim one's own ethnical belonging. The thesis proved this attitude to show in the play, as well as on the current attitude of Anglo-Jewish society. The play also reflected author's own background, just as the anxiety with which English Jews still struggle when identifying themselves as Jewish.

The sixth chapter traced the overt connections between the play's story and Leigh's own Jewish background. Author's grandmother proved to be an inspiration for the character of Dave. His emigration to Israel was also modelled on two of Leigh's family members. The older generation of the characters in the play used to be Zionists, just as the majority of Leigh's family. All the characters in the play just like Leigh's family members attended Zionist socialist youth club, Habonim. Moreover, Leigh's choice of the career at the theatre proved to stem from his experience of producing Habonim's annual theatre play. The characters within the play discuss their former membership in the club with great deal of

nostalgia. It reflects the loss of community life Habonim used to be providing for secular Jews, echoing the author's nostalgia over the loss of Jewish community life after he left his family and the club for RADA. At the same time, the club is sharply criticised for its communist propaganda and an aim to repatriate young European Jews back to Israel. The play thus also reflects author's change of opinion, just as overall decline of Zionism among English Jews. It is thus overall reflective, yet full of personal references like no other of Leigh's works.

The last chapter looked at the ongoing political discussion within the play. Producing a political drama was proved to be an intention behind *Two Thousand Years*, even though Leigh formerly denied having or displaying any clear political opinions in his works. The thesis thus discovered that the play is not only Leigh's first work about Anglo-Jewish experience, but also his first political drama. It is full of references to major political events of the time, for instance the war in Iraq, against which the author was opposing. The play also reflected crucial shift of Anglo-Jewish voting behaviour from Labour to Conservative and other parties. It touched upon all major reasons behind the shift, such as upward social mobility, or the shift of Labour's policy from pro-Israeli to pro-Palestinian. It also brought out the question of Anglo-Jewish double-political loyalty. The chapter proved that there is a great variety of voting behaviour of both the characters and in reality. Nevertheless, it also showed that any strong political opinion, just like the sense of the ethnic belonging is constructive of identity.

The discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the play also proved to be a reflective mixture from both UK's and Israel's point of view. Negative stance towards Israel prevailed, once again echoing the author's own current opinion, just as the overall change of British public opinion on the issue. All in all, the play was found to fit in the canon of what Kritzer described as the new wave of political discussion plays that are overall reflective and realistic, yet also personal, converging general and specific, public and private. At the same time, *Two Thousand Years* proved to open a new outspoken attitude in Anglo-Jewish drama. The thesis thus confirmed that the play is a unique piece of theatre work on more than one level, certainly deserving further academic attention.

## Resumé

Diplomová práce se primárně zabývá analýzou nejnovější hry současného britského filmaře a dramatika Mika Leigha, zvané *Two Thousand Years*. Hra byla poprvé uvedena 15. září 2005 za nebývalého zájmu publika, kdy i předpremiéra byla vyprodaná, ačkoliv nebyl znám ještě ani oficiální název. Práce úzce sleduje všechny oblasti, ve kterých hra prokazuje svou výjimečnost, hlavně její reflexi současného života Anglických Židů. V tomto ohledu je dílo zároveň autorovou první zповědí o jeho vlastním židovském původu. Práce se také snaží zasadit dílo do širšího kontextu anglo-židovského dramatu od roku 1945 až po konec prvního desetiletí současného století. I přes svou výjimečnost hra prozatím nezískala větší pozornost akademické obce, tato práce je tedy vůbec první svého druhu na dané téma.

Před samotnou analýzou hry se práce nejprve snaží zodpovědět otázku, zdali vůbec existuje novodobá anglo-židovská divadelní tradice, která by primárně zobrazovala postavení a život anglických Židů. Po zohlednění příslušných antologií, databází a jiných zdrojů bylo nalezeno devatenáct relevantních poválečných anglo-židovských autorů, kteří dohromady uvedli pět set sedmdesát dvě hry. První kapitola sleduje tematickou základnu jejich her a následně dochází k závěru, že až *Two Thousand Years* představuje život současné anglické židovské rodiny jako hlavní téma. Zároveň však poukazuje na některé její podobné předchůdce, například drama Arnolda Weskera, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, které je obdobně tematicky vystavěné. Wesker však razantně odmítá, že zobrazení života anglických Židů bylo jejím hlavním tématem. Kapitola také zmiňuje autory, kteří podobné téma ustanovují jako hlavní ve hrách, které následovaly po *Two Thousand Years*, například Julii Pascalovou a Ryana Craiga. Dochází tak k závěru, že Leighova hra zároveň začíná novou otevřenější etapu anglo-židovského dramatu.

