



HOWARD BARKER'S NO END OF BLAME: FROM THEATRE OF CATASTROPHE TO HISTORIOGRAPHIC METADRAMA¹

HOWARD BARKER'İN SUÇLAMANIN SONU YOK OYUNU: FELAKET TİYATROSUNDAN TARİHYAZIMSAL ÜSTTİYATROYA

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Abstract

Howard Barker's theatre has always been dealt with as a characteristically distinctive kind with respect to the playwright's formulation of his self-crafted dramatic genre 'Theatre of Catastrophe' whose main principles were listed in his two monumental books on drama and performance, *Arguments for a Theatre and Death, the One and the Art of Theatre*. In these treatises, Barker designates a new genre which differentiates itself from the contemporary mainstream tradition of Brechtian political drama, dominating British stages for decades, with its non-didactic, anti-cathartic outlook aiming to divert the audience into individual responses rather than a collective moral improvement. Barker's plays also stand apart from the mainstream drama in their concern with the tragic experience rather than the political and moral message with an elaborate, lyrical language and obscurity of meaning. However, this study aims to bring a new perspective to the understanding of Barker's drama, with specific examples from his famous play *No End of Blame* (1981) with an emphasis on the use of historical subject matter and the choice of characters from among artists. The play in question is interpreted within the context of the contemporary dramatic genre, 'historiographic metadrama', with an aim to reveal Barker's veiled political, moral and aesthetic criticism and, thus, to refute his claims that his 'Theatre of Catastrophe' is a politically, morally and aesthetically functionless and non-didactic kind of drama. This study concludes that Barker's drama has to be incorporated into the mainstream political theatre of his time despite its other distinctive thematic and technical qualities.

Öz

Howard Barker'ın tiyatrosu, yazarın temel ilkelerini oyun yazımı ve sahnelenmesi konusundaki iki önemli kitabında - *Arguments for a Theatre and Death, the One and the Art of Theatre* - listelediği ve kendi yaratımı olan 'Felaket Tiyatrosu' açısından karakteristik bir tür olarak ele alınır. Bu eserlerde Barker, kendi oyunlarını İngiliz tiyatrosuna on yıllardır egemen olan çağdaş anaakım Brehtçi politik tiyatrodan ayıran, izleyenleri kolektif bir tepkiden ziyade didaktik ve kathartik olmayan bir bakış açısıyla bireysel çıkarımlara yönlendirmeyi amaçlayan yeni bir türün ana hatlarını çizer. Barker'ın oyunları aynı zamanda ana akım tiyatrodan kullanılan karmaşık ve şiirsel dil ile anlam belirsizliğinin yanı sıra siyasi ve ahlaki mesajdan ziyade trajik deneyime önem vermesi bakımından ayrı durmaktadır. Ancak bu çalışma, Barker'ın tarihi konuları kullanımını ve karakterlerini sanatçılar arasından seçmesini göz önünde bulundurarak, onun en ünlü oyunlarından *Suçlamanın Sonu Yok* (1981) üzerinden örneklerle yeni bir bakış açısı getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Söz konusu oyun, Barker'ın üstü kapalı siyasi, ahlaki ve estetik kaygılarını ortaya koymak ve böylece *Felaket Tiyatrosu*'nun işlevsiz bir tür olduğuna dair iddiaları çürütmek amacıyla çağdaş bir dramatik tür olan tarihyazımsal üsttiyatro bağlamında yorumlanmaktadır. Bu çalışma ayrıca, Barker'ın tiyatrosunun, diğer özgün tematik ve teknik niteliklerine rağmen, zamanının anaakım politik tiyatrosuna dahil edilmesi gerektiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

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1. Introduction

Howard Barker's talent as a dramatist, essayist and stage designer has demonstrated itself in huge volumes of plays, books of theory of theatre and performance as well as a substantial number of domestic and international performances of his plays let alone a theatre ensemble dedicated to the staging of his drama. Rabey reminds the reader that Barker has been described as 'England's greatest living dramatist' in *The Times* and as 'the Shakespeare of our age' by Sarah Kane with respect to the playwright's prolificacy in writing, authenticity of style and mastery of the English language in its most poetic form (3). Barker's drama stands somewhere between the mainstream political theatre of the late 20th century and the expressionistic experimental drama of the turn of the century, which manifests itself in his interest in the historical subject matter, themes of death and desire for power and an intense theatrical self-reflexivity. In this respect, his plays have been interpreted in their relations and potential responses to the mainstream political drama of the Brechtian vein -represented by dramatists like Caryl Churchill, David Hare and Howard Brenton- as well as to the experimental drama of playwrights like Sarah Kane.

Barker's work has drawn intense critical attention for the last few decades in terms of his unconventional approach to the role and functions of drama in the social, political and moral contexts. Many researchers have positioned Barker's 'Theatre of Catastrophe' up against the long tradition of Aristotelian catharsis and Brechtian epic theatre, which attribute various functions to the dramatic work and its representation on the stage. However, such discussions are inevitably contingent upon a blind acknowledgment of Barker's drama as a decisively and perfectly functionless kind, as proposed in the playwright's theoretical treatises on drama and performance. The studies conducted on Barker's theatre so far have focused on its thematic richness with an insistence on the subject of death, violence and sexual desire as well as its technical aspects like the use of poetic language, asides and its attitude towards the audience. Among these studies are Charles Lamb's *Howard Barker's Theatre of Seduction* (1997) and David Ian Rabey's *Howard Barker: Ecstasy and Death* (2009), both of which examine Barker's career as a dramatist with respect to his alleged aloofness from politics and moralism.

However, this study focuses on the relationships between the contemporary postmodern theories of history and literature and Howard Barker's drama as well as his theoretical works on the art of theatre from a different point of view. It examines

to what extent Howard Barker's 1981 play *No End of Blame* is suitable for categorization as 'historiographic metadrama' and how much it contributes to the development of the genre. Such a reading is expected to reveal the playwright's views of history and art in general along with his use of those historical and metadramatic references as a means to address contemporary political, moral, ethical and aesthetic issues. To that end, this study also discusses how such a reading of Barker's play is potentially subversive of his theatrics of 'Theatre of Catastrophe' proposed in his theory books on theatre and performance.

2. The Evolution of a Genre: Historiographic Metadrama

The term historiographic metadrama was coined in 1987 by the Canadian literary scholar Richard Knowles in his seminal article titled "Replaying History: Canadian Historiographic Metadrama". Building his arguments on another Canadian's, Linda Hutcheon's, abovementioned epochal theory of historiographic metafiction, Knowles defines this new genre, in an extended study published a decade later, as "*the dramaturgies that concern themselves with theatrical process (rather than product) as attempts at democratization; with explorations of history and historiography as themselves self-reflexive probings into present constructions and reconstructions of a unifixed and ever-changing past through which we (continually) remake what we 'are'*" (Knowles, *The Theatre of Form...* 77-78). He begins his discussion with an elaboration on the postmodern conception of history and historiography not as an unearthing of facts of the past, but as creative writing. "*Historiography, then, becomes the ongoing process of remaking history, of 'making it new', as fiction and myth*" (Knowles, "Replaying History..." 228). In a similar vein, literary scholars and the writers of fiction have lately concentrated on the instability of textual meaning with an emphasis on the readers' capacities of rewriting the texts which already have a metafictional 'consciousness'.

