

Regular Section

Howard Barker's *Brutopia*: History In Politics, Politics In History

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Abstract Howard Barker can be considered as one of the most prolific writers of the British stage who has written numerous plays as well as poetry and theoretical writings on drama. He is especially a significant name for political drama due to the strong political themes explored in his works. *Brutopia: Secret Life in Old Chelsea*, as its full name, is a historical play that combines political criticism together with Barker's understanding of theatre in line with his Theatre of Catastrophe. In this play, Barker invites the audience and/or the readers to the fictionalised world of the play, decorated with the historical facts of Thomas More's life and its timeline. Barker applies history to lay out the ground for social and political criticism of the contemporary society. He skilfully blends history with fiction in order to disturb the audience and/or the readers to make them think about the present. Consequently, this paper aims at analysing *Brutopia* within Barker's creation of imaginary place as thinly disguised in history and focuses on social and political criticism that exemplifies Barker's specific approach towards drama, Theatre of Catastrophe.

Keywords Howard Barker; *Brutopia*; Theatre of Catastrophe; political drama; historical metafiction

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Introduction

Howard Barker has started his career “as a stage dramatist with the production of *Cheek* in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in September 1970” (Wilcher 176). His political orientation as a political writer was apparent starting with his first play. Moreover, he “remained essentially a fringe dramatist, and he is keenly sensitive to the fact” (Rusinko 139) although his plays were being staged in the mainstream theatre such as the Royal Court Theatre. In this respect, Megson states that “[o]ften his work has been received with marked circumspection if not outright hostility by reviewers and, with occasional exceptions, has been rejected by major theatre establishments, most notoriously the National Theatre” (489). Hence, in spite of the numerous works he has written, including stage plays and radio plays, he persistently remained a fringe dramatist. Wilcher touches upon Barker’s this stand arguing that “[h]is own uncompromisingly avant garde stance has meant that some of his plays have remained unperformed for years, and although the Royal Shakespeare Company has mounted a number of productions, they have been confined to its studio spaces” (176). Such interesting position of Barker within British theatre is pointed out by Sakellaridou as such: “Barker has saved himself both from the market place and the closures of ideology” (62). Thus, as Sakellaridou suggests, since “Barker has invented his own ‘oppositional’ theatre” (62), his plays paved the way to the idea of The Wrestling School. The company was established by a group of actors in 1988 particularly to perform plays by Howard Barker. While they do not define themselves as an ensemble, the company draws attention to the need of such a group to be able to develop certain techniques in order to reveal distinctive style of Barker’s writing and characters. According to the company’s own definition, “[t]he Wrestling School explores the dynamic between language and communication, performer and audience through the work of playwright Howard Barker, and works to develop new forms of expression for text based drama” (“The Wrestling School”). Hence, The Wrestling School creates a ground for the plays of Barker to meet with the audience while fulfilling a need for Barker to meet with more audience. Lamb also touches upon the reception of Barker and his plays by the theatres and companies in line with his position between mainstream and fringe: “There have been productions of Barker plays at the Royal Court but these have generally been promoted as collaborations by actor-led companies such as Joint Stock and, latterly, The Wrestling School” (14). It can be concluded that although being a prolific playwright, Barker’s plays struggle to find their place in the mainstream reaching a wider audience. This, in fact, is an achievement for Barker

as someone who criticises the mainstream theatre and who develops his sense of drama, Theatre of Catastrophe, to challenge what is considered as mainstream.

Barker's Political Views

Brought up as a socialist, Barker has reflected his political views almost in all of his plays fiercely. According to Wandor, "Barker's cynicism knows no party boundaries; The Home Secretary in the ensuing enquiry is Labour; the ordinary people are represented as no better than their oppressors. [...] His is the drama of profound cynicism, conveyed through a gutsy, invigorating and shocking use of language" (46-47). Hence, it can be argued that Barker's tone of criticism differs based on his level of criticism towards ideologies and all parties. This is indicated by Wilcher as well: "From the beginning, Barker has been preoccupied with the conflict between individual impulse and society's internal and external mechanisms of control" (177). These approaches towards the tone and themes of Barker lead us to his theory of drama, Theatre of Catastrophe. He primarily sets the principles of his Theatre of Catastrophe in his book *Arguments for a Theatre* (1989) which aims, according to Megson, "to inculcate a state of anxiety in the audience, an anxiety that is a precondition for witnessing the moral dislocation that lies at the heart of his drama" (489). Houston comments on the tone of Barker in relation to his theory of theatre: "With the Theatre of Catastrophe, the tension between the audience and the play becomes the aesthetic, the nature of the experience. This involves challenges to common morality, common socialism, even what passes for common humanity" (50). In this respect, Barker prioritises individual responses to the events staged in a play. What is more significant for Barker is the personal interpretation of the events. Thus, Barker can be considered as a provocative playwright. In his interview with Mark Brown, Barker also states that "[i]t seems to me society requires pain, civility requires pain. We must suffer, we do suffer, individually, but also collectively we must suffer" (152). It can be argued that this suffering lies at the centre of his drama. He carries the suffering onto the stage for everyone to get their share in order to broaden their mind. In this regard, what dominates *Brutopia* is also sufferings of More, Henry, and Cecilia as will be discussed further from political, intellectual, and personal aspects. Moreover, the play also presents the challenges to morality and socialism as indicated through Cecilia's aim to compose a work named Brutopia.

Barker and History

Barker's background in history is also significant for analysing his works and for considering him as a political writer before a detailed analysis of the play. As

Rusinko points out, Barker holds an M.A. from Sussex University in history (138). History is a preferred subject for Barker to reflect and criticise the contemporary Britain. Barker also admits this in his interview with Malcolm Hay and Simon Trussler: “[...] [H]istory is a vastly important factor in my plays. It broods over most of my work, it lurks in the back of the characters’ minds, and is a persistent justification for action. The right-wing characters invoke it continually and the left fret about its judgment” (30). In his interview with Charles Lamb, Barker touches upon the relation between politics and history in a different way explaining his choice of history to convey a political message: “My 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. [...] I am acutely conscious of the collapse of a political ethic in my own time, but my sense is always that we have been here before” (39). The past is critical for Barker to find answers for today’s problems. In this regard, he is a historical writer as well as a political one since he tries to make connections between Britain’s past and present continuously in his drama. Hence, for Barker, history is a mediator to question the problems of contemporary world. Barker reflects historical events in a provocative manner as applied in *Brutopia* as well combining history with fiction.

The combination of history and fiction in Barker’s play inevitably evokes the significant term “historiographic metafiction” coined by Linda Hutcheon. She introduces this new concept as follows: “The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. In order to distinguish this paradoxical beast from traditional historical fiction, I would like to label it ‘historiographic metafiction’” (3). Hutcheon’s term “historiographic metafiction is further explained by Macleod: “Fuelled by a powerful sense of creative and political agency, historiographic metafiction purposely undermine the truth claims and progressive master narratives imbedded in any nation’s story of its own becoming” (127-128). He further adds that “In the process, these texts reveal the inevitable and inescapable ‘constructedness’ of any official historical record and often put forth alternative readings that suggest new ways of pulling together the story of the past and reconceptualizing the present” (128).

Applied mainly to the post-modern novels, the concept historiographic metafiction also coincides with Barker’s treatment of fictional and historical facts in the play. Hutcheon points out that “[i]n the postmodern novel the conventions of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied” (5). As will be discussed further, Barker also follows

these steps in his play. The way Barker interprets history in his plays is presented by Sakellaridou “Howard Barker is the only male playwright in contemporary British theatre to adhere consciously and systematically to postmodern concepts of history and simultaneously theorise about the new issues and aesthetics of socialist theatre” (64). Although it might not be appropriate to name his play *Brutopia* as a post-modern work, historiographic metafiction can be applied to the play for Barker’s particular style in playing with historical and fictional facts. In this regard, according to Hutcheon, “[...] the ‘world’ in which the text situates itself is the ‘world’ of discourse, the ‘world’ of texts and intertexts” (6) as Barker also situates the literary texts with a historical context within play’s fictionalised world. Hence, Barker takes advantage of concept of historiographic metafiction while folding fictionalised and historical facts and fictions together, as will be aimed to be analysed.

Following Hutcheon’s footsteps, in 1987, Ric Knowles published his article “Replaying History: Canadian Historiographic Metadrama” in which he applies Hutcheon’s term to drama. In these metadramatic texts as examined by Knowles, he lays out “the making and remaking of history as a contingent and ongoing process” (Stephenson 222). Hence, Knowles’s theoretical contribution corresponds with Barker’s approach to history in the selected play. Hutcheon’s theory of post-modernism, in line with Knowles’s contribution to drama, is further interpreted by Stephenson as follows: “Metafiction and metatheatre are premised on the essential gap between the actual world of the play as an event and the fictional world contained within. Any time this gap is brought to the awareness of the audience, we get metatheatre” (223). The gap referred to by Stephenson becomes the focus in Barker’s play *Brutopia*. Both through the representation of fictional and historical characters and the mentioning of fictional Brutopia and literary work of *Utopia* in the play illustrates the gap Barker intentionally put at the center of the play for the audience and/or the readers to tackle with.

Reference to More

By considering it as a historical play, Barker’s *Brutopia* can be read as an attack on Thomas More who was an English lawyer, philosopher, author, humanist and a councillor to Henry VIII of England, and as a criticism of More’s ideas in his work *Utopia* which describes an imagined just society in a fictional island. From this perspective, the play belongs to a tradition of writing on More’s life and his ideas. There have been numerous literary works that have been written on More, as Robert Bolt’s *A Man For All Seasons* one of them and as one of the most significant one. Yet, Barker’s play differs from the previously written plays on More with his

tone and perspective in the play by incorporating fictionalisation into historical facts as suggested through the reference to Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction. Moreover, Barker does not embody the aim of reflecting More and his time, but mostly interested in criticism of the contemporary times through More, his work and his time as mentioned previously. In this sense, the play combines More's political side with his family life and intellectual ability giving a wider perspective about him. Nevertheless, as can be understood from the title, *Brutopia*, this is not a play that merely takes More and his life into the centre. The play is mainly narrated by More's daughter Cecilia from her perspective. Thus, Barker tends to fictionalize history to convey his political message. Such fictionalization is obviously present within the story line of Cecilia who is a writer of a counter book of *Utopia*, although the names and the relations related to the More family in the play are taken from historical facts (Marius 222-223). Hence, rather than a life story given in a chronological order, Barker picks images and scenes from More's life to create a new context. He comes up with a dramatic narration inspired from historical events. This deliberate act enables Barker to refer to the contemporary politics through More's life and his work *Utopia*. In this respect, Weissengruber indicates that "Barker instead presents a dramatic arena for the dissection of an important figure in British and European History, for the purposes of indicating Utopia's entanglement in the political network of its day, and utopianism's status in contemporary political reality" (264). As Weissengruber points out, Barker discusses and criticises the ideology behind the work relating it to the contemporary politics.

History in *Brutopia*

The play has thirty-seven scenes in two acts named as "The Sickness" and "The Recovery." As the play opens up in the first act, the audiences and/or the readers are introduced to Thomas More in a garden in Chelsea, where he is away from the court to complete his work *Utopia*. Meanwhile, it is also revealed that Cecilia, More's daughter, has composed a work called *Brutopia* as a reaction to her father's work. Barker's approach in the play includes anachronistic elements in the first act such as the dispute between King Henry VIII and More. From a historical perspective, More composes his famous work *Utopia*, completed and published in 1516 (Marius 153). However, King Henry VIII seeks out More's approval in his political decisions more than a decade later. Despite this historical reality, at the end of the first act, More refuses to help King Henry VIII to divorce his wife, which leads to his beheading in 1533 (Marius 466). The second act centres on the character of Cecilia as More is kept in the prison for his capital punishment. It also concentrates

on Cecilia's political moves to finish and publish her work *Brutopia* as well as her problematic relation with her father and mother. At the end of the play, she is consigned to a madhouse by her mother and silenced by King Henry. As can be observed from the plot structure, Barker fictionalises history for his own purposes, significantly political criticism, by adding his unique tone and characterization into the play. In this sense, the play combines More's political side with his family life and intellectual ability presenting a wider perspective about him. Nevertheless, it is quite difficult to specify that this is a play on More; this is mostly a play on social and political criticism done over More and his work.

One of the most significant questions that the play arouses is why Barker uses an anachronistic approach to the historical facts used in the play. The anachronistic plotline of the play makes the audience and/or the readers to ask such questions: why Barker combines the writing of *Utopia* with More's relation with Henry? If the play is a criticism of More's work *Utopia* and the utopian ideas reflected in the work from a socialist perspective, what is the function of Henry's plotline? Wouldn't Barker give the same messages on criticism of the so called just, idealized and socialist world of *Utopia*? These questions are partly answered by Barker himself who adamantly declares that,

I gnawed at English socialism for ten years coming at last to History, which is where I had begun, neither official history, nor documentary history, whose truth I deny, but the history of emotion, looking for a politics of the emotions. I discovered that the only things worth describing now are things that do not happen, just as the only history plays worth writing concern themselves with what did not occur. (19)

At this point, it can be argued that all the historical facts included in the play carry a political aim related to each other beyond the resistance and autonomy from history and the representation of reality Barker seeks (Hoffmann 68). Using Cecilia as his spokesperson, Barker questions the system More proposes in his work and tends to analyse the shortcomings of this idealized society from a leftist point of view. As a playwright who is ideologically rooted in socialist ideas and politics, Barker questions More's system in *Utopia*. The most significant scene related to his questioning is when the doctor from *Utopia* comes into the world of More in the first act. As opposed to the perfection aimed by More, what the doctor tells draw a picture of a police-state failed in prosperity and equality. He admits in scene XIII that "[u]topia is all consequence" (42) drawing attention to the good will of More, but to the harsh

reality he created within utopia. Hence, he is the embodiment of the idea that a utopia can turn out to be a dystopia.

Moreover, Barker, through More, criticises the political system as well as the social issues. Since he does not reflect solely a social point of view, the corruption within the politics is reflected to underline the utopic side of More's optimism in his proposed ideas in *Utopia*. Thus, he includes Henry as a significant figure in the play. Barker takes advantage of the figure of Henry as a representation of how power corrupts individuals. Henry is depicted in relation to the power he holds in the play. First, Henry is depicted as he tries to get the approval of More to achieve his personal ambition in politics. In the second act, his power turns into a tool for Cecilia to publish her work. At this point, the play presents the clash of ideas on More's and Henry's sides. As opposed to idealization on More's terms, the play puts forward the political ambitions of Henry relating this to some extent why utopian society fails and is doomed to fail.

Henry, in the play, also stands for realism as opposed to the fictionalized world of Cecilia and to More's *Utopia* as a fiction. Both *Utopia* and *Brutopia* construct ideas as opposed to realities of the age. Henry is not depicted as pursuing the good will or the socialist order which eliminates interests of individuals in *Utopia*. Throughout the play, he is solely led by his political power. This reality is reminded to More as well as the audience as he throws More's work *Utopia* to the ground at the end of act one diminishing the fictionalization as opposed to reality. Weissengruber also comments on this idea that "Henry's pronouncement of More's death sentence at the end of this act, in the name of practical political solidarity, and his dismissal of More's utopianism as an elitist snob's fantasy, provide ironic justification for the attempts of both More and Cecilia to construct imaginative counter-statements to an intolerable reality" (275). Hence, Henry can be taken as a counterpart of More and Cecilia for his representation of reality, significantly of politics.

With the second act, Henry also exemplifies the coercion which is a threat in communist societies. This is one of the most significant consequences of socialist societies as Barker tries to draw attention. In the play, Henry represents such force by letting everyone to suffer and by enjoying his ultimate freedom. As the formation of utopic ideology is given in the first act as More composes *Utopia* and as Cecilia challenges his ideas, they struggle to free themselves from the imposed ideas. While More is suffering in the prison as he waits for his death, Cecilia, assaulted by her fiancé, Bertrand, involves herself in politics to publish her book. As the sole power holder, Henry is the only person who has a saying on this issue. Thus, she becomes Henry's lover for the sake of power. She tries to control Henry through

manipulating his desires. Nevertheless, Henry admits that he is aware of the plan Cecilia has made and the deal with Boleyn justifying his power as the sole authority, almost a god-like figure who knows everything under his rule. For his authority, Henry says that “I know everything. I have to.” (195). He might be interpreted as “the big brother” who watches them all the time. This is clear starting with the first act when he shouts to More showing his power: “Too late! [...] The bigger the head, the poorer the stalk, I am the wind and you damned well asked for it, you snob!” (161). In this regard, he is depicted as the most authoritative figure who has the potential to become a dangerous dictator.

Conversely, inclusion of Henry as a character in the play, through its political content, helps persuading the audience and/or the readers on the fact that the world Cecilia creates in Brutopia as a counterpart of the world of *Utopia*, is the real life, life on the streets when it is perceived from a different perspective. In her opening aside, Cecilia explains that “[i]n Brutopia love was impossible, and anger took its place. This anger was in certain ways, indistinguishable from love” (131). In fact, in the play, anger shapes the events starting from Cecilia and her actions against her family. More significantly, anger dominates the political acts as in the case of Henry. Later, she continues to describe the world of Brutopia as “they know no pity. So, when hurt, they seek no comfort, but find another to inflict their hurt upon” (135). Such an effect can be also observed in the politics of the play which dominates many scenes in the second act. The most specific reference to the contemporary society comes in Cecilia’s aside in scene IX: “Brutopia is a republic, but with a monarch” (145). The power Henry holds is the most significant example to this statement as discussed briefly. Nevertheless, the key line on this issue is given in the caption: “Thomas More published *Utopia* in 1516. It describes the perfect society. His daughter Cecilia composed Brutopia in secret. Only now has the text been discovered” (132). By emphasizing the fact that it has been discovered while this play is being written it has been suggested that the world of the play is Brutopia itself. This suggestion also introduces the claim that Cecilia acts as the playwright. Thus, Barker makes his political and social criticism of contemporary society by projecting them as a fiction within a historical background. In other words, he fictionalizes the realities he criticises through Cecilia’s world of Brutopia. While doing this, he also points out Cecilia as the owner of the criticism the play aims by not undertaking any responsibility.

Representation of Cecilia

It has been argued that Cecilia is a significant character in the play acting as if a

narrator and posing as the protagonist in the play. In a general approach, Hammond comments on Barker's protagonists: "[Barker] comes across as a charismatic despot, and his protagonists are frequently also charismatic despots, capable of seeing what is right for others and having the necessary iron in the soul to force others to make the difficult choices and live up to their potential" (21). As discussed briefly, Barker presents a certain amount of despotism not only in Cecilia, but also in Henry and More. Nevertheless, especially Henry and Cecilia have the power and courage to force the limits in the play. Rather than the characters in the play, he forces the audience and/or the readers to make difficult choices on understanding history and applying the values and the problems such as corruptible despotic power and the shortcomings of so called idealized socialist societies to the contemporary realities. Thus, the play disturbs the audience and/or the readers as Barker aims.

As pointed out previously, Barker has developed his own theory for drama, Theatre of Catastrophe, which he discusses in depth in his work *Arguments for Theatre* refraining himself and his technique of writing from Brechtian technique. In this regard, Cecilia's asides can be mistaken as a Brechtian technique. However, rather than voicing a message, her asides reflect her brainstorming on the world of Brutopia. Thus, her composing process of her book is given to the audience and/or the readers in the form of asides since the concept of Brutopia is significant for the audience and/or the readers rather than for the characters in the play complementing the political content and theme of the play. In this regard, it can also be argued that the play turns into Cecilia's writing process. In addition, the audience and/or the readers are also involved in the writing process through Cecilia's asides. The play reflects the life and society Cecilia depicted in her imaginative world Brutopia. On the other hand, from time to time Cecilia poses as the voice of Barker. But the theatre of Barker does not intend to give a direct message. In this regard, Cecilia is more of a guide not only for the world of More, but also for her own mind and Brutopia. Eventually, these elements can be discussed as Brechtian not because exclusively Barker includes these elements in his play, but rather for their resemblances to Brechtian techniques. Whereas Barker deliberately applies these elements for the sake of the theme.

The asides applied by Barker, at the same time, indicate the importance of Cecilia as a character who is quite an unusual female figure. By intending to write a work challenging her father, she is portrayed as an intellectual figure. She is sexually abused by her fiancé, and she decides to give birth to this child. She is also politically involved as she makes plans both to publish her book and to have Henry as her lover. To begin with, she is depicted as a problematic child. While Meg is

the favourite child of More in the play, Cecilia does not have a healthy relation neither with her father nor her mother. In act one scene III, More clearly indicates that he does not love Cecilia like he does Meg: “How hard you are to love” (137). Moreover, he looks down on her intelligence: “It is a pity we can’t talk. It is an indictment of us both, for I can talk to anyone” (137). Thus, Cecilia’s decision to compose *Brutopia*, as a counterpart of *Utopia*, can be also read as a power struggle between these two characters as well as an intellectual rivalry. As she rebels against her father intellectually, she is mainly driven by her desires. From this perspective, she is not a submissive woman. Politically, intellectually, and morally her desires govern her rather than the society and its values. Her relationship with More and Henry are justifications of this side of Cecilia in which she presents the immoral and corrupted aspects of the society. According to Rabey “Barker’s characters move in a world of warfare, cultural or personal. They attempt to negotiate a terrain where man-made laws have broken down, and may attempt to reassert divine or moral law in the aftermath of catastrophe” (5). Cecilia exemplifies such comment. As one of Barker’s characters, she creates her own warfare with her father. Moreover, she attempts to rewrite the laws as she tries to seduce Henry. At the end, she submits herself to her desires, of political and intellectual. She is proud of her subversion, yet she is doomed to share the same fate as her father as she is taken to a madhouse. She is gradually defeated by the system, which is the power system she is criticising in her work *Brutopia*.

Politics as Reflected in the Title

The title of the play is quite functional for delivering hints on the play such as its themes, messages, and characters. First of all, the title, *Brutopia: Secret Life in Old Chelsea*, leads to the important function of Cecilia in the play. Although historical facts are about More, the play is more about Cecilia. This is not only due to the action of the play, but also on the role of Cecilia for, to some extent, representing Barker himself as well as exemplifying the specific qualifications of Barker’s typical characters. The subtitle is also related to Cecilia and her secret aim of writing a book. Moreover, as opposed to the word ‘utopia’ which has the meaning of no place, “brutopia” is not a real world that has a dictionary meaning. It is a made-up word. Thus, it can be interpreted as indicating the fictionality in the play, since besides having historical elements, the play is not a historical play. This side of the play can be taken as being indicated by the coined phrase *brutopia*. The function of the title, “*Brutopia*,” can also be interpreted in relation to the message of the play by evaluating it as the work Cecilia composes. If the word is taken as a reference

to the world Cecilia creates, Barker's criticism of utopian world and thought comes to the foreground. Hence, the title is a direct reference, with a criticism at the same time, to the utopian expectations of a perfect society. In this regard, even the title embodies a cynical tone which is established by Barker in the play.

While brutopia is a coined phrase, it has been, quite interestingly, used before Barker in the cartoon series Donald Duck by Walt Disney. According to the website that is devoted to introducing the world of Donald Duck and Duckburg, the word first appears in the cartoon in 1957. It is referred to be a caricature of former U.S.S.R. The writer of the comic Don Rosa comments on the meaning of brutopia within the universe of Donald Duck that "Barks made it quite obvious that he was implying that Brutopia was the equivalent of Russia or the USSR. I don't say it's exactly Russia, otherwise I would not call it Brutopia, I'd call it Russia. I place it as occupying the eastern third of Russia (Siberia), as I place Calisota as the northern third of California" (qtd. in Sigvald). Such usage definitely carries the effects of the cold war between USA and USSR which was then a communist country. Beyond the discussion of whether Barker is aware of the meaning and the usage of the word brutopia, which would be a futile concern and question, such usage of the word has some connotations within the play, although it is a requirement to know this in order to interpret the play and the meaning of the word. Considering the word as a reference to USSR, it can be argued that the play makes a satirical criticism of utopian ideal by juxtaposing them with a communist counterpart, which is a system that carries some of the characteristics of the imagined country of *Utopia*. Moreover, if Brutopia that Cecilia describes in the play is interpreted as a reflection of contemporary society and politics, Brutopia as a caricature of a communist country stands even more cynical and harsh. This can be read as Barker's reflection of his pessimistic ideas on contemporary society. It can be also perceived as Barker's another play with fiction and reality. Just like the play is a fictionalised history with real historical facts, his ideas and criticism on utopia and utopic ideas are also made up off fictionalisation and reality. On the one hand, he uses *Utopia*, as a real work depicting the concept of utopia; on the other hand, he creates Brutopia as a fictionalized work of Cecilia which can be read as the symbol of communist Russia, a historical fact. Consequently, Barker plays with the notions of fact and fiction to lead the audience and/or the readers to question the problem and to seek for a message hidden in the play.

Conclusion

Although it has been neglected by the critics as a television play, *Brutopia* is

a significant play of Barker for representing the characteristics of Theatre of Catastrophe as well as for its historical and political contents. Hoffmann argues that

[...] Catastrophe is a theory of the theatre articulated within and against the overwhelming prevalence of Brecht-inflected British social realism in new writing for the theatre [...]. Indeed, Howard Barker's tragedies were self-consciously developed to challenge a certain kind of 'theatre of conditions' – that is Barker was writing against empiricist humanism, to re-conceptualize capital-H-history, and to problematize vulgar social utilitarianism in the arts and facile ontologies of reality in theatrical representation associated with the kitchen sink drama. (65)

Indeed, the play, Barker's theatricality and technicality in general, differs from his contemporaries, especially in terms of Barker's use of history. As discussed briefly, his characters and tone also have a specific aim of disturbing the audience and/or the readers. He skilfully blends history with fiction in order to disturb the audience and/or the readers to make them think about the present. In conclusion, Barker's television play *Brutopia* reflects a criticism of socialist ideas and politics using historical figures and facts involving the characteristics of Barker's specific approach towards drama, Theatre of Catastrophe.

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