



BFI'S 100 BBC TV GAMECHANGERS

Play for Today: Licking Hitler

+ panel and Q&A with writer David Hare and actor Bill Paterson

Almost incredibly, David Hare made the visually highly sophisticated *Licking Hitler* 'without having ever looked down a camera until the first day of shooting. My film directing came primarily from having been to the cinema a lot. It's my view that anybody who knows what they want to say can develop the means for saying it.' He was particularly fortunate in having an innovative and supportive producer in David Rose, who had long been aware of Hare not only as a writer but also as a director. As Rose put it: 'He obviously was very much in command of the direction of his stage plays and knew precisely what he wanted. It seemed to me that among his qualities was a precision that would obviously be very valuable in filmmaking. This feeling was reinforced by the screenplay of *Licking Hitler*, it was clearly written as a film – you could see from the page exactly what he intended to see on screen.'

In spite of Rose's support, however, Hare still had problems with the BBC. One of these revolved around the familiar film/play argument: 'When I insisted at BBC Birmingham on calling *Licking Hitler* a film, it was thought to be quite controversial because at that time they just didn't recognise the category of "television film". Thanks to Channel 4 that's now changed, and indeed it's Film on Four which has given the Channel much of its identity to date. I've always wanted to work in feature films since I was a boy – it's what all of us of a certain age always dreamed of doing. Really, I went into the theatre because there was then no possibility going into film. Theatre was a second choice, and indeed it's generally said of my stage writing that it's cinematic, that it's trying to burst out of the stage, and that there's a certain freedom of movement through time and place. I don't, however, write short scenes, and an awful lot of "epic" writing that I now see on stage has suffered terribly from a misunderstanding of the epic form. A number of young writers seem to think that if you write a great many monologues and short scenes, that's epic writing. But epic writing on stage is actually about juxtaposition, about what you put next to what, and I'm afraid that television, too, has been an appalling influence in making writers think that plays are just little bits of scenes dribbled together.'

Formal questions loomed large in Hare's arguments with the BBC hierarchy over *Licking Hitler*. In the first place, corporation executives tried to insist that he shoot more sequences outside in order to 'justify' his use of film as opposed to videotape. Hare is particularly hostile to video, for two main reasons: 'I dislike the look of video and I dislike the way in which it is rehearsed. I associate it with production values which are not my own. The performance is the thing that gets put in last and is considered least important. No director, no matter how good he is, can ignore the pressures of time and the technical process, and the actor is simply expected to perform at the last possible moment. And it's a bastard medium – the actor can neither get the "through line" on his part which he can in the theatre, nor can he get the moment-to-moment steady construction of his part which he can from film by examining every single second. And so he's left recording in these half-baked slabs, and because video is a bad acting medium it's not good for any work which happens to depend on good acting.'

Secondly, Hare's refusal to shoot 'cover' raised a few hackles in the corporation. This way of working is part of his deliberate and concerted attempt to get away from what he calls 'the depressing grammar of so much British television – the master-shot, the two-shot and the close-up.' As he points out, however, not shooting cover both requires a certain amount of nerve on the director's part and also poses an implicit challenge to the power of the producer: 'It really does need courage when you're shooting just to let things go and trust them. If you don't shoot cover then that means that the producer has to accept the film in the form that the director intends it; there are no choices left in the editing room. That's why some producers still sometimes order directors to shoot cover. When I made *Licking Hitler*, I was continually asked why I didn't make master-shots – the people back home really felt a loss of power. But of course directors fear this way of working too because they are liable to get trapped in performances which may not be the performances they want.'

Julian Petley, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1985

David Hare is a playwright and filmmaker. He has written over 30 stage plays which include *Plenty*, *Pravda* (with Howard Brenton), *The Secret Rapture*, *Racing Demon*, *Skylight*, *Amy's View*, *The Blue Room*, *Via Dolorosa*, *Stuff Happens*, *South Downs*, *The Absence of War*, *The Judas Kiss* and *Straight Line Crazy*. For film and television, he has written nearly thirty screenplays which include *Licking Hitler*, *Damage*, *The Hours*, *The Reader*, *Denial*, *The Worricker Trilogy: Page Eight*, *Turks & Caicos* and *Salting the Battlefield* and most recently, *Collateral*, *Roadkill* and the Rudolf Nureyev biopic *The White Crow*. In a millennial poll of the greatest plays of the 20th century, five of the top 100 were his.