Knowles draws attention to the increasing popularity of contemporary Canadian plays which deal with historical topics from a present-time perspective in an attempt to rewrite those 'histories' as well as commenting on their own dramatic conditions and meanings. He argues that this metadramatic consciousness can be traced back to the 16th century, to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, who made use of chronicles and other historical documents as the basis of their plays. Similarly, in the 20th century, political dramatists "*since Brecht and Piscator have employed presentational, audience-centred forms of documentary drama to deconstruct traditional 'authoritative' views of history and replace them with self-*

consciously revisionist and populist re-presentations of history as performance and process" (229). Contemporary Canadian playwrights have unsurprisingly followed the footsteps of their European pioneers and directed their attention to political non-illusionistic drama in a presentational style. Among these playwrights, three representatives come to the fore with their exceptional political and historical consciousness along with a self-reflexive style: Rick Salutin, James Reaney, and Sharon Pallock.

What characterizes the work of these playwrights is an attempt to reveal the fictional nature of documented history by means of a presentational, self-reflexive style which underlines the fact that history, very much like the play being staged, is a scene for role-playing and representation. These playwrights all make use of "*the techniques of self-reflexive theatricality ... to deflect cathartic engagement with character and plot, in order to produce a more active and ongoing engagement associated with the imagination and the will, and to open their dramas outward to the world as they lay open their documentary sources, for re-construction*" (241). Very much like its counterpart in fiction, historiographic metafiction, Knowles' historiographic metadrama obviously has a potential to become the defining genre of the whole contemporary western drama, as it gives voice to both central postmodern reservations: historical accuracy and soundness of textual meaning.

In line with Hutcheon's and Knowles' ideas above, Alexander Feldman comes up with the term 'historiographic metatheatre', which he describes as historiographic metafiction's "*self-conscious counterpart to dramatic art- theatre's acknowledgement of its own artifice—... [which] by exposing the theatricality within theatre, provoke[s] questions as to the artifice, the spectacle, and the dramatic constructs of the world beyond*" (Feldman 3). He calls for a necessary distinction, though, between 'historical' and 'historiographic' and definition of 'metatheatrical' on the basis of 'theatricality'. With the use of the word 'historiographic', he draws attention to, not only the historical events, but also the circumstances under which those historical events are 'narrated' in a particular discourse, from a particular point of view on a particular ideological basis. The term 'metadrama', on the other hand, refers to the illusoriness of theatrical performances and their assumption of a representative voice which is identical to real life. Feldman also draws attention to the self-reflexive nature of 'historiographic metatheatre', justifying his location of his formulation on the axis of Hutcheon's theory, as his idea, very much like hers, emphasizes the "*seminal significance of self-reflexivity in modern and contemporary*

history plays [which] share numerous features with the novels under Hutcheon's purview. [He] explore[s] interrogations of historical understanding and historical representation, as she does, within art-works which may be considered characteristic of late twentieth-century theatre" (5).

Feldman applies his theory to a number of British and German plays with an emphasis on the use of play-within-the-play as the key, but not the only, factor in self-referentiality. As Feldman also argues in his discussions of the plays, the primary contention of 'historiographic metatheatre' is becoming "*a seminal mode of political and ideological engagement in post-war European theatre. As well as staging history, these plays reflect upon the pressing issues of their own periods. Dramas of the past they may be, but they thinly veil their critiques of the present" (5).* Feldman admits that his formulation has its roots in the traditions of European historical drama along with the seminal theoretical texts of the postmodernist vein including Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction'. To his understanding, history and drama share an inevitable connection in terms of their essences being representation, both creating a set of characters, attributing certain roles to them and pretending that what they are telling or showing is real. This connection stems from the fact that "*it is one of the insights of postmodernist historiography ... that the fictionalising process—the assignment of roles and the plotting of events— is crucial to the historian's practice" the same way it is crucial to the dramatist's" (7).* When the traditional idea of 'the world as a stage' is taken into consideration, Feldman's definition of history as 'the theatre of the world' and of drama as 'the theatre of the book' makes perfect sense in revealing their interconnectedness. Historiographic metatheatre, in this sense, brings these two interpretative activities together to reveal the theatricality of history and the historicity of theatre.

Feldman also evokes Lionel Abel's definition of metatheatre in a critical manner, as he believes that the latter's equation of metatheatre with a blurring of the distinctions between reality and illusion is inadequate. Furthermore, Abel's discussion revolves mistakenly around the assumption that a play is metatheatrical as long as it deals with life 'as already-theatricalised' being theatricalized once more on the stage. What Feldman proposes as an opposition to this is an emphasis on the metatheatrical potentials of the play-within-the-play scenes that acknowledge the performance on the stage as a performance and tries to reveal the already-theatricalised nature of roles played by the actors with a strong self-referentiality and self-consciousness. Such historiographic metatheatricality goes even beyond

reflecting on fictionality of history and drawing on the play's own dramaticity, and it engages in a "*pursuit of political themes and ideological arguments*" (16), which dominated the post-Brechtian stage in the West. Feldman finds the basis for this domination not only in the growing interest of professional historians in the fictional nature of historiography, but also in the contemporary dramatists' increasing political consciousness in an attempt to reveal the histories of the oppressed to put it in Walter Benjamin's terminology. These politically-conscious playwrights of the second half of the century "*began to explore alternative, suppressed versions of history, histories that could not be considered a linear flow of the past into a progressive present, and to demythologize hegemonic representations of history as a tawdry illusion*" (Middleton and Woods 155). In doing so, they prove that history writing is no different from interpreting the past from a present-time point of view and their version of history is as valid as a professional historian's, as both are subject to subjective ascription.

Even though political awareness and dramatic self-consciousness bring these works closer to the Brechtian epic theatre, historiographic metatheatre departs partially from the Brechtian legacy in its inclusion of the audience to the illusion created on the stage. Actually, the illusion becomes the central function of the metadramatic play, as it tries to put its version of history over the one the audience has long been fooled with. Historiographic metatheatre requires the performance of a naturalist play in a naturalist fashion, or whatever the mentioned historical period calls for, rather than the epic style, to have a full command of historical referentiality with a strong claim to historical accuracy in order only to prove that it does not exist. In other words, it problematizes its own attempt to achieve historical knowledge to display that such a thing is out of question. Very much like the professional historical account, historiographic metatheatre "*refer[s] to events that have taken place, in one way or another, but the manner of their presentation subverts, or at least destabilises, the referential capacity of [all] stagings. The 'metatheatrical awareness' ... renders all histories suspect, contingent, provisional*" (Feldman 23). To that end, historiographic metatheatre draws attention to the constructedness of its own plot, the affectedness of its characters and illusoriness of its own action.