Vlastní analýza díla začíná řešením otázek týkajících se role náboženství ve hře. Představuje rozdíl mezi židovskou identitou z etnického hlediska a složkou židovské identity spojenou s Judaismem. Jeden z hlavních problémů ve hře je totiž konfrontace mezi sekulární židovskou rodinou a příslušníkem její nejmladší generace, Joshem. Ten začne dodržovat židovské náboženské tradice, které dílo

zároveň představuje divákům. Joshův návrat k Judaismu je však zbytkem rodiny vnímán jako nepříjemná přechodná záležitost a celá zápletka je využita pro podtržení komického efektu, aniž by hra hlouběji řešila Joshovu motivaci k takové změně. V tomto ohledu bylo dílo obecně kritizováno, jelikož tím až příliš odráží autorův negativní postoj vůči náboženství. Zároveň tím však odráží také realitu, anglické Židovstvo je totiž v současnosti většinově ateistické. Hra tedy nejde úplně proti autorovu tvrzení, že se především snaží zachytit realitu. To dokládá i fakt, že ani Josh, ani jeho sestra, která působí jako jeho protiklad, nejsou černobílými postavami. Dílo ve spojitosti s vyznáním představuje spíše univerzální otázky, které záměrně nechává nezodpovězeny.

Práce dále zkoumá, do jaké míry je realismus v díle dominantní a jaké prostředky autor využil, aby realistického efektu dosáhl. Čtvrtá kapitola tedy nejprve rozebírá samotnou Leighovu tvorbu, která vyniká svou jedinečností mezi ostatními jeho současníky. Scénář hry je výsledkem až půlroční improvizace s herci na dané téma. Herci zároveň podstatně přispívají k tomu, co jejich postavy vlastně vyjádří. Také proto Leigh pro svou nejnovější a zatím poslední hru zvolil výlučně ty herce, kteří pocházejí ze stejného kulturně-etnického zázemí jako jejich postavy. Všichni herci jsou rovněž angličtí Židé, až na začínajícího izraelského herce Nitzana Sharrona žijícího v Londýně, který hraje Tzachiho mladého Izraelce pobývajícího v Londýně. Práce následně dokazuje, že jedinečný styl Leighovy tvorby, stejně jako výběr herců činí hru prokazatelně realističtější. Také potvrzuje, že Leigh dílo zamýšlel jako reflexi života současných anglických Židů, mezi které sám patří.

S tím souvisí použití jazyka ve hře. Nejedná se pouze o Nitzanův přirozený silný přízvuk, ale o množství slovíček v jidiš a moderní hebrejštině, které herci mimoděk užívají. Tištěná verze hry vychází s indexem obsahujícím všechna neanglická slova a jejich překlad. Práce dokazuje, že jejich přítomnost ve hře je do jisté míry regulovaná. Tím potvrzuje, že hra se snaží cílit na všeobecné publikum. Zároveň však dodržuje maximální autentičnost tím, že styl rozhovorů je velmi jednoduchý, odpovídající každodenní hovorové mluvě. Práce následně odhaluje, že autorovou inspirací byl v tomto konverzační styl v dramatech Harolda Pintera.

Prostředí, ve kterém se hra odehrává, rovněž odráží skutečnost. Čtvrt' Cricklewood v severním Londýně je místem, kde žije velká část převážně

sekulárních židovských rodin. Práce také vyvrací obecný kritický názor, že alespoň polovina z Leighových postav není ničím více, než satirickou karikaturou. Tento omyl je v případě *Two Thousand Years* doložen rozebráním žánru hry, kterým je tragikomedie, nikoliv satira. Autor sám dokládá, že tragikomedii jakožto dominantní žánr v jeho tvorbě vnímá jako odraz jeho židovského kulturního zázemí. V souvislosti se hrou autor také poprvé otevřeně hovoří o jeho židovském původu a tradici, ve které vyrůstal.

