



An Analytical Study of Theatre and censorship in Howard Barker's No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming (1981) and Scenes from an Execution (1984)

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper explores the use of history in contemporary British theatre to address issues like marginalization and censorship, focusing on Barker's theatre theory, which diverges from early works by Churchill and Hare. Emphasizing the artist's role and responsibilities, it delves into potential dilemmas faced in the realm of contemporary British theatre.

Methods: This study critically analyzes Barker's plays, "No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming" (1981) and "Scenes from an Execution" (1984), through the lens of his influential book, "Arguments for a Theatre." Additionally, insights from interviews with the playwright are incorporated to better understand Barker's views on theatre and censorship.

Results: Government interference adversely impacts an artist's freedom, creating a dialectical relationship between the artist and the state. In the 1980s, the theme of censorship and restricted expression is portrayed through artist figures in conflict with external forces. Depicting artists as characters not only illustrates the dilemmas, they faced but also serves as a critique of political efforts to suppress voices during that decade.

Conclusions: The paper concludes that artists may intentionally conceal opinions to evade censorship, emphasizing the need for artists to balance political demands with personal expression. Unlike peers like Stoppard and Wertenbaker, Barker doesn't advocate a specific ideology in his plays. He views theatre as a space for unleashing individual imagination rather than conveying a message or utilitarian value. The exploration of artists' roles and responsibilities in Barker's plays remains a fertile area for ongoing research and discovery.

Keywords: British theatre, censorship, the dilemma of the artist, commercialism, Howard Barker

دراسة تحليلية للمسرح والرقابة في مسرحيات هاورد باركر لا نهاية للوم: مشاهد من التغلب (1981) ومشاهد من الإعدام (1984)

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ملخص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الورقة إلى إلقاء الضوء على استخدام التاريخ للتعلق على قضايا مختلفة للمسرح البريطاني المعاصر مثل التهميش والرقابة. ويركز أيضاً على نظرية باركر المسرحية التي استنبطت من رفضه للسيطرة الجماعية ومفهوم بريخت للتغريب الذي كان مألوفاً في الأعمال المبكرة لكارل جيرجيل وديفيد هار. كما يحاول البحث إبراز دور ومسؤولية الفنان في المسرح البريطاني المعاصر والمعضلات المحتملة التي لربما هو أو هي يواجهها.

المنهجية: في هذه الدراسة، استخدم المنهج النقدي لتحليل مسرحيات باركر: لا نهاية للوم: مشاهد من التغلب (1981) ومشاهد من الإعدام (1984) في ضوء نظرياته التي طرحها في كتابه الشهير، مجادلات للمسرح. إضافة إلى ذلك، اعتمد الباحث المقابلات مع الكاتب المسرحي نفسه للحصول على فكرة واضحة عن وجهة نظره الخاصة في المسرح والرقابة.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج أنَّ تدخل الحكومة في أعمال الفنان يؤثر سلباً في حريته وتظهر الورقة أيضاً أنَّ العلاقة بين الفنان والدولة هي علاقة جدلية دائماً. في الثمانينات، سادت فكرة الرقابة وانعدام حرية التعبير ومثلت باستعمال أشكال الفنانين (كشخصيات رئيسية) الذين يجدون أنفسهم في صراع مع القوى الخارجية المناوئة. لذلك لم يكن استعمال الفنان كشخصية هو فقط لبيان المعضلات المحتملة التي يواجهها الفنان خلال هذا العقد، بل أيضاً كوسيلة لمهاجمة النظام السياسي في محاولاته لتكثيف الأقواء.

الخلاصة: خلصت الورقة إلى أنَّ الفنان أحياناً يخفي عمداً آراءه الصريحة لتجنب التعرض للرقابة. كنسان، يجب على الفنان أن يوازن بين المتطلبات السياسية وحاجاته الشخصية. وبخلاف معاصريه مثل ستوبارد وورتنبيكر، لم يستعمل باركر مسرحياته لتبني وجهة نظر أيديولوجية معينة. من وجهة نظر باركر، المسرح هو المكان حيث يتحرر الخيال. وهو ليس إعطاء رسالة أو أي قيمة نفعية. بالرغم من أنَّ المعضلة الرئيسية لشخص الفنانين في مسرحيات باركر تتمثل في استكشاف دور الفنان ومسؤوليته، يبقى هذا الموضوع حقلاً مثمراً للبحث وكشف أعمق.

الكلمات الدالة: المسرح البريطاني، الرقابة، معضلة الفنان، التجارية، هاورد باركر.



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I. Introduction:

In his answer to a question about the significance of reading history at university in providing tools for writing, Howard Barker states that

[History] made me refuse the obvious in the political play, made me cautious, even suspicious, especially of crude political solutions. It's also given me a profound sense of European suffering.... History makes you angry.

