



## State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945

*By Michael Billington*

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### **State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945** By Michael Billington

State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945 looks at post-war Britain from a theatrical perspective. It examines the constant interplay between theatre and society from the resurgent optimism of the Attlee years to the satire boom of the Sixties and the growth of political theatre under Tony Blair in the post-Iraq period. Featuring detailed evaluations of writers from J. B. Priestley and Terence Rattigan to Alan Bennett and David Hare, Billington is continuously insightful and incisive. As Britain's longest-serving theatre critic Michael Billington is uniquely placed to offer an authoritative overview of modern British theatre, and the book offers a passionate defence of the dramatist as the medium's key creative figure. Controversial, witty and informed, State of the Nation offers a fresh and challenging look at the vast upheavals that have taken place in British society, and the theatre which documents and challenges it, in the course of sixty turbulent years. "[Billington] views his subject as a "vehicle of moral enquiry" and brings to bear wide experience, astute opinion and diligent research to write what for many might become the definitive book on theatre in the period between the departures of Churchill and Blair...This book should be a must for Christmas stocking of anyone interested in theatre in this country. It will give readers hours of pleasure and in many cases, the odd sputter of indignation as a forthright opinion does not fit in with their own. That is the mark of a good critic and Michael Billington is one of the very best." (British Theatre Guide).

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Magisterial, informative and lively. Essential for anybody interested in theatre's recent history. The Times Billington is first-rate when it comes to spotting themes in the diverse work he has seen, and his book is an impressive monument to a professional life well spent. There is some superb critical analysis of individual plays with Billington finding fresh things to say and he's excellent, too, on the creation and shifting fortunes of the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company. Daily Telegraph Billington has managed to produce a compelling narrative history of 60 years of British theatre which is a pleasure to read. The Economist Billington has produced an account of the theatre and of Britain which, like the art he rates most highly, does not only reflect on what happens, but may influence it too. Independent

#### About the Author

Michael Billington has been theatre critic of the *Guardian* since 1971 and of *Country Life* since 1986. He is the author of biographies of Harold Pinter (newly revised this year) and Peggy Ashcroft, of critical studies of Tom Stoppard and Alan Ayckbourn, of a celebration of Ken Dodd and a collection of reviews, *One Night Stands*. He has also edited *Directors' Shakespeare: Twelfth Night and Stage and Screen Lives* selected from the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He frequently lectures and broadcasts on the arts, teaches drama for the University of Pennsylvania and is a Visiting Professor at King's College, London and an Honorary Fellow of St Catherine's College, Oxford.

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