In a similar approach, Zapkin analyses two of Tom Stoppard's plays, *Travesties* (1974) and *Arcadia* (1993), in terms of their treatment of documented historical data and questioning of the stability of textual meaning, the playwright

being a representative of the ‘postmodern scepticism’. Zapkin classifies these plays as historiographic metatheatre, the former as an overt and the latter a covert example. Stoppard appears already to be the playwright showing the highest interest in the issue of history, with plays set completely or partially in the past, along with offering commentary on “*epistemological issues [such as] reliability, the limits of knowledge, and how humans experience the laws of the universe*” (Zapkin 308). Stoppard’s plays display what Hayden White describes as ‘historical emplotment’, the activity of giving interpretations a factual framework thanks to a formation of cause and effect relationships by means of a plot. In other words, as Belsey puts it:

History is always in practice a reading of the past. We make a narrative out of the available ‘documents,’ the written texts we interpret in order to produce a knowledge of a world which is no longer present. And yet it is always from the present that we produce this knowledge: from the present in the sense that it is only from what is still extant, still available, that we make it; and from the present in the sense that we make it out of an understanding formed by the present. We bring what we know now to bear on what remains from the past to produce an intelligible history (1).

Stoppard seems fairly aware of this narrativity inherent in historical accounts by which any individual can assume the right to write ‘a’ history. Using historical settings and personages at the centre of his plays, he does not claim that his ‘version’ of history is correct, but proves that, with deficient arguments based on subjective accounts, it is never possible to have direct access to history (Valdes-Miyares 7). Zapkin is obviously of the same opinion as Valdes-Miyares when he argues that “*historiographic metatheatre such as Stoppard’s confronts both history and science as epistemological discourses, exposing the limitations of narrative through a historiographic reliance on error. Stoppard’s historiographic metatheatre accepts error not just as inevitable but as part of the fabric of historiography*” (312). In this respect, historiographic metatheatre exemplifies the postmodern suspicion of grand narratives.

With an eye to the ideas above, there is no doubt that historiographic metadrama has been one of the most popular dramatic genres in the last few decades of western literary tradition in line with the increasing postmodern scepticism towards generalizing narratives like history. In English drama in particular, historiographic metadrama has found a place for itself among the

political playwrights who have been categorized as Brechtian by the literary scholarship, including David Edgar, Howard Brenton, David Hare and Trevor Griffiths. In addition to these playwrights, Howard Barker stands out as a practitioner of historiographic metadrama even though his drama is described by Barker himself as one that abstains from any commentary and message whatsoever. In fact, a great number of Barker's plays take their subject matters from documented history, though in a subversive way. Barker situates his plots right within the defining moments in history with actual historical personages as his characters who are depicted as the opposites of what they are in the history books. Along with such interest in historical knowledge, Barker's drama also stresses self-reflexivity, self-referentiality, artificiality and illusoriness of dramatic works, particularly by the use of artists as his protagonists in the middle of their struggles against authority, use of works of art at the centre of the events and discussions related to the ethics and functions of art in the face of politics, morality and society. In this respect, Barker's drama bears strong potential to be read and categorized as historiographic metadrama; but, before that, it is necessary to comprehend Barker's understanding of art as manifested in his self-crafted genre, *The Theatre of Catastrophe*.

3. The Tenets of Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe

Howard Barker's drama has always been juxtaposed with the generation of British political playwrights including Howard Brenton, David Edgar, John McGrath and Caryl Churchill whose works dominated the stages in the last decades of the 20th century. These playwrights have been regarded as the torchbearers of the Brechtian tradition of political epic theatre in Britain in terms of both content and technique. However, Howard Barker's self-crafted path as a playwright and the character of his drama definitely deserve to be taken into account individually and independently. Even though Barker's departure from his contemporaries in terms of artistic character and motivation becomes clear in the late 80s, his interest in political writing along with his admiration for the tragic form dates back to the staging of his first plays at the Royal Court almost two decades earlier. Wilcher attributes the beginning of Barker's career "*as a stage dramatist [to] the production of Cheek in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in September 1970*" (176). Towards the end of the decade, Barker has already found a place for himself among the famous generation of the abovementioned playwrights due to his political orientation reflected in his early plays. However, Barker's plays remain unrecognized by the

general public for a long time, as they are not staged as widely as those of his contemporaries. Megson points out that Barker's early work "*has [often] 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). Despite occasional appearances on mainstream stages, Barker keeps his plays off the market intentionally until the establishment of his own theatre company named The Wrestling School in 1988. Until then, Barker remains "*essentially a fringe dramatist, and he is keenly sensitive to the fact*" (Rusinko 139) and this "*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*" (Wilcher 176). For the past few decades, however, Barker's plays have been translated into various languages and reached a wider audience by stage productions around the world.

The Wrestling School was founded by a group of actors with the sole purpose of staging Howard Barker's plays in 1988 and, since then, the company has devoted its attention to introducing the playwright's highly distinctive style and techniques to an eximious group of spectators who are in search of a distinctive theatrical experience. Since the opening performance of Barker's *The Last Supper* (1988), the company has staged around 40 of Barker's plays, "*many of them [being] the English language premieres as well as workshops, readings and public discussions to over 56,000 people in nine countries*" (The Wrestling School). Thanks to its stance inbetween mainstream and fringe theatre, the company has also found the chance to work in collaboration with other companies including the Royal Court and Joint Stock (Lamb 14). In time, the Wrestling School has turned out to be an experimental theatre company which "*explores the dynamic between language and communication, performer and audience, ... and works to develop new forms of expression for text-based drama*" (The Wrestling School). The company takes its name from the idea that each member of the audience as well as the actors performing a play must 'wrestle' with the innumerable possible meanings that the text suggests in order to come up with an independently authentic, personal interpretation.