He further expounds that "[m]y political sense derives from the past, and I view the present from the perspective of the past, at least as I have constructed it, in imagination." (Brown, 2011, p. 39)

With this in mind, Barker uses history or historical incidents to comment on modern and contemporary issues such as the crisis of contemporary British theatre, the role of the artist and the dialectical relationship between the artist and the state.

However, during the 1980s, theatrical culture was liable to a variety of political and economic pressures that "produced an enormous sense of dislocation and dissatisfaction" (Milling, 2012, p. 32). Theatre was not only subject to funding cuts, but also to censorship as we shall see. In his commentary on British theatre in the 1980s, Michael Billington states that "We live increasingly in a culture dominated by the two big Cs: consumerism and celebrity" (2002, p. 55).

The impact of changing economics on British subsidized theatres, during Margaret Thatcher's time raises crucial questions about the role of theatre in society and the relationships between the artist and the ruling political party. Because of the encouragement of the marketplace, British theatre finds itself in a competition with other cultural attractions in the burgeoning media, tourism and related industries. Therefore, its worth is being tested by popularity and profitability. The other key issue which led to the crisis of British theatre in this period is the interference of political party in the administration of Arts Council which is the main body in art affairs. The party politicisation of arts institutions for subsidy and administration has a negative impact on distinctive waves of new plays to cope with new realities.

Significantly, Barker is against politicising theatre. Although his plays in the 1970s were classified as "political," he never adopted the discourse of agitational propaganda or used his plays to espouse a particular ideological thought. On the contrary, he was doubtful in the efficacy of political theatre as a true developer of people's perceptions. More than that he believes that a commitment to a particular ideological system will be detrimental to the aesthetic qualities of art. But this does not mean that Barker's plays are devoid of political awareness. Taking a short glance on Barker's work in the 1970s, we see that it "generally recommended itself to directors on a 'political' level: this was because the plays were overly concerned with political figures and political questions." (Quoted in Lamb, 2005, p. 26)

As his writings are developed in 1980s, nevertheless Barker's catastrophic plays were also operating on a deeper political level. Barker's shift in his work from socialist realism to catastrophe heralds new forms of artistic enquiry which involve challenges to social objectives. Now, the political message is covered by an aesthetic and poetic veneer which can seem an ambiguous. This ambiguity is perhaps one of the reasons to neglect his plays, after his early professional success.

Moreover, for Barker, one of the crisis of contemporary British theatre is its focus on the usefulness of art. He thinks that art has no use. This justifies his opposition to English culture which values things according to their utility. In his speech about black theatre, Andrzej Ceynowa points out that "The theatre must be an institution for bringing change... Black theatre must be a school for teaching high morality, for inspiring black people to move, for Self-Determination, Self-Respect and Self-Defence" (Quoted in Diyaiy, 2009, p. 12). Whereas Barker is against any message or utilitarian value of dramatic work. This moral refusal has led to a negative reaction to his plays. The resistance wall to his works goes beyond marginalizing him to stand against funding his company, the wrestling school. In an interview with Elisabeth Angel-Perez et al, (2007) Barker bitterly argues that "My theatre company has almost been destroyed by the ethical judgement of the government. Ethics have continually attacked artists, and theatre artists in particular, in their space. The funding of English theatre is based on moral judgements about the content. That's what I call censorship" (Brown, 2011, p. 147). Accordingly, the writer has to fit the criteria to be performed. In other words, they have to serve the critical agenda. For Barker, the

writers who are interested in meanings and messages want “the theatre to reiterate social propaganda within the framework of a governing social humanism, a compact of mutual celebration which had degenerated into message” (Ibid, p. 68). As such, the theatre will be reduced to a function which is required by the market. It becomes like a factory for critical texts which determines what is relevant and irrelevant to the society.

In contrast, Barker does not believe in using value of the theatre. Instead, he is “interested in how the individual reconstructs him or herself from an experience of catastrophe” (Ibid., p. 115). However, Rabey and Gritzner (2006, p. 37) affirm that in his speech about the crisis of theatre in the current political and cultural climate, Barker considers the decline of a theatre language and form the worst aspect of this crisis which has damaged the acting training. Of course, this is beside the dominance of the ideology of socialist realism which focuses on utilitarian value of theatre. As a consequence of his perception, Barker creates the wrestling school to be a test bed for his writing.

The dilemma of the artist, then lies in the fact that: how did artists enjoy a degree of freedom without being censored? And if he/she failed to match the criteria of the ruling political party, what is the price of free expression? All these questions suggest radical changes in the British theatre system which is very complicated ideologically in respect of democracy, sponsorship and how the artists respond to it.

