

Simon Gray

OTHER  
ENGAGE  
and other plays



EYRE METHUEN · LONDON

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*The photographs on the front cover show (top) Ian Charleson and Alan Bates in a scene from the Queen's Theatre production of Otherwise Engaged (photograph reproduced by courtesy of Donald Cooper); Alan Bates in the BBC-TV production of Plaintiffs and Defendants (bottom left); and (bottom right) Alan Bates and Dinsdale Landen in Two Sundays (photographs reproduced by courtesy of the BBC). The photograph on the back cover is reproduced by courtesy of Beryl Gray.*

# OTHERWISE ENGAGED and other plays

First seen at the Queen's Theatre in July 1975 in a production directed by Harold Pinter, *Otherwise Engaged* is Simon Gray's first stage play since the enormously successful *Butley*. With his wife away, Simon Hench, successful publisher and avid Wagnerite, is looking forward to a long, luxurious listen to his brand new record of Parsifal. But the sex problems of his unprepossessing lodger and his brother's desire to share his anxiety over his prospects for an Assistant Headmastership turn out to be just the beginning of a string of interruptions which increasingly draw Simon himself into a vicious vortex of accusations and recriminations.

The London production opened to a unanimously favourable critical reception:

'Simon Gray's *Otherwise Engaged* is incomparably his best play to date: adult and literate, scathingly funny but ultimately disturbing.'

Frank Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*

'... excellence that dazzles ...'

Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*

'*Otherwise Engaged* is not the kindest play in London; but it is the most entertaining and the most brilliant.'

Harold Hobson, *Sunday Times*

In the same volume are two new television plays by Simon Gray, *Two Sundays* and *Plaintiffs and Defendants*, first screened on BBC-TV in October 1975. These are thematically related not only to each other but also to *Otherwise Engaged*. Together they afford a unique example of the author's ability to shape his material to the different requirements of stage and television.

*by the same author*

*Plays*

Sleeping Dog (published by Faber)  
Wise Child (published by Faber)  
Dutch Uncle (published by Faber)  
Spoiled (published by Eyre Methuen)  
The Idiot (published by Eyre Methuen)  
Butley (published by Eyre Methuen)

*Novels*

(under the pseudonym, Hamish Reade)

Colmain (published by Faber)  
Little Portia (published by Faber)  
Simple People (published by Faber)  
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**For Harold**  
**Two summers 1971 and 1975**

# OTHERWISE ENGAGED

OTHERWISE ENGAGED was first presented on 30th July 1975,  
at the Queen's Theatre by Michael Codron with the following  
cast:

SIMON  
DAVE  
STEPHEN  
JEFF  
DAVINA  
WOOD  
BETH

Alan Bates  
Ian Charleson  
Nigel Hawthorne  
Julian Glover  
Jacqueline Pearce  
Benjamin Whitrow  
Mary Miller

Directed by Harold Pinter

# Act One

*The living-room of the HENCH's house in London. It is both elegant and comfortable, but not large. Two sofas, two arm-chairs, a coffee table, a telephone with an answering machine, an extremely expensive and elaborate hi-fi set, and around the walls shelves to accommodate a great range of books (which are evidently cherished) and an extensive collection of records, in which Wagner and other opera sets can be distinguished.*

*Stage left is a door that leads onto a small hall, at one end of which is the front door, and at the other a door which, in its turn, when opened reveals a passage that goes onto stairs going down to the basement. More stairs lead up from the hall to another section of the house. The house has, in fact, recently been divided into two, so that there is a top flat.*

*Stage right has a door that leads to the kitchen, and as becomes evident, there is a door that opens from the kitchen into the garden.*

*When the curtain goes up, SIMON is unwrapping a new record. He takes it out with the air of a man who is deeply looking forward to listening to it - there are several records, in fact - the complete Parsifal. He goes to the hi-fi, puts the first record on, listens, adjusts the level, then goes to the sofa and settles himself in it. The opening chords of Parsifal fill the theatre.*

*The door opens, left. DAVE enters. SIMON turns, looks at him, concealing his irritation as DAVE wanders into the kitchen, returns, and sits restlessly in the armchair. A pause in the music.*

DAVE. What's that then?

SIMON *gets up and switches off the record.*

SIMON. Wagner. Do you like him?

DAVE *(standing up)*. No, well I mean he was anti-semitic, wasn't he. Sort of early fascist, ego-maniac type.

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SIMON. What about his music, do you like that?

DAVE. Well, I mean, I'm not likely to like his music if I don't like his type, am I?

SIMON (*concealing his impatience*). Everything all right? In the flat, that is. No complaints or other urgencies?

DAVE. No, no, that's all right. Oh, you mean about the rent?

SIMON. Good God no, I wasn't thinking about the rent.

DAVE. It's all right if it waits a bit then, is it?

SIMON. Good God yes, pay us this week's when you pay us last week's - next week, or whenever.

DAVE. OK I'm a bit short, you know how it is. Your wife out again then?

SIMON. Yes, she's gone to (*Thinks.*) Salisbury. She left last night.

DAVE. That girl in the first year came round last night for something to eat. I dropped down to borrow a chop or something, fish fingers would have done.

SIMON. Would they really?

DAVE. But she wasn't here, your wife.

SIMON. No, she wouldn't have been, as she was either in or on her way to Salisbury.

DAVE. So I had to take her out for a kebab and some wine. Then I had to get her to come back.

SIMON. Ah, she stayed the night then? Good for you!

DAVE. No, she didn't.

SIMON. Oh. You managed to get rid of her, then, instead, well done!

DAVE. She just left by herself.

SIMON. Before you had a chance to get rid of her, oh dear, why?

DAVE. Said she didn't fancy me.

SIMON. Good God, why ever not?

DAVE. I don't know. I mean I asked her if she'd like a screw and she said no. Then I asked her why not, and she said she didn't fancy me, that was why not.

SIMON. Still, she's left the door open for a platonic relationship.

DAVE. Yeah, well, then she went off to see something on television with some friend. I haven't got a television.

SIMON. Well, I'm afraid I can't help you there, nor have we.

DAVE. Anyway she said she might be going to that Marxist bookshop down the road today.

SIMON. What time?

DAVE. About lunch time, she said.

SIMON. But good God, lunch will soon be on you, hadn't you better get going - it would be tragic to miss her.

DAVE. Yeah, well that's it, you see. I'm a bit short, like I said. I mean we can't do anything -

*Pause.*

SIMON. Can I lend you some?

DAVE. What?

SIMON. Can I lend you some money?

DAVE. Yeah, OK.

SIMON (*giving him a fiver*). Is that enough?

DAVE. Yeah. Right. (*Takes it.*) That's five.

SIMON. Well, I'll get back to my music while you're making your own.

STEPHEN (*enters, through the kitchen door*). Hello. Oh hello.

SIMON (*concealing his dismay*). Oh, Stephen. This is Dave, who's taken over the upstairs flat. Dave, my brother Stephen.

STEPHEN. Oh yes, you're at the Poly, aren't you?

DAVE. That's right.

STEPHEN. What are you studying?

DAVE. Sociology.

STEPHEN. That must be jolly interesting. What aspect?

DAVE. What?

STEPHEN. Of sociology.

DAVE. Oh, the usual stuff.

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STEPHEN. Psychology, statistics, politics, philosophy, I suppose.

DAVE. We're sitting in at the moment.

STEPHEN. Really? Why?

DAVE. Oh, usual sort of thing. Well - (*Goes towards the door and out.*)

STEPHEN. What is the usual thing?

SIMON. No idea.

STEPHEN (*after a pause*). Well, I must say!

SIMON. Oh, he's not as thick as he seems.

STEPHEN. Isn't he? He certainly seems quite thick. (*Sits down.*)  
I'm surprised a student could afford that flat, what do you charge him?

SIMON. Two pounds a week, I think.

STEPHEN. But you could get, good Heavens, even through the rent tribunal, ten times that.

SIMON. Oh, we're not out to make money from it.

STEPHEN. Well, *he* seems rather an odd choice for your charity, with so many others in real need. Beth's not here, then?

SIMON. No, she's taken some of her foreign students to Canterbury.

STEPHEN. Did she go with that teacher she was telling Teresa about?

SIMON. Chap called Ned?

STEPHEN. Yes.

SIMON. Yes.

STEPHEN. What do you think of him?

SIMON. Oh, rather a wry, sad little fellow. Bit of a failure, I'd say, from what I've seen of him.

STEPHEN. A failure? In what way?

SIMON. Oh, you know, teaching English to foreigners.

STEPHEN. So does Beth.

SIMON. True, but Beth isn't a middle-aged man with ginger hair, a pigeon-toed gait, a depressed-looking wife and four children