Barker's already-distinctive dramatic style gains a theoretical foundation with the publication of his monumental treatise on the art of theatre and performance, titled *Arguments for a Theatre*, in 1993. In this work, he basically sets his 'art of

theatre' or 'the new theatre' or 'The Theatre of Catastrophe' up against what he calls simply 'theatre' or 'the humanist theatre' or 'the old theatre' referring to a whole tradition of Western dramatic theory from Aristotle to Brecht. Barker views the old theatre as an act of marketing in which the actors assume the role of a salesperson trying to promote his product to the taste of the audience who is presented as a mere consuming entity. In such cases, the audience's satisfaction becomes "*the necessary end of the performance*" (Barker, *Arguments...* 67). However, the new theatre liberates both parties from such an imposed exchange and expectations, and takes the experience of theatre beyond purgation of any kind to the feeling of exclusiveness on behalf of the audience: "*To escape the pernicious memory of the market place, the new theatre will dethrone its audience. [...] It will not be encouraged to think itself a jury, obsessively judgmental*" (67). Barker then calls for a distinction between the 'important plays' and the 'disappointing plays'. He believes that a play cannot achieve importance by remaining in the framework of the existent ideology in which the good and the bad are predetermined. Instead of satisfying the audience's need to be rewarded with habitual outcomes, it must deliver a wound which is "*the aim of the new theatre and the intention of the actor*" (68). As the wound in the heart of the audience keeps bleeding, they will look for alternative ways to heal the wound outside the framework of the dominant ideology.

Barker makes a list of assessments from which his 'Theatre of Catastrophe' takes its shape. The list includes the assumptions that "*information is a universal commodity [,] that knowledge is forbidden [,] that imagination has been maimed by collectivist culture [,] that in this maiming the public itself has colluded [and] that this collusion is nevertheless detected and is experienced as shame*" (69). Barker sees his theatre as an honourably barbaric act in an environment where civilization means political and social gibberish in the name of a moral unanimity. The theatre is, and must be, protected by the invisible walls of this barbarism against a sea of moral and political impositions and discussions while, inside those walls, the imagination continues its free play. Barker concludes that when the audience experiences 'the terrible ambitions of the human spirit' in silence and darkness beyond the constraints of ideology and education, it leaves the premises between those walls not as 'changed', but 'confused' beings, which is the sole aim of theatre (78). The political theatre, for Barker, disregards complexity in its pursuit of exposure and promotion, and assumes a 'common morality' in the background of the audience's perception. Such a theatre underestimates its audience's meaning-making capacities and serves it ready-made, ideologically-shaped meanings in the way a

journalist or a documentarian does in the public arena. Such an obsession with realism and accuracy deprives theatre of its poetic potentials which should be the sole motive determining the way the author writes, the actor plays and the audience watches. He claims that his plays are indigestible, rather than incomprehensible, in their disruption of the moral substructure they are expected to stand on. His catastrophic theatre is never afraid of the audience's potentials; instead, it challenges the audience to overcome the deliberate obscurity on the stage and to prove that clarity murders imagination. Barker detests the theatre's self-assured authority on the audience which laughs or cries when the play motivates it to laugh or cry. He bestows the medal of success to the kind of theatre which achieves to unleash the individual members of the audience from the constraints of collectivity and meaning (79-82). Barker's understanding of theatre is a safe haven for the audience from the bombardment of compelling comments "*in an age of persistent meaning, of relentless indoctrination, not only from the state, but from the artistic community, the commercial empires and the propagandist forces of an information network*" (82). In Barker's catastrophic theatre, the audience enjoys the 'multitude of possibilities' none of which assumes superiority over its receptive capabilities or tries to change the audience's moral or political standpoint.

Howard Barker's career as a dramatist took a different direction in the 80s in line with the playwright's interest in history, the developments in England regarding the licensing of art culminating in The Theatres Act in 1968 and the surreptitious censorship still going on even after the preclusion of the Lord Chamberlain's Office from taking such measures. Rusinko observes that Barker's interest in the study of history results in and stems from his MA at Sussex University in history (138). Most of Barker's plays written during the 80s take their subject matter from history, documented or imaginary. Barker himself acknowledges that history has a significant role in his career as a playwright: "*But history 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*" (Barker, "Interview with Simon Trussler..." 30). His interest stems from his will to rewrite history or reinterpret the historical events from an artist's perspective.

In another interview, Barker touches upon the relation between politics and history in a different way explaining his choice of history to convey an indirect 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" (Barker, "Articulate Explorers..." 39). Thus, it is seen that Barker differs from his contemporaries in the way he makes use of the historical subject and setting in his plays. The past is a means for Barker to come up with remedies for today's shortcomings. This makes Barker a historical as well as a political playwright even though he speaks otherwise in the formulation of his 'Theatre of Catastrophe', as he turns a critical eye to the past without losing sight of the present in his works. In his seminal *Arguments for a Theatre*, Barker confesses that he has a disbelief in the premises of history as it is recorded in books written by ideologically-concerned historians:

History 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. [...] Writing now has to engage with what is not seen (i.e. imagination) because real life is annexed, reproduced, soporific (23).

To emphasize the differences between his theatre and the so called 'humanist theatre', which he also calls 'theatre of journalism', Barker draws attention to art's relationship with what is out there, what is experienced by real people and what is known to have happened, in other words with history: "*An artist uses imagination to speculate about life as it is lived, and proposes, consciously or unconsciously, life as it might be lived. The more daringly he dreams, therefore, the more subversive he becomes*" (36). From this comparison, he moves on to his suggestion of the appropriateness of his 'Theatre of Catastrophe' for the present time, a new kind of theatre which, in order to be taken seriously, must abandon first comedy, then factuality, and then an unquestioning trust in what is seen, and finally seeing itself superior to its audience. Barker's catastrophic tragedies, in this sense, set the rules for a new kind of drama which "*is not about life as it is lived at all, but about life as it might be lived, about the thought which is not licensed, and about the abolished unconscious*" (52).

Barker's interest in the representation of history on stage is accompanied with a concern with the artistic perspective in the historical representation. As a free-spirited artist himself, Barker chooses his protagonists for his historical, or rather historiographic, plays from among artists from whose perspective documented

historical events are reinterpreted. In the introduction to Barker's *Arguments for a Theatre*, Price describes Barker's theatrical method as one that "determines to show not the author's destination, but rather the process of struggle which initiates artistic endeavour" (52). In his major historiographic plays, Barker pits the free-spirited artist against a superior, generally political, power and generates a moment of crisis, which he calls the moment of beauty: "The moment of beauty is the moment of collision between two wills, the will of the irrational protagonist (the non-ideological) and the will of the irrational state (the officially ideological)" (59). Barker glorifies this individual resistance against institutional or social oppression in many of his plays and demands an individual, rather than a collective, deduction of morality by the deliberate 'removal of moral climate' or 'suspension of moral predictability'. His plays do not "aspire to indicate 'correct' action, or 'correct' analysis" (59). Instead, they create certain moral and political anxiety in which the audience, having been forced to be the judge of what Barker calls the 'wrong' action or injustice on the stage, feels provoked to reconsider his own moral and political outlook along with those of the characters. He explains the reasons for his choice of characters from among artists saying: "I found in the study of the artist himself ... the cause that was neither wholly self nor the rattling egotism of entertainment... . This was a sense of artistic responsibility both to order and to violation, on the one hand to language and the literary culture ... and on the other, to the furthest reaches of speculation whether of desire or dissolution" (24). By the artist's responsibility to speculation driven by desire, Barker refers to the historical representation's speculative nature and its equal status to artistic endeavour in the representation of the lived past filtered through imaginative faculties of an author.