However, the question about the responsibility of the artist and the function of art has been at the forefront of controversial debates among intellectuals who have been preoccupied with the aesthetic function of art and its morality. An ever-growing body of plays have tackled this issue during the last forty years, including such diverse works as Edward Bond’s *Bingo* (1974), Howard Brenton’s *Bloody Poetry* (1984) and his most recent play, *The Arrest of Ai Weiwei* (2013), Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), David Grieg’s *San Diego* (2003), and Lee Hall’s *The Pitman Painters* (2007). This article intends to explore how artists are reflected on stage in order to demonstrate the dilemmas that the artist has to confront. Moreover, by considering Barker’s plays by, this article attempts to show how the figure of the artist is the focal point for observations and perspectives.

Howard Barker is one of those writers who had begun to grapple with these questions when he became suspicious of the effectiveness of politically committed theatre at about the same time Thatcher was elected as a Prime Minister. Although he is marginalised in his country, Barker has remained a challenging writer who dismantles the strictness of conservative values during Thatcher’s time. Unlike his oeuvre in the 1970s, Barker does not use his plays to espouse a particular ideological viewpoint as mentioned before. On the contrary, he tries to show the dilemmas of the artist in his/her trajectory of conflict between his/her aesthetic and political demands. To achieve this, Barker depends on history to illuminate the dialectical relationship between those two domains as reflected in the next two plays.

II. No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming (1981): Artist and Freedom

In this section, I am first going to talk about the dialectical relationship between the artist and the state as it is represented by Barker’s characters in *No End of Blame*. My second aim is to show the dilemma of the artist as he struggles for freedom of expression.

Beginning with the relationship between the artist and the state, we see that the tensions and conflict in the artist’s relationship with the reactionary forces which are represented by the political system or state are clearly manifested in the play. And as Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005, p. 66) has demonstrated in *Biographical Plays about Famous Artists*, “The central artist character [is placed] in conflict with adverse forces”. Here, the adverse force is embodied by the political system of the state. However, the two poles of the state and the artist wield their power in two different directions. The political system tries hard to affirm its hierarchical privilege without paying attention to the suffering of the people. Meanwhile the power of the artist lies in the provocation of thought, that is, to open people’s eyes to hidden corruption for the sake of revolution. This recognition is particularly important when the political system or state denies the rights of the individuals in society. So, the social and artistic upheaval evoked by the artists still represents a form of challenge to the state, which attempts to minimize or revoke their role in society by imposing different obstacles. This is sometimes done by censoring their works or silencing them forever. Writing on *No End of Blame* (1981), *Pity in History* (1984) and *Scenes*

from an Execution (1984), David Ian Rabey argues that, "Though centring on the artist's dilemma, the plays have wider reverberations in their scenes of opposition, where the fetish of ownership pits its power against the reinvention of forms of life" (2009, p. 84).

Barker's *No End of Blame* explores the role of the artist in society and the dilemma he/she faces in the struggle for freedom of expression. Although Barker denies the intentions in his writings, the play is truly a scathing commentary about the censorship of art.

As in *Pity in History* and *Scenes from an Execution*, the play is set within a historical framework, that is, during two world wars or in their aftermath. It tells the story of two artists: Grigor Gabor, a traditional painter and Bela Veracek, the politically committed cartoonist who goes on a journey to test his political art and the freedom of expression. Unfortunately, his belief in the freedom of the artist is always hindered by the tendencies of political system which, as in artists in David Pownall's *Master Class* (1983), where the state opposes artistic freedom.

From this brief summary, the play follows Bela's journey from Hungary to the emerging Soviet Union to Pre-World War II London. At every stage, his savage work is censored by the political system either because of 'its residual bourgeois thinking' or for criticizing Winston Churchill.

To make it clear, it is important to concentrate on certain incidents to show the role of the artist and the dilemmas he/she confronted.

When we first meet Bela and Grigor, they are soldiers during the First World War. Their characters are rapidly distinguished by their reactions to the sight of a half-naked Romanian woman. Grigor is fascinated by her outward appearance which is completely harmonious with gravity. Her breasts "CONCEDE" in a curved way that "eliminates all tension" (Barker, 1990, p. 75-76). He tries to prevent her movement in order to observe and paint "the essential female line", (1: 76). Bela, in contrast, is moved by his instincts which push him to want to rape her. This does not mean that Barker or his characters are being offensive or misogynistic towards the woman. On the contrary, they idolize her. Barker always wants to present his characters in an ordeal. He points out that "the characters onstage are not simply in unlikely situations but usually disastrous ones; perhaps just in the aftermath of a disaster. I don't like the point of disaster itself, but what occurs after it" (Brown, 2011, p. 45). Similarly, Eléonore Obis states that "In Barker's work, the characters are thrown into catastrophic situations. These extreme situations push them to the limit, which allows them to explore their identities and their capacities" (2013, p. 74).