Práce tedy následně zkoumá, do jaké míry a ve kterých konkrétních případech dílo reflektuje Leighův osobní život. Nejvíce prostoru dostává Habonim, mládežnický sionistický socialistický klub, jehož členy byly všechny postavy ve hře. Nostalgicky na Habonim vzpomínají, ale také ho zpětně hodnotí vcelku negativně, kvůli šíření komunistické propagandy. Ta souvisela se snahou o repatriaci mladých evropských Židů do izraelských komun zvaných kibucy. Autor sám byl v mládí aktivním členem klubu, což přímo souvisí také s jeho pozdější volbou stát se dramatikem, jak práce rovněž dokazuje.

Poslední nedílná součást *Two Thousand Years* je diskuze Rosenových na téma domácí i světové politiky, která probíhá během celé hry. Zahrnuje taková témata jako volby ve Spojeném království v roce 2005, válku v Iráku, ale hlavně Izraelsko-Palestinský konflikt. Závěr práce se tedy snaží odpovědět na otázky s tímto spojené. Zkoumá, zdali existuje určitá jednota v politickém chování anglických Židů a jestli lze jejich politickou loajalitu vůči Británii zpochybňovat. Dále zjišťuje, jak a v návaznosti na které faktory se vyvinuly volební preference této skupiny. Poté se zabývá otázkou, jaký je ve hře převládající názor na Izraelsko-Palestinský konflikt a jak toto téma souvisí s veřejným míněním Spojeného Království či s Leighovým osobním názorem na tuto problematiku.

Nakonec práce potvrzuje, že *Two Thousand Years* patří do nové vlny anglických politických dramát. Tyto hry jsou především reflexí skutečnosti, ovšem formou neustálé diskuze. Tím zároveň prezentují různé názory na témata, která se této skutečnosti bezprostředně týkají. Spojují tak obecné se specifickým a veřejné s osobním, což platí i o Leighově nejnovější hře. Ta je celkově hodnocena jako výjimečná ve více ohledech, čímž si nesporně zasluhuje větší pozornost akademické obce.

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**Synopsis:**

The thesis analyses Mike Leigh's most recent play, *Two Thousand Years*. It presents a comprehensive survey of the central theme in the plays authored by post 1945 Anglo-Jewish playwrights to provide the context needed for the determination of the position of Leigh's play among them. *Two Thousand Years* proves to be the first play of its kind to centre on the reflection of contemporary Anglo-Jewish life. At the same time, it is the first and only one to reflect Leigh's personal background. The thesis thus answers an underlying question whether the play is more of a realistic reflection or a presentation of a preformed opinions on issues such as identity, Judaism as a religion, Anglo-Jewish citizenship and voting behaviour, and last but not least, an Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**Key Words:**

Anglo-Jewish drama, Mike Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, tragicomedy, realism, identity, religion, politics, Zionism, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, general elections

**Anotace:**

Diplomová práce analyzuje nejnovější divadelní hru současného Britského autora Mika Leigha, která v originále nese název *Two Thousand Years*. Práce nejprve zkoumá tematický základ her devatenácti anglo-židovských poválečných autorů a tím představuje výjimečné postavení Leighovy hry. Ta je jedinečná jednak tím, že jako první hra od roku 1945 cílí na zobrazení reality současného anglo-židovského života a zároveň je prvním a jediným z autorových děl, které do určité míry odrážejí jeho rodinnou historii. Práce tedy zodpovídá otázku, do jaké míry je hra čistě reflektivní a do jaké míry prezentuje určité názorové postoje spojené s tématy jako identita, role náboženství, Judaismus, anglo-židovské volební chování a Izraelsko-Palestinský konflikt.

**Klíčová slova:**

Anglo-židovské drama, Mike Leigh, *Two Thousand Years*, tragikomedie, realizmus, identita, náboženství, politika, volby, Sionismus, Izraelsko-Palestinský konflikt