With respect to these two points, Howard Barker's historiographic plays which take an artist or artists as their protagonists can be examined within the framework of the popular dramatic genre which has earlier been discussed in this paper. Barker, in the selected play to be analysed below, deals with documented history as a grand narrative whose claim to accurate knowledge of the past is the product of an illusion or the imaginative faculties of a 'narrator'. In doing so, he puts an artist at the centre of the historical events already known to the readers and researchers of history and questions the validity of historical accounts by writing an alternative account which, he claims, is as valid as any other historical writing on the same topic. In addition to that, he uses these artists as a mouthpiece to form parallelisms between the past and the present in order to voice his criticism of deep-rooted political, moral, aesthetic and social shortcomings of his own time. With the

struggle of his artist-protagonists against various kinds of authoritative forces, Barker also expresses his views about such long-debated issues as censorship of art, freedom of expression and the use of art as a means of political propaganda. By referring to first documented historical events, then to other forms of art and finally to itself as a work of art, Barker's historiographic play in question displays a metadramatic essence with an eye to Richard Hornby's list of varieties of metadrama including play-within-the-play, ceremony-within-the-play, roleplaying-within-the-role, literary and real life reference and self-reference. In this respect, Barker's famous play *No End of Blame* is to be discussed as an early example of the genre "historiographic metadrama" by taking into consideration the historical texts dealing with the same period in history and the elements of metadrama given above.

4. *No End of Blame* and the 'Terrible' Power of Art

No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming is one of the Barker's historiographic plays which takes its subject matter from the documented events of the European history and revolves around a free-spirited artist who struggles against diverse forms of institutional oppression over the course of a few decades. The play follows the footsteps of a Hungarian cartoonist named Bela Veracek through some of the milestone stages of European history including the Hungarian front of the First World War, the early years of the Soviet Union and the English-German war in the Second World War. With Bela's never-ending conflict with the power-holders on the potential functions of his cartoons, Barker draws attention to contemporary issues troubling the artists like political intervention in art, violation of freedom of thought and speech and the question of responsibilities of an artist towards his society.

As a background for his play, Barker chooses the chaotic atmosphere in Europe between the two world wars in which everything, specifically arts, is politicized in the service of great world powers struggling to achieve domination over each other. Instead of using imaginary settings and events, Barker places his character in the middle of what is familiar and known to shatter the audience's expectations from a historical play and to disclaim historical accounts' pretence that they are the one accurate source to bring the past to the understanding of the present. Barker opens a new chapter to the history that has been recorded in books and taught to generations with a claim to accurate knowledge of the past. In doing so, he gives voice to the potential silenced individuals of that time who are depicted as real as those well-known historical figures such as Lenin, Churchill and Hitler, though they are purely imaginary. What Barker emphasizes here is that great

historical personages mentioned in history books are products of imagination just like his own characters, as he blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. He draws attention to the narrative nature of historical accounts and attributes similar powers of historical representation to his own play.

Barker reveals his historical consciousness at the very beginning of the play in which the setting and time are specified as the Carpathian Mountains, a mountain chain stretching over a number of Eastern European countries today, and 1918 with a Hungarian soldier present in the scene. To the attentive reader, this information is sufficient to infer that the subject is somehow related to the First World War, which is justified by Bela's statement: "*We have 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*" (Barker, *No End of Blame...* 76). With the coming of the Red Soldiers announcing the ending of the war, Barker gives an instant from the past which no history book has ever mentioned before; however, he seems to be aware that his imaginary version of the First World War scene is as valid as any other version written in other historical accounts.

In the third scene of the first act, Bela appears before a jury of comrades in the Writers' and Artists' Union of Moscow for his caricature titled 'The New Economic Plan' depicting the Soviet leader Lenin in a negative way. At this point, Barker's imaginary artist interferes in the life of one of the greatest power-holders of the time and the image of Lenin is depicted once again through the eyes of an insignificant historical subject whom, as a part of Barker's scheme, history has omitted. The image of the Soviet leader that Barker draws in the play is one of a destructive cunning and ambition who is wholeheartedly trying to use Bela's art as a means of propaganda for his Communist Party. This image complies with the Lenin depictions made in history and biography books. For instance, Read observes that, after the Great War, "*in addition to newspapers, all print media and eventually all means of artistic expression, including film (in which Lenin was to show increasing interest), theatre and music, were under the supervision of a censorship apparatus which began to formalize itself from 1918 onwards*" (236). Correlatively, the Fourth Comrade among the jury informs Bela that "*Lenin holds cartoons in the highest regard*" (Barker, *No End of Blame...* 91) and the First Comrade adds that Lenin is disturbed by Bela's "*tendency to criticize the line that Comrade Lenin is advancing. Which is – which is – unhelpful –*" (96). The New Economic Plan that gives Bela's

cartoon its subject matter is also a “fact” found in history books with the name The New Economic Policy, in which all economic enterprises in a free market system are controlled by the State for maximum State profit (Lenin 196). Barker’s imaginary hero criticizes the shortcomings of this economic plan refusing to keep a low profile unlike the actual artists of the time who chose to keep their heads down to stay within the borders drawn by the censors and were eliminated from documented history. Towards the end of the first act, Bela’s insistence on keeping his art politics-free causes him to lose his job and citizenship, as the Fourth Comrade informs him: “[Lenin] wants you to have a holiday” (Barker, *No End of Blame...* 103). Bela’s cartoons keep getting him into trouble and strengthen the historically conscious background with, for instance, a depiction of a ‘Hitlerine’ bat spreading its wings over Europe evoking the coming of the Second World War.

The second act of the play continues to refer to historical events like “*Hitler [having] been gassing kids since 1938*” (109) or one of the British airmen in the Royal Air Force being named Kenny after the American general George Churchill Kenney who fought during the war as the commander in chief of the Allied Air Forces in the Pacific (Wolk 93). In addition, Bela’s troubles with the authoritarian government continue in England where his cartoons attract the attention of state offices. The cartoon titled ‘There always was a Second Front’ depicts a ‘profiteer’ strangling a British soldier from behind when the soldier is fighting against Hitler, and the suggestion that the profiteer is the English prime minister Winston Churchill causes Bela huge trouble with the government. Bela’s editor in the newspaper, Stringer, reminds him of the government’s right to close any newspaper on the basis of ‘The Defence of the Realm Act’ which was an actual Act that passed the English Parliament right after the beginning of the First World War and continued to be enforced during the Second World War. The act depends basically on the suppression of any contradictory view that has the potential to harm governmental policies during states of emergency like the war, saying: “*No person shall by word of mouth or in writing spread reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm among any of His Majesty's forces or among the civilian population*” (The London Gazette). With reference to this act, Barker potentially forms a parallelism between the past and the present, evoking the long-debated problem of censorship of art in England, culminating in the abolishment of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office’s functions on theatre in 1968.