Through their speech, Bela and Grigor are fascinated by the woman's spiritual and physical beauty. But while Grigor is content with only observing, Bela responds physically and opportunistically. In other words, he has no interest in the aesthetic niceties that Grigor tries hard to draw. Instead, he wants art by which he can test individual human emotions. So, he gives up the poetry he writes for a form of creativity in favour of the cartoon, thinking that it is the art which is required for revolution or change.

At the outset of the play, Barker doubts the usefulness or functionality of art. In this sense, he overshadows the role of the artist as a consumer in *Scenes from an Execution*. Barker argues that "art is not a product. It exists in your soul and your imagination [which] modern society hated"¹ because it may dislocate society. Here, Bela draws our attention to the fact that art in the age of war loses its honourable mission. He says:

Grigor, we have just butchered two million Russians, a million Italians, half a million Poles, the same number of Roumanians, some Greeks, some French, a few thousand English, a division of Bulgarians by mistake, we have trod on babies' brains and caught our boots up in the entrails of old women, yesterday we ate our breakfast on a table made of half a man, Grigor, I do not understand a morality which says we have to draw a line at petty theft! (1: 76-7)

This argument of the morality of art is taken further by referring to the situation of women being raped. Uniquely, Bela

¹ My interview with Howard Barker, Brighton, 7 February 2015.

defines the quality of art and the identity of the artist. For him, the artist is a privileged person whose inhabited instinct works freely without external forces:

Bela: Goes – what is the value of an inhibition if it collapses under strain of opportunity? That’s the argument. Either it is incumbent on me not to rape women at all, or I should rape women under all circumstances. But that should equally apply to killing, shouldn’t it? **What in God’s name are we doing here?** (1: 77)

Thus the value of art lies in its spontaneous expression. It is not an opportunity. On the contrary, it is a gift which is divinely ordained. Bela eloquently connects art with human desire which comes out without constraints. Accordingly, to talk about morality or “a moral hero, in the midst of all this sin and shame and human vileness, where we eat our breakfast off a man’s divided trunk, to find an act of selfless purity is like-” (1: 77) searching for a straw.

As mentioned before, Bela decides to desert poetry in favour of the cartoon. He feels humiliated as a poet to address the minds of people. His poetry is out of tune. In other words, the recognition of metaphorical insight, uttered by the Officer when he says, “Poetry without rhyme is laying bricks without cement”, (1: 80) makes him realize that his poetry is not in line with the rhyme of human life.

Besides discussing the dilemma of the artist, Barker reveals the mentality of the politicians who always try to widen the gap among people by vile means. This view separates the artists, who are moved by human feelings, from the state. The first red soldier addresses Grigor:

Listen, Grig, there must be killing in this world, because we’re angry, and we’ve our rights. Anyone who tells you killing is just killing tells you lies. There is all the difference in the world between a rich man’s and a poor man’s death. You must know this, Grig, or we will never build a better world ... (1: 81- 82)

The second scene takes place at the Institute of Fine Art, Budapest where the instruction centres on classical idealism and the image of the artist as one who ‘thrill[s] to beauty’ with the privilege of being ordained ‘the guardians of beauty, high priests in the temple Art (Barker 1990, 2: 84).

Billwitz, the Head of the Institute sees that the main role of the artist is to seek ‘beauty everywhere,’ whether it is in tears or pain. Such mystical conservatism is in contrast with Bela’s cartoon which is concerned with showing the contradiction between ideal and reality. Bela wants to show the contemporary social hypocrisy without beautifying it. This fact makes Billwitz revolt against Bela’s sketch ‘We will Revive the Spirit of Hungary,’ which grotesquely shows two soldiers beating a man to death.

For Billwitz, this cartoon is prejudice and a kind of humiliation. He addresses Bela:

It is not half as true as any life drawing you did for me...

You will never be a great painter if you do not tell the truth! (2: 85)

Bela’s view of truth is different from that of Billwitz. He looks for the truth which exposes the contradictions of political system. He aspires for a freedom of expression which is not governed by censorship. Bela, unlike his partner refuses to be passive. On the contrary, Bela reflects Baker’s view that “In an age of populism, the progressive artist is the artist who is not afraid of silence” (Barker, 1989, p. 11). His/her responsibility is to disclose deception.