Bill Paterson has worked extensively in theatre, with some of his credits including Dominic Cooke's *The Low Road* and James McDonald's *No More Shall We Part*. Bill has taken to the stage at the National Theatre on many occasions, including *Earthquakes in London*, *The Marriage Play*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, as Harry the Horse in the 1982 production of *Guys and Dolls* and in *Schweyk in the Second World War* for which he was nominated for an Olivier Award. He has also performed in the West End in *Misery*, *Death and the Maiden* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway*. He was most recently seen opposite Brian Cox in *Waiting for Godot* at The Lyceum in Edinburgh, directed by Mark Thomson.

Bill's television credits include *Guilt*, *Brassic*, *Good Omens*, *Inside No. 9*, *The Rebel*, *Churchill's Secret*, *Outlander*, *37 Days*, *The Forgotten Fallen*, *Law and Order UK*, *Doctor Who*, *Criminal Justice*, *Little Dorrit*, *Sea of Souls*, *Wives and Daughters*, *The Singing Detective*, *Traffik*, *The Crow Road*, *Auf Wiedersehen Pet*, *Smiley's People*, *United Kingdom*, *The Vanishing Army* and *Licking Hitler*. Other notable performances include the award-winning *Fleabag* Series Two, opposite Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Olivia Colman and the highly anticipated *House of the Dragon* for HBO – the *Game of Thrones* spin-off.

Bill's recent film credits include Netflix's *Rebecca* directed by Ben Wheatley, *Marionette* and *Love Sarah*. Other film credits include: *Happy New Year*, *Colin Burstead*, *Dad's Army*, *High-Rise*, *Creation*, *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*, *Miss Potter*, *Bright Young Things*, *Richard III*, *Truly Madly Deeply*, *The Witches*, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, *A Private Function*, *The Killing Fields* and *Comfort and Joy*.

PLAY FOR TODAY: LICKING HITLER

Director: David Hare

Production Company: BBC Birmingham

Producer: David Rose

Production Unit Manager: Dawn Robertson

Production Assistant: Roger Gregory

Script Editor: Peter Ansorge

Written by: David Hare

Directors of Photography: Ken Morgan, John Kenway

Editor: Mike Hall

Designer: Charles Bond

Costume Designer: Ann Doling

Make-up Artist: Vivien Oldham

Sound Recording: Alex Christison

Dubbing Mixer: Dave Baumber

Cast

Kate Nelligan (*Anna Seaton*)

Bill Paterson (*Archie Maclean*)

Hugh Fraser (*Will Langley*)

Brenda Fricker (*Eileen Graham*)

Clive Revill (*John Fennel*)

Michael Mellinger (*Karl*)

George Herbert (*Herr Junghe*)

Patrick Monckton (*Allardyce*)

Jonathan Coy (*Lotterby*)

BBC1 tx 10.1.1978

60 mins

Total running time: 110 mins

BFI'S 100 BBC TV GAMECHANGERS**The Eurovision Song Contest 1962 + intro**

Sat 22 Oct 12:00

A Eurovision Extravaganza: The Changing Face of Eurovision

+ panel discussion with clips

Sat 22 Oct 14:45

Monitor: Elgar + Omnibus: Dance of the Seven Veils

Thu 3 Nov 18:15

Play for Today: Licking Hitler + panel + Q&A

with writer David Hare

Sat 12 Nov 15:00

I, Claudius (Episode 4): Poison Is Queen + Q&A with cast members

Sir Derek Jacobi and Dame Siân Phillips

Sun 13 Nov 15:15

Theatre 625: Talking to a Stranger Part 1:

Anytime You're Ready to Sparkle

Sun 20 Nov 15:30

Goodness Gracious Me + The Real McCoy (2 episodes)

Mon 21 Nov 18:30

The Wednesday Play: In Two Minds + Where the Buffalo Roam

Sun 27 Nov 14:30

The Royle Family (2 episodes) + panel discussion

Sun 27 Nov 18:20

Empire Road (2 episodes) + panel discussion

Wed 30 Nov 18:10

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