Very much like in the scene about Lenin, three governmental officers come to warn Stringer and Bela about their biting tongue interfering in the government's business and they mention Winston Churchill's resentment towards their work. Deeds, one of the officers, openly threatens the two with shutting up the newspaper completely, saying: *"Look, don't want to lose the entire morning over this, so get to the point swiftly, shall we? Winston doesn't like this [...] I can assure you first thing in the morning he was practically pissing blood [...] Winston is thoroughly cognisant about the press. But feels you have abused his trust"* (Barker, *No End of Blame...* 112-113). Bela, at this point, observes that the British public is deceived by the government about their enemy, they think that they are fighting against Hitler, but it is actually their own government who is dealing the biggest blow on their democracy: *"They are under the cruel misapprehension that it is Nazi bombers that are blowing their limbs off and killing children in their beds! How has this wicked deception been permitted?"* (115). Winston Churchill has always been known to take a firm grip on the press and art for the sake of the British government's soundness, which could also be observed in his establishment of the Press Bureau in 1914 and his documented statements like *"I think you ought to realize the harm that has been done... I never saw such panic-stricken stuff by any war correspondent before; and this served up on the authority of The Times can be made, and has been made, a weapon against us in every doubtful state"* (Haste 33). The historical background is strengthened by Barker with the reference to the Special Powers Act of 1922, an act giving the civil authority the right to *"take all such steps and issue all such orders as may be necessary for preserving the peace and maintaining order"* (Donohue 1091), which was obviously abused by the government in matters of censorship. Barker draws attention to this abuse in the dialogue between Deeds and Stringer in which the former gives a notice to the newspaper on the basis of this act saying: *"This is a mighty piece of paper, Bob. [...] This paper says troops with bayonets on all the doors and lock the printers out"* (Barker, *No End of Blame...* 116). Barker, in a way, points at a historical 'truth' which was known by many but kept quiet about even by history books.

Towards the end of the play, Barker refers to two daily newspapers of the communist parties of Russia and China at the time, *Pravda* and *Peking People's Daily* in a dialogue between Diver, Bela's current editor, and Mik, the cartoonist to be hired in Bela's place on condition that he will keep a low profile unlike Bela. Diver informs Mik that *"Lord Slater has owned nearly every paper in the world at some time or the other, excluding Pravda and Peking People's Daily, and he has come*

to the conclusion, in his wisdom, that human beings need to laugh” (122). Barker’s reference to the newspapers seems more than coincidental, as the papers were widely accepted as the highly-ideological and sided voices of the governments during world war and cold war years. *Pravda*, for instance, had such a world-wide notoriety, along with the other Russian newspaper titled *Izvestia*, that there occurred a saying like “*there’s no truth in Pravda and no news in Izvestia*” (Overholser), ‘pravda’ meaning ‘truth’ and ‘izvestia’ meaning ‘news’ in Russian. *Pravda* also turns into a symbol of partisan press in *Pravda* (1985), a satirical drama written collaboratively by Howard Brenton and David Hare, exploring the use of media as a means of political propaganda. Similarly, *Peking People’s Daily* is described as “*the ideological leader responsible for delivering updated values and directing ideologies to the public. The newspaper is also well known as the spokesperson of the State Council. Views therein are believed to reflect the voice of authorities*” (Zhang 183). Barker forms a relation between these newspapers and the dominant press of his own time, as all have turned into mouthpieces of the dominant ideology of the time and freedom of expression is wholeheartedly sacrificed to winning the favour of the powerful.

All references Barker makes to historical events, personages and institutions are easily reinforced with historical, biographical or other non-fictitious texts in a conscious parallel reading. These references also draw advantage from the collective memory, rumours, tales and urban legends along with his personal observations and readings regarding those historical issues. What differentiates Barker’s version of history from historical texts about the same subject is that he brings a new perspective to these historical issues with an aim to disrupt their referentiality to truth, to ultimate reality of the past as it was actually experienced by the past agents. In doing so, Barker also draws attention to the parallelisms between the past and his own time to voice his criticism regarding political intervention in arts, press and violation of freedom of speech and expression. Barker shakes the grounds of historical representation as a grand narrative with a claim to historical knowledge and, for him, any account related to the past, including his own play, has an equal right of historical speculation with an equal degree of validity.

Barker’s use of historical sources and his references to historical personages, events, and institutions do not only show the playwright’s historical consciousness, but they also have a metadramatic contribution to the overall meaning and presentation of the play when Richard Hornby’s aforementioned varieties of

metadrama are taken into consideration. Hornby, in his *Drama, Metadrama and Perception*, notes that “real-life reference includes allusions to real persons, living or dead; real places; real objects; real events” (95). In this respect, Barker’s references to Lenin, the Communist Party, The New Economic Plan, Hitler, the Royal Air Force, Churchill, the Defence of the Realm Act, the Special Powers Act and the newspapers *Pravda* and *Peking People’s Daily* among many others are all metadramatic elements that give the play a deeper dimension of meaning and another layer of representation. These elements do not only “mean”, but also “suggest”, saving the play from the monotony of drama whose meaning is only consumed by the audience and attributing it a metadramatic outlook whose meaning is discovered and reproduced by the audience at every turn.

However, Hornby also adds that real-life references tend to lose their metadramatic potentials in time, as the referenced event or person or object loses its popularity among public along with their referentiality: “Mentioning Jerry Falwell would be more intrusive on a play than mentioning Southern Baptists generally; a reference to the American invasion of Granada, soon after the event, would be more intrusive than merely referring to American imperialism generally ... A reference to the Reverend Falwell will obviously have no special impact after most people have forgotten who he was” (95). In this respect, Barker’s historical references possess a metadramatic effect as long as the referenced historical personages, events or objects make sense to Barker’s audience watching the play at a given time. To secure the metadramatic quality of his historical ‘real-life’ references, Barker constantly forms connections between the historical referent and the contemporary persons, events and objects, by which he both voices his criticism of his time and enriches the meaning of his play. For instance, by referring to the political intervention in art and official censorship in the Soviet Union during Lenin’s rule and Britain under Churchill’s governance, Barker evokes the long-debated issues of censorship of art troubling dramatists of his time, violation of freedom of expression leading to student riots and conservative administrative mentality under Margaret Thatcher.