So, Bela’s speech about war then reveals the deception of political system. In particular, it recalls Barker’s doubt of the philosophy of liberal humanist social democracy. This social democracy, Brown states that, “create[s] fear whilst attempting to ameliorate pain, a dazzling contradiction. Fear of sickness and death is obsessive here, and the State, in its medicalization of all human experience, makes itself a body-snatching agency in the process” (Brown, 2011, p. 126).

The political and social agenda of the liberal democracy is to abolish pain and death. The best means to do so is to use

a barrage of social propaganda about imminent death even if it is not real. The important thing is to subjugate people to follow its policy. So, they agitate war for something which is not genuine:

Bela: No! War is so childish! One says so many silly things with death next door!
With death shoving its mouth against the sandbags, say a lot of babble, not from
the head, just speaking from the bowels- (2: 86)

In Russia, the heated discussion of art and the responsibility of the artist has ensued among the members of the Writers' and Artists' Union in Moscow. The discussion is commenced by a lecture of the first comrade who emphasizes on their attempts, "to evolve a different sort of art here. All right? An art which is not bourgeois" (3: 91).

Although the first comrade denies the subjugation of art to a certain class, it should be in line with the political party.

So Bela is accused of residual bourgeois thinking. All members of the committee agree that there is a critical 'tendency to criticize the line that Comrade Lenin is advancing. Which is – which is – unhelpful – '(3: 96) However, his case is taken further in their analysis. The first comrade distinguishes between two types of artists: the one who does wrong knowingly and the other who can do it unknowingly. For him, both represent a source of threat to the party-line consensus since they have the power of the words by which they can address people's mind and heart to stimulate them to revolt. Metaphorically, their dangerous power is associated with tanks and planes:

Artists are very dangerous people. That is why they go to prison, that is why they
gags stuck on their mouths. They are more dangerous than tanks and planes. It's a
terrible power, this power of addressing hearts and minds, articulating the
unspoken will of peoples. What a treasure that is, Bela, a gift of the most massive
kind, a power which in the case of the very greatest artists, may be beyond even
the control of genius itself.... (3: 94)

Bela defends his cartoon by drawing the committee's attention to the fact that the true artist should be loyal to his/her mission. Therefore, his/her freedom originates from the feeling of his/her responsibility to him/herself. It is far from being a commodity used by the state to achieve political ends. For the artist, freedom of expression is a high value which cannot be understood only by him/her:

BELA: Because to an artist, freedom of expression matters even more than
nationality. I say that as a patriotic person, a person who loves his country and
his people. Not as a lick of governments. I say it as a person who loves
socialism and materialism. As a person who admires Lenin more than any other
man alive. But to an artist freedom comes above all things, above – (3: 96)

In opposition with Bela, the second comrade sees that 'an artist is only free if his society is free. He cannot be free against the freedom of his society.' (3: 96) This barren argument between Bela and the committee has ended by his acceptance of the verdict of the Soviet Writers and Artists Union that his anti- NEP cartoon was irresponsible. In his speech about this incident, Barker argues that though the play's subtitled *Scenes of Overcoming*,

one of the things [Bela] overcomes is his own sense of self. For example, in that
scene he thinks something passionately but he represses it in the interests of the
overriding definition of the people's interests as defined by that committee. I think
that's wrong and I don't regard that as a good form of overcoming (Ibid., p. 50).

Bela's weary resignation is a bad sign of his submission to the demands of political party. Bela comes to realize that he cannot confront the political current which is higher than him. Moreover, he begins to doubt the terms of freedom and truth over exist:

Supposing freedom's not the truth? Have you ever thought of that? Suppose the truth's somewhere else after all?.... I go about, I shove the thermometer of freedom in the great wet gob of humanity and I go, good, we're healthy, when the mercury goes up, and bad, we're ill, when the mercury goes down. The fever of truth. Suppose freedom's nothing to do with it? Suppose it's just a virus? Suppose the truth is love? (2, 2: 118)

At the conclusion of the play, Bela has surrendered to the fact that an artist with visionary forces cannot be redeemed in the material world. Thus his search for the truth becomes a wish which cannot be attained. So, his "faith in himself seems at last overcome, and he is prepared to condemn himself, as well as the world, as mad" (Rabey, 1989, p. 91).

III. Scenes from an Execution (1984): Art and Its Function

The enormous tension between the state and the artist is central to Barker's radio play *Scenes from an Execution* (broadcast 1984). Again, the subject of art and its function in society is re-activated by Barker to comment on the dilemma of the artist as he/she struggles to affirm his/her situation within the political domain.

However, what is striking about *Scenes from an Execution*, is the fact that it is a radio play. Barker, like Stoppard, employs this medium as a means of conveying experience to a wider audience. This is completely true in the case of Barker if we already know that he is not celebrated in his country. So, broadcasting on radio grants the play an opportunity to be heard by those who are unfamiliar with Barker's work.

Although there is no substitute for a performance on stage, "production on radio of a stage play brings a [sic] clarity of focus on the text that sometimes can reveal the author's purpose more directly than an elaborate theatre production" (Richard Imison, 1991, p. 290). Moreover, a radio play releases the actor from the tyranny of physical appearance. In *Scenes from an Execution*, the voices of Galactia's canvas and the Man-In-The-Next-Cell do not appear physically.

Set within a historical context, Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* dramatizes the timeless conflict between the artists and the State as they enjoy different preferences. It is the story of a famous female painter named Galactia who is commissioned by the State to paint the victory of the Republic of Venice over Turks at the Battle of Lepanto. But as she works with her two daughters, Supporta and Dementia on it, the canvas turns into a show of massacre which reveals the atrocities of war. So, instead of commemorating the naval victory at Lepanto, Galactia chooses her own perspective of war to be in different line with the demands of a governing state. Consequently, her dilemma is represented by the struggle between artistic freedom and the requirements of the two sisterly institutions: the state and the church. Her price is to be imprisoned only to be freed at the end by reconciliation between her and the doge, the sponsor. However, the historical dimension, which is represented by the Battle of Lepanto brings to mind Barker's belief in the potential of historical narratives for a new moral reconstruction. Rabey states that "In these plays such as *The Bite of the Night* (1988), *The Ecstatic Bible* (2000) and other plays, Barker re-vision foundational mythic and historical narratives in such ways that challenge notional inevitabilities and present, instead, a provocative range of moral alternatives and perspectives (2016, p. 166).

As the play opens, the argument about art is established between two creative painters: the classical idealist Carpeta and the passionate social realistic Galactia. Although both are linked by sexual attraction, they have "divergent philosophies" (Rabey, 1989, p. 95). Carpeta is known for his religious paintings, particularly of Christ among the flocks. He tells Galactia:

Carpeta: And I have painted Christ among the flocks eight times not because I cannot think of anything else to paint

but because I have a passion for perfection, I long to be the finest Christ painter in Italy, I have a longing for it, and that is something an opportunist like you could never understand – (1:254)

Carpeta's speech overshadows his unique creativity as a painter of pity and his jealousy of Galactia's intellectuality. For Carpeta, Galactia gets the commission from the state because of her sensuality:

Carpeta: And you will never make a decent job of anything because you are sensualist, you are a woman and a sensualist and you only get these staggering commissions from the State because you – ... Thrust yourself! (1:254)

Though Carpeta's words about Galactia are, to some extent, true, her creativity cannot be denied. From the very beginning of the play, we are told by a character named The Sketchbook that Galactia is preoccupied with drawing some sketches of a naked man in a studio in Venice:

The sketchbook: The sketchbook of a Venetian painter Galactia lying on her parted knees speak of her art, speak of her misery, between studies of sailcloth in red chalk the persistent interruption of one man's anatomy ... On every margin where she has studied naval history his limbs or look intrude, the obsession alongside the commission ... (1: 253)

The above lines reveal that Galactia is not only creative but has a wide knowledge of naval history which qualifies her to be the best painter in Venice. So, she wins the state and the church's investment for a 100ft canvas celebrating the triumph of the Venetians.

In contrast with Carpeta, who looks for pity in his paintings, Galactia "wants her audience to experience the pain of the sea-battle rather than be oppressed into association with the institutionalised reverence of national sacrifice, its icons of celebration and monuments to majestic absorption" (Ibid). Like Barker's *Judith* and *The Europeans*, *Scenes from an Execution* becomes the ground for arguments on the struggle between the state and private will.

However, before examining the antagonistic relationship between the state and the artist, it is a specifically admitted issue that the artist's dilemma springs from his/her sense to be committed to aesthetic truth on the one side and the demands of political system on the other side. In *Scenes from an Execution*, Barker seems much influenced by Adorno in the sense that he "places emphasis on the notion of aesthetic autonomy and its interrelated concept of subjective freedom." For Adorno, "the significance of art and philosophy...lies in their expression of a consciousness of suffering" (Gritzner and Rabey, 2006, p. 86). Accordingly, Galactia dedicates her creativity to depict the truthful spirit of the artist which is quite different from that of state. For her, the battle is a manifestation of violence and suffering. Thus her use of the maimed ex-soldier Prodo testifies to her tendency for ruthless exposure. In this scene, Galactia hears and observes the testimony of Prodo as a witness to the degenerating power of war:

CALACTIA: I am painting the battle, Prodo. Me. The battle which changed you from a man into a monkey. One thousand square feet of canvas. Great empty ground to fill. With noise. Your noise. The noise of men minced. Got to find a new red for all that blood. A red that smells. Don't go, Prodo, holding your bowel in – (1: 257)

So, she prepares for her paintings by taking live evidences helping her to make truth speak. Galactia is not only content with showing mere truth but its suffering. When she is asked by Prodo about her identity, Galactia asserts:

A midwife for your labour. Help you bring the truth to birth. Up there, twice life-size, your half-murder, your half-death. Come on, don't be manly, there's no truth where men are being manly – (1: 257)

Scene two establishes the character of one sisterly institutions, Urgentino, a State patron. His speech with Galactia overshadows the type of relationship between the artist and the State:

URGENTINO: I like to be friends with everybody. It is a weakness of mine. But if we are to be friends I think we have to understand one another. I know you are an artist and I am a politician, and we both have all sorts of little mannerisms, turns of speech, beliefs and so on, which neither of us will be happy to renounce, but for the sake of easy communication may I suggest we stop the little dance of personal regard and concentrate on facts? Simple, incontrovertible facts? My brother is Admiral of the Fleet and he does not occupy a prominent enough position in this drawing. (2: 260)

In his speech about the relationship between the artist and the state which is embodied in the aphorism ‘artists have no power and great imagination. The state has no imagination and great power,’ Barker argues that

It seems to me impossible that the State and the artist should enjoy anything but a fleeting similarity of interest, usually in the aftermath of a revolution when the artist mistakenly believes his imagination will be licensed as part of the cultural rebirth of a new order. The rapid restitution of economic and social priorities and the assertion of the collective, or its mediators, over the individual interpretation of society, make this inevitably short-lived (2011, p. 63).

Barker adds that “States are mechanisms of discipline, and perpetually involved in rewriting and reordering experience, annexing it and abolishing it in the interests of proclaimed moral certitudes. The artist, as long as he is in profound union with his imagination, inevitably finds himself opposing ideological imperatives and exposed to censorship” (Ibid). For Barker, the relationship between the artist and the state is impossible as they have their own ideologies.

Although Urgentino trusts Galactia’s art, he reminds her of the importance of the work she is commissioned for:

URGENTINO: Good! But listen, this is a State commission, an investment, an investment by us, the Republic of Venice, in you, Galactia. Empire and artist. Greatness beckons, and greatness imposes disciplines. Do you like these grapes? They come from Crete. We left two thousand soldiers dead there, but we have the grapes. Little bit of sand. Little bit of history. (2: 260)

From Urgentino’s perspective, greatness as long as responsibility can complement each other. As a representative of the state, he wants artist to be responsible first to priorities of political system. Based on state’s investment in works of art, the artist was obliged to dedicate his/her creativity to the patron. In other words, the artist finds him/herself forced to comply with investor’s taste thereby limiting creativity:

URGENTINO: Signora Galactia! Would I do such a thing? You are the artist! I only remind you of certain priorities. A great artist must first of all be responsible, or all his brush strokes, and all his colouring, however brilliant, will not lift him out of the second rank. (2: 261)

Galactia, like Bela in *End of Blame*, wants every spectator experiences the event as they are in:

GALACTIA: I am painting the Battle of Lepanto. I am painting it in such a way that anyone who looks at it will feel he is there, and wince in case an arrow should fly out of the canvas and catch him in the eye – (2: 261)

As a consequence, the first draft of Galactia's drawing is refused since the Admiral Suffici has no a prominent place.

Galactia is repeatedly disturbed by the influence of the two sisterly institutions which appreciate fake glory over truth. A hallmark of her suffering is manifested eloquently in a monologue from Scene Seven. As such, Galactia's dilemma is represented by the loss of free expression. Apparently, the artist who tries to protest or say truth is accused of madness. Addressing Sordo on the need for the courageous expression of truth, Galactia blames those who hinder it:

GALACTIA: Why is it you cannot speak the truth without someone saying you must be drunk? That or barmy? They put Farini in the madhouse for saying the Pope could not tie his own shoelaces – (Protests) They did – fact! He recanted. (More groans and complaints.) I must get some fresh air. All this death worship is getting up my nostrils where's my lover? Oh, look at him, he has the face of – now I see it, Carpeta's Christ paintings are self-portraits! And half an hour ago he had his mouth – (Shouts of protest.) All right, I'm going! (The door closes. Sounds of the street.) A dead painter, claimed. The dissenting voice, drowned in compliments. Never happier than when lying in the gutter with a bricklayer, drunk out of mind. Human, warm, and round. And yet a frightful liar. Couldn't put a brush to paper without lying – the happy poor, the laughing rags of trams and scabby dogs pawing the dirt. Guilty old fornicator ... (7: 275)