Along with these real-life references, Barker alludes to other works of literature, or forms of literature that have come before him and dominated a certain period of time establishing a tradition of their own. The fact that the first part of the play takes place in Eastern Europe at the end of the First World War and then in Russia under the Soviet rule is not a coincidence. Lenin’s insistence on politicizing

art is quite reminiscent of the agitprop convention, using arts and popular media as a means of agitation and propaganda as the name itself suggests. The fact that Bela is a cartoonist adds more believability to such an assumption, as cartoons were one of the most powerful weapons that the Communist Party used in order to play with the public conscience and change their perceptions. Bodek argues that the agitprop tradition gave rise to the agitprop drama first in Russia and then in the Western Europe culminating in the political drama of Bertolt Brecht (7). There is no doubt that Barker was aware of the Brechtian political tradition from which he decisively separates his 'Theatre of Catastrophe' because of the former's overt politically and morally functional essence. In Hornby's formulation, "*there are many ways in which a play can refer to other literature. In each case, the degree of metadramatic estrangement generated is proportional to the degree to which the audience recognizes the literary allusion as such*" (88). With an eye to this statement, Barker's insistence on a political background for his play looks more functional given that the decade in which *No End of Blame* was written, the 80s, witnessed the peak of political drama modelled on Brechtian epic theatre. Even though Barker rejects any classification regarding his plays on the basis of their political functions, his remarks alluding to the political issues of his time, such as governmental censorship of art, violation of freedom of expression and criticism of totalitarian regimes, ultimately involves his drama in the long tradition of British political theatre. In this respect, such a politicization of drama is quite familiar to the theatre-going public in Britain when the play is first staged, which gives the audience a deeper sense of political dramatic tradition, thus strengthening the play's metadramatic effect.

Barker's *No End of Blame* is strongly self-referential, which stems from the fact that the protagonist of the play is a free-spirited, left-wing artist very much like Barker himself and the play revolves around works of art, Bela's cartoons, through which the playwright investigates issues like ethics of art, responsibilities of an artist and the process of artistic production. Hornby refers to self-reference as "*always strongly metadramatic with [which] the play directly calls attention to itself as a play, an imaginative fiction*" (103). At the very beginning of the play, when Bela and Grigor are confronted by the Hungarian soldiers, one of the officers ask Bela to make up a poem before he is executed. At gunpoint, Bela produces a quatrain with something of a half-rhyme to which the officer responds saying: "*Breast and bed are not full rhymes. If you had said – forgive me – the blood in scarlet dressed – you see? ... I like rhyme. Poetry without rhyme is laying bricks without cement*" (Barker, *No*

End of Blame... 80). Barker, here, draws attention to the fact that everybody has an opinion about art and everybody feels free to express their opinions in the manner of cheap criticism. This is probably one of the issues that troubles Barker himself as an artist in the process of artistic production and he voices his intentions to keep his art opinion-free like Bela himself saying: “*He went on about rhyme. Fuck rhyme. I hate it... . Balls to rhyme! Balls to the heroic, national style! His brains were pitiful, the pus of dead imagination on the ground, all his rhyming couplets running in the mud...*” (82). After the war, Bela appears in the Hungarian Institute of Fine Arts in Budapest where he engages into a debate with Billwitz, the director of the institute, on who an artist is and what his duties are to the society. What Bela argues is reminiscent of what Barker has been arguing since the beginning of his career and later expressed in his treatises about theatre and performance. The dialogue between the two reads:

BILLWITZ: Why are we artists? We are artists because we thrill to beauty. We look for beauty everywhere... . Artists are the guardians of beauty, high priests in the temple Art. Who drew it? ... It is not art.

BELA: I feel it. So it is.

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

BELA: It's more true.

BILLWITZ: It's prejudice! ... **You will never be a great painter if you do not tell the truth!**

BELA: I don't want to be a painter. I hate oils, studios, manipulating colours inches thick. Give me ink, which dries quick, speaks quick, hurts.

BILLWITZ: Heal us, Bela. If there was ever a people needed healing, it is us ... I have just come from the police.

BELA: **My art speaks, then!** ... Did any single picture of yours win you such an accolade? A visit from the police! There is a diploma, there is a prize! Now I know I am a genius, now I hang in the echoing gallery of human art! **I stirred the police, therefore, I touched the truth** (emphasis in the original) (84-85).

Here, Barker uses Bela as a mouthpiece to voice his own belief about the functions, or rather functionlessness, of art against Billwitz's argument that an artist has a duty to represent truth as if it really existed. Billwitz's voice in this

dialogue must be quite familiar to Barker, as he struggles throughout his career against a generation of political playwrights who believe art to be supposed to have a function in order to change people's minds and make them better. In this respect, the dialogue between Bela and Billwitz stands as a self-referential element in which Bela's painting stands for the play itself and Bela stands for the playwright.

In the scene in which Bela appears before a committee of artists in the Writers' and Artists' Union of Moscow, a similar discussion comes up regarding the ethics of art and responsibilities of an artist between Bela and the committee members. Bela defends the idea that art must be liberated from all contextual impositions including politics, morality and social utility whereas the committee members are persistent that art is to serve grander purposes:

FOURTH COMRADE: Lenin holds cartoons in the highest regard.

FIRST COMRADE: ... we are trying, quite simply, trying – to evolve a different sort of art here. All right? An art which is not bourgeois... . Because although we have no shoe laces for our boots and no lenses for our spectacles, our art is free. By free I mean free of bourgeois constraints. By bourgeois constraints I mean the tying of the creative act to the demands of the private ego. Individualism, I mean, all right? ... we have exerted our communal will to rescue artists from their bourgeois habit ... if I say no artist can be wrong – in the most fundamental sense – because he is obeying an impulse from somewhere within – ... No artist does wring knowingly. Or else he's not an artist...

SECOND COMRADE: I think there is only one principle that we ought to be rigid about, and that is – do we, as artists, serve the people? That's the only one, I think. . .

BELA: ... 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... to an artist freedom comes above all things ...

SECOND COMRADE: Wait a minute ... We say an artist is only free if his society is free. He cannot be free against the freedom of his society...

BELA: I disagree with Lenin...

FOURTH COMRADE: He is entitled to disagree with anyone he wants. That's freedom, isn't it? But he must be able to restrain his

criticism in the wider interests of the people. That's responsibility, isn't it? ...

BELA: But I want to protest! (91-97).

Putting the committee member comrades, who are also artists, against Bela in this debate, Barker once more voices his criticism of the use of art as a means of political propaganda; but at the same time, he also criticizes the artists who become a part of this puppetry by submitting their art to the interests of political parties. In another respect, Barker also draws a strict line between his theatre and the political theatre of the dramatists among his contemporaries in terms of free art. He puts freedom of expression and artistic vision above all meanings art can suggest, and sacrifices the meaning to the act of protest, the service to beauty, and the social responsibility to the responsibility towards the artistic endeavour itself. Barker, through Bela's mouth, announces that true nationalism is not a cheap patriotism through political involvement, but a true conservancy of the right to speak regardless of the subject of the speech. He denies to attribute any duty to art and any responsibility to the artist other than staying true to pure artistic vision and the impulse coming from within.

At the beginning of the second act, Barker's own voice is again heard in Bela's speech to the officers of the British Airforce as he makes a distinction between important art and great art. Bela's speech functions as his artistic manifesto and is reminiscent of Barker's ideas discussed before. After giving a brief account about his early life, Bela sets the criteria that separate his art from the rest, which caused him to be banished first from Hungary and then from the Soviet Union. He says:

BELA: [...] I am a cartoonist. I believe the cartoon to be the lowest form of art. I also believe it to be the most important form of art. I decided in my twenty-fourth year I would rather be important than great. I decided this because I have always preferred shouting to whispering and humanity more than myself. The cartoon is a weapon in the struggle of peoples. It is a liberating instrument. It is brief like life. It is not about me. It is about us. Important art is about us. Great art is about me. I am not interested in me. I do not like me. I am not sure if I like us either, but that is private and the cartoon is not private. We share the cartoon as we cannot share the painting. We plunder painting for the private meaning. The cartoon has only one meaning. When the cartoon lies it shows at once. When the painting lies it can deceive for centuries. The cartoon is celebrated in

a million homes. The painting is worshipped in a gallery. The cartoon changes the world. The painting changes the artist. I long to change the world. I hate the world (107-108).

Bela's distinction between the important art and great art is reminiscent of Barker's distinction between the art of theatre and the theatre. At first glance, Bela's statements may sound a little contradictory with what he has said before regarding the responsibilities of the artist towards his people and the functions of art as an instrument of any kind. However, after a second, more critical reading, it is revealed that Bela is being ironical about the adjectives "important" and "great" in the sense that greatness is calculated on the basis of acceptance by the dominant ideology rather than being true to truth itself. By important art, Bela mentions a kind of art which is functional in the long term through the liberation of humanity from any kind of ideological involvement, an art whose only mission is to awaken people to seeing the reality with their own eyes rather than showing them the reality.

Barker believes that whether or not art is pre-motivated by external forces, it cannot and must not be squelched by means of ideological or repressive state apparatuses, in Althusser's terminology. In an era when censorship of art is widely disputed and Lord Chamberlain's Office's authority is questioned by the artists and the public – culminating in the deprivation of its rights to censor – Barker chooses up his sides openly and, through his characters, expresses his intentions to fight till the end of his career to liberate his art from any kind of external intervention. In addition to his defence of his art from Lenin's and Churchill's insinuations, Bela lets on about his apolitical stance when it comes to his art saying: "*My politics are to look for the truth, and when you find it, shout it. That's my politics*" (114). This statement is a paraphrase of what Barker discusses in his theorization of "Theatre of Catastrophe" in terms of keeping politics offstage and being true to truth only. Similarly, towards the end of the play, Barker draws attention to the same issue in a critical way in the dialogue between Diver and Mik. As a replacement for Bela, Mik is questioned by Diver regarding his political tendencies before being given a job; and Diver asks him: "*Lord Slater is very keen for you to have a point of view. Do you have a point of view?*" (123). Overhearing the dialogue, Bela intervenes and accuses Diver and his newspaper of "*washing men away with lies, the great flood of dirtiness, hold your heads up in the swell!*" (125). This is exactly what Barker remonstrates in his major prose works on the dramatic art. For him, once 'point of

view' is involved, what is produced is not art, but advertisement. In Barker's view, art must speak for itself, which differentiates it from cheap propaganda.

5. Conclusion

Barker's "Theatre of Catastrophe", in his own understanding, marks a breakage with the long tradition of cathartic tragedies, in Aristotle's terminology, and political drama, drawing mainly on the Brechtian vein. Even though Barker's earliest plays have a strong awareness of contemporary political agenda, his later plays seem to divert strongly from this preoccupation into a deliberate aloofness from political and moral issues, especially after the publication of his own dramatic theory in two separate books and numerous articles and the establishment of his own theatre company named The Wrestling School at the end of the 80s. Barker draws a red line between his drama and mainstream political drama, or the art of theatre and simply the theatre, or the catastrophic theatre and the humanist theatre in that the former never indulges in playing around with the audience's ideological and moral values unlike the latter. Barker refers to the political theatre dominant in 70s and 80 in England as theatre of marketing, which tailors ready-made meanings for the audience's consumption, whereas his catastrophic tragedies force the audience into a ruthless struggle with the play and the actors for meaning which they acquire individually rather than collectively. He views political and moral involvement in arts as a betrayal to the essence of art and an insult to the audience's capacity of generating their own beliefs. Barker proudly claims that his theatre shows rather than tells, and pursues no didactic purposes whatsoever.

Even though Barker categorizes his plays as 'Theatre of Catastrophe' which manifests itself as a politically, morally and aesthetically functionless kind, approaching his plays from a different, opposite angle also proves rather fruitful with an assumption that ideology lurks behind every artistic endeavour, especially in Barker's time when political drama has dominated the stages for decades. In his play *No End of Blame*, Barker touches upon similar issues from a similar point of view and his choice of political historical subjects seems more than coincidental when his own political views regarding the Thatcher rule in England are taken into consideration. In other words, Barker's play turns into a masterful and veiled critique of the so-called Thatcherite liberalism and conservatism at the time and the ongoing official censorship activities despite the abolishment of the Lord Chamberlain's Office with the passing of the Theatres Act in 1968.

Barker's *No End of Blame* gives a panorama of the great catastrophes in the 20th century Europe through the spectacles of a free-thinking artist. What makes the play historiographic is the playwright's attempt at disrupting the mainstream historical knowledge and offering an alternative history to his readers and the audience with an equal claim to historical knowledge keeping the historical background the same with references to the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Second World War, the atomic bomb attacks along with the hypocrisy of those who ruled the world at those times. Barker's version of history displays how subjective and flexible historical representations are and how they depend on who is holding the pen. The play is also metadramatic with respect to the real life references it makes to actual historical personages like Lenin, Hitler and Churchill along with historical events like the passing of specific acts from the British Parliament and the world wars. The references to other literature like the agitprop and the political drama strengthen the play's metadramatic outlook along with the play's references to itself through other works of art. By placing an artist into the centre of the play, Barker finds a voice to express his ideas about art in general and the issues like censorship of art and freedom of expression in particular. In his protagonist's struggle against authoritative governments to purify his art from ideological impositions, Barker answers questions about the ethics of art and responsibilities of the artist using the protagonist's cartoons as representatives of his own play. With all these points taken into consideration, Barker's *No End of Blame* turns out to have sufficient elements to qualify as an example of historiographic metadrama.

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