The next scene provides the answers to Galactia's questions about the absence of freedom of expressions. In a materialistic world where the struggle for personal benefit is on the wane, there is no place for truth. Although the critic Rivera shows her admiration for Galactia's painting, she cannot come to terms with Galactia. Working for the state, Rivera's opinion is in line with it admitting the violence truth of the canvas. Therefore, he visits Galactia to convey a message of resentment from the doge:

RIVERA: The doge has taken an extraordinary risk in commissioning you. If you humiliate him, you aid his enemies and invite his fall. And if he falls, there will be a new incumbent, and I assure you, as someone who is interested in politics, none of the other candidates cares one iota for – (8: 278)

Unsurprisingly, the voices of the canvas Galactia heard represent the source of agony and suffering inside Galactia's consciousness. Left alone, thinking in Rivera's speech makes her torn between her duty to reveal the truth and the demands of the authority.

The two poles of sisterly institutions come to agree that Galactia becomes a threat to their authority. In fact, their "authority depends on the management of opinion and the suppression of the imagination" (Rabey, 1989, 68). Although Urgentino frequently expresses his homage to Galatia as not 'spent' artist (10: 283), he does not hide his fear of her artistic power to instil revolutionary ideas in the public. Hence, they decide to exclude her:

URGENTINO: The Cardinale, as you know, is Secretary of State for Public

Education, which is to say he is very worried about Signora Galactia and so am I.... Art is opinion, and opinion is the source of all authority. (10: 282)

Again, Urgentino comes back to the suspicious relationship between art and state:

URGENTINO: And the Cardinale and I thought, decided between ourselves, we could not let Venice fail to celebrate her genius, because for an art establishment like us, a cynical clique of bureaucrats like us, who like to pride ourselves on taste, to let a great fish through the net of our sponsorship would be a lapse. (10: 283)

Ostensible as a church Cardinal shares with Urgentino the power to control the artist. They believe in the artist as enemy of the people and, beyond that, artists as enemy of each other. In practice, Ostensible appears to be the cruellest against Galactia. In contrast with Urgentino, he is rude and more conservative. He believes that Galactia mocks not only history but its divinity:

OSTENSIBILE: The battle is not – unwholesome – it is, rather, the highest moment of self-sacrifice. It is as divine – in essence – as the crucifixion – (10: 285)

For both Urgentino and Ostensible, the whole venetians are humiliated by the drawing since it is a slaughter at sea not battle. To Ostensible, Galactia is irresponsible. Her responsibility is “only a mask, the posture of artistic freedom,” (14: 293) As a consequence, Galactia is accused of treason, and finally send her to prison. Ostensible said, “.... You are an enemy of the Republic. You wish to destroy its unity and its power for an end you will no doubt admit in time but the great thing is we are not fooled (14: 293-294). In the same vein, to colonize people culturally, artists are encouraged to distort people’s history according to the desires of the ruling political party and its agenda. Midhin et al state that “in order to dominate a nation through colonialism and neocolonialism, it is important to destroy or distort its history” (2021, p. 311).

IV. Conclusion

As have already shown Barker’s *No End of Blame* and *Scenes from an Execution* examine the dilemma of the artist within a historical set. In both cases, surrounding characters seek to define and possess freedom of expression. But every time their attempts are shattered by the pressure of the two sisterly institutions: the State and the Church. Consequently, their art is liable to censorship. Drawing on the similarity and difference between the two plays, it has seen that Barker presents different perspectives for the artist. Both artists in the two plays suffer from lacking of freedom of expressions. Both of them elevate truth as a high value in art. However, although Bela and Galactia are revolutionary, Bela does not succumb entirely to the demands of the political system. Galactia’s crushing decision to dine with the Doge at the end the play is open to different interpretations. On the one hand, it can be seen as surrender to the political agenda or ideology in which Barker highly renounced. On the other hand, the artist is a human being who aspires for both material and spiritual elevation. This truth is uttered by Galactia in Scene Five:

GALACTIA: I will negotiate with the power because I have to. I will lick the Doge’s cervices if need be, because he has power. I am not wholly an idiot and I like to eat and drink as well as you. (5: 268)

However, after the collapse of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1990 and the appearance of the US as the major super-power in the world, the role of the artist and his function in society also underwent a discernible change. Artists and critics alike were no longer obliged to conceal their opinions or to suggest multiple interpretations for fear of being censored or imprisoned. This demonstrates why British playwrights have turned to European and Eastern countries

to tackle the issue of artistic freedom. Brenton's *The Arrest of Ai Weiwei* (2013), a play about the arrest of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei is an example of the global nature of the